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Social perception of natural hazards in the province of Alicante, Spain: A comparative analysis

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Natural risks are natural processes that can have their function in nature, but when they manifest they have a direct impact on societies and on the environment. Historically, the human being has been subjected to the threat of natural phenomena, such as floods, earthquakes, volcanoes, forest fires, etc. The exposure to risk is always associated with the territory or geographical area inhabited. The risks, far from being reduced, increase in a world of increasing population and colonization of the territory. From environmental psychology, natural hazards are interpreted as stressful experiences that the individual or community must face, looking for the most appropriate strategies for each situation. We propose a comparative analysis between two different samples of the population of the province of Alicante (Spain). The data has been obtained by adapting the same measurement instrument and following a similar procedure, but taken in two different time periods, 2012 (Ramos R, Olcina J Y, Molina S 2014) Y 2017 (Senabre J). The results indicated that the threat perception of natural hazards has increased and that society perceives in a more pessimistic way the evolution of the impact of natural phenomena. The main perceived threats (forest fires, drought, desertification, extreme temperatures and floods) are maintained in both studies, although there have been significant changes in the level of importance that society gives each one of them. The risk of drought is the only threat that doesn't offer qualitative changes in perception, occupying the second place in both cases, although there are differences at a quantitative level. Likewise, the data indicate that, in recent years, the society has received more information about of this type of risk. The studies on risk perception are a good tool for improving risk management and for the development of environmental policies appropriate to each specific territory.

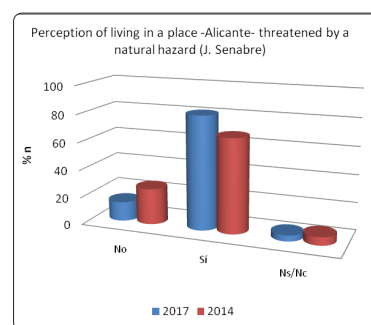


Figure: Perception of living in a threatened place.

Biography

Jaime Senabre is a Psychologist and Environmental Consultant. He had completed his Doctoral studies in the Department of Personality, Evaluation and Psychological Treatment of the UNED. He is the Chief of Brigade in a Forest Fire Service with more than 20 years of experience. He collaborates with several companies and institutions in training psychology in emergencies and human resources. He is a Professor at the University of Valencia, Spain. He is also the Director and President of the International Scientific-Professional Committee of the National Symposium on Forest Fires. He has published articles on forest fires, stress, psychosocial risks and emotional trauma, mainly in relation to emergency services and natural disasters. Currently, he is assigned to the research group on climate and territorial planning at University of Alicante, where he researches on the social perception of forest fire risk and behavior in the event of possible disasters.

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