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► To cite this version:

Guillaume Delatour. Analysis of Local Populations' Initiatives and Integration in Crisis Management INPLIC project -funded by the french national research agency. EUT+ Substanability Lab, Jun 2021, Virtual, France. hal-03261811

HAL Id: hal-03261811

<https://hal-utt.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03261811>

Submitted on 16 Jun 2021

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Analysis of Local Populations' Initiatives and Integration in Crisis Management
INPLIC project – funded by the french national research agency

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Keywords: crisis management, disaster, emergency management, population

Purpose of the project

In the aftermath of a disaster, from the very next minute, the populations, victims, are also the first step of solidarity, notably through spontaneous volunteers (Auf der Heide, 2004), (Lecomte, 2012), (Waldman et al, 2017), (Lorenz, 2017). In front of a chaotic context and in the absence of structured emergency services, populations self-organize to cope (Solnit, 2009), (Drury et al, 2009). In France, the law on the modernization of civil security of August 13, 2004 places the citizen at the heart of civil security. However, 14 years later, this principle remains difficult to apply in the field. Concepts such as population resilience or community resilience (Wulff et al, 2015) and multiple initiatives have emerged to reinvest populations in crisis management (notably via the ISO 22319:2017 Guidelines for planning the involvement of spontaneous volunteers). However, it is clear that (1) the identification and understanding of the various typical behaviors of populations and (2) taking them into account in the conduct of operations are still major issues in crisis management, and are supported by international bodies (FEMA, 2011), (UNDRR, 2015). Several elements motivate this resistance.

The first element, linked to the classical and intuitive representation carried notably by the work of Le Bon on crowd psychology (1895) according to which in a crisis situation, the population would invariably give in to panic. Even though this representation has been challenged for many years (Quarantelli, 1989), (Tierney et al., 1995) and in recent works on disaster situations (Dezecache, 2015), the myths of panic, looting and indifference dominate the attitude of professional relief workers and leaders towards civilians confronted with a disaster (Auf der Heide, 2004), (Barsky et al., 2006), (Helsloot et al., 2004).

A second element hinders this consideration. In a disaster situation, the behaviors of the impacted populations can be considered deviant (inhibition and collective panic, exodus, rumors, violence...) and the actions of the population can be destructuring and disruptive (problems of responsibility, control, coordination, efficiency and legitimacy) for the action of law enforcement and emergency services (Provitolo, 2005), (Tucker et al., 2011), (Crocq, 2013), (Provitolo et al, 2015). This is all the more true since the spontaneous initiatives of populations are partly unpredictable and do not fit easily into structured and hierarchical frameworks of command control specific to civil security services (Helsloot et al., 2004, p104).

Finally, a third element of recent appearance can explain this reticence, the terrorist threat and in particular the risk of an attack where any victim, witness or person involved is considered as a potential threat.

As a result, disaster preparedness plans do not take into account the actions of civilians and seek to keep them away (Oberije, 2007). Moreover, in disaster situations, security services essentially consider populations as potential victims, sources of vulnerability, rather than as actors who can be mobilized for crisis management and resilience.

Scientific perspectives

The various feedbacks on crisis management allow us to draw three major conclusions. Firstly, the action of organized relief requires a delay in implementation during which the population is left to its own devices. Also, if losses are due to an inappropriate reaction, structuring behaviors are implemented, and solidarity initiatives emerge (Rodriguez et al., 2006). Finally, the digitization of exchanges, in real time, constitutes major levers of information and mobilization for the population in the face of an event (Sullivan et al., M. 2014). Behind these observations, we propose to approach the problem of integrating the behaviors of populations in the conduct of emergency operations from the following angles:

- 1- Analyze the typical behaviors of populations in the face of crises. Observe, analyze and then characterize structuring behaviors (mutual aid, solidarity) and destructuring behaviors (panic, looting, delinquency) for the emergency services. What can we learn and expect from them? What anticipation can be predicted according to the territory concerned?
- 2- Design vectors of proximity to the rescue/population based on the knowledge generated previously. What specifications and technological solutions should be used to recover data from the field?
- 3- Integrate this information into the conduct of rescue operations. How can we capitalize on "solidarity initiatives" as an "initial link" in the operational chain that can be mobilized?
- 4- To develop service innovations based on the diversity of networks of actors and action logics. Why and how can we redefine methods of collective action that integrate the principle of proximity between populations and relief? How can we change the organizations in charge of civil security from a logic of control and command to a logic of continuity, coordination and cooperation?

On a scientific and technological level, the INPLIC project is interested in the regeneration of the proximity link between the emergency services and the population in crisis situations, whether it is a civil security or homeland security crisis. This project focuses on the definition, design and deployment of systems that integrate the first link in the operational chain, i.e. the population, in the conduct of emergency operations. This overall system aims at detecting, monitoring and integrating into the operational management of all the initiatives of the populations.

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Member of labs / working groups / institutes: research unit INSYTE, UTT

Topics of research: collaborative planification, extrem context, crisis management, decision making

Interest in sustainability lab: develop research collaborations on the security implications of climate change (social risks, crisis management)