

Introduction

This chapter, 'Communicating risk among all', is focused on a specific aspect of risk management: how to link and integrate territories and communities ever better in facing challenges, reacting to shocks, anticipating them and learning from experiences by means of two-way risk communication. The object of this chapter is to show how good, granular and effective communication plays a paramount role in strengthening cohesion between all the stakeholders involved in order to deal with the risks in their territories.


To achieve this goal, it is not enough to produce content and data: what is needed is a comprehensive shared knowledge system, able to support, communicate widely and be understood by all the actors involved and exposed to risks.

It is worth noting that we are finalising this chapter during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency: it has been impossible not to reread our contents from the perspective of what is ongoing. In this very moment we are experiencing, with a strength perhaps never experienced before, the systemic nature of our communities, the limits of some of our institutional organisations, and the role of social networks and technology.

Communication has played, as foreseen, a massive role in the overall situation, both for good and for bad. What we are now observing is that the communication dimensional axes that we are experiencing are the ones that have been explored in this chapter: institutions, communities and technology.

The concept of complexity is at the root of all the contents of this chapter, recognising that territories and communities are networks made by a plurality of actors and stakeholders, mutually interrelated by processes and relationships, and sharing, alongside their differences, the same risk. The idea informing this chapter is that the only answer to the network of risks is the network made by an informed and proactive territory.

This objective cannot be taken for granted: our societies, communities and institutions, even if deeply interconnected in the face of the risk, are historically organised in a hierarchical and sectoral way, to assure specialisation and clear responsibilities in governance processes. Nevertheless, this aspect may hamper the efficiency of response to risks. This chapter, on the basis of case studies, good practice examples and the discussion of past experiences, deals with methodologies, instruments and strategies to overcome this hierarchical and sectoral approach and achieve a complex environment based on efficient communication.



This chapter addresses convergent objectives: how to create the conditions in which nodes in communication networks are able to connect to one another (subchapter 4.1), how to involve stakeholders and sustain their capacity to perceive themselves as essential nodes in the network (subchapter 4.2) and how to take advantage of technology to realise this environment (subchapter 4.3).

The concept of complexity has been explored and applied in many of its dimensions. This chapter considers complexity not merely a network, but a system, with a certain number of specific properties. The first one is about keeping the separation paths among the nodes as short as possible. This aspect is dealt with in subchapter 4.1, where the different approaches to linking actors, sectors and governance levels are presented and discussed.

The chapter also shows that installing linking paths among the nodes of the network is not enough if they are not kept alive and participating. This aspect is, in particular, discussed in subchapter 4.2, in which the question of how to overcome the classical hierarchical governance structure in the context of more bottom-up and participative governance is addressed. That part of the chapter is, in fact, about a governance approach for transforming a community in a real complex network: the management of different points of view and interests or the recognising of clustering phenomena that may provide advantages for designing efficient processes for participation through social media or, as we are experiencing now, for blocking the propagation of false information.

Besides the more political, organisational and structural approaches discussed in the first two subchapters, subchapter 4.3 looks in particular at the technical feasibility conditions.

It is quite tricky to succeed in providing an exhaustive and updated discussion of the state of the art in this field: in these very days, for instance, we are witnessing, hour after hour, the emergence of new proposals for instruments and communication assets to face the present challenges.

The chapter, anyhow, discusses the fact that technology, information and communication science is not only about instruments, but about methods and design approaches, essential to realising complex information and communication networks.

