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***DEZASTRUL PRODUS ÎN URMA INUNDAȚIILOR. EXPERIENȚE DIN
MEDIUL RURAL [FLOOD-INDUCED DISASTERS: EXPERIENCES FROM
RURAL AREAS]. TRITONIC, BUCHAREST, 2019. ANCA MIHAI***

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Abstract

The book reviewed here is one of the very rare social scientific analyses of flood-induced disasters in Romania. The monograph is a valuable contribution to the Romanian literature in the social sciences, because the author makes a sustained effort to advance a sociological understanding of the disasters triggered by floods. In this sense, any given flood is not the disaster but only the trigger of a social disaster. The disaster ensues from the ways in which the flood interacts with pre-existing socio-economic and spatial conditions and inequalities. The book is structured into six chapters and an introductory piece. Its appeal is wide-ranging and it includes all social scientists interested in flood-induced or climate change-induced disasters. Experts and stakeholders involved in the management of floods or similar systemic hazards would also greatly benefit from reading this informative piece.

Keywords: floods, social disasters, sociology, social work, neoliberal order.

Anca Mihai's book is one of the very rare social scientific analyses of flood-induced disasters, at least in Romania. To my knowledge, there is only comparable research output, namely a special issue on the "sociology of disasters" published in the *Romanian Journal of Sociology* (issue 5/6, 2017) (Bădescu, 2017). As such, Anca Mihai's monograph is a valuable contribution to the Romanian literature in the social sciences. This is not the only reason for its value. The author makes a sustained effort to advance a sociological understanding of the disasters triggered by floods. She is adamant that any given flood is *not* the disaster but only the trigger

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of a *social* disaster. The disaster thus ensues from the ways in which the flood interacts with pre-existing socio-economic and spatial conditions and inequalities. This explicit emphasis placed on the social conditions of disasters makes the book stand out and there are good reasons for that.

Anca Mihai has completed her PhD in sociology at the University of Bucharest in 2019 and has already completed four publications dealing with disasters and vulnerabilities, apart from the book reviewed here. Her publication record is much more comprehensive than this, but it shows that the topic of her book is a mainstay of her research interests.

The book is structured into six chapters and an introductory piece. The first chapter provides a well-grounded introduction in the sociological study of disasters, dealing mostly with the burgeoning Anglo-Saxon literature. The second chapter outlines the process that leads from the (natural) flood event to the disaster. The third chapter provides an overview of methods for dealing with disasters (including structural and non-structural approaches) and of the role of social work in the management of disasters. The fourth chapter details the management of floods in Romania, moving from the link between floods and climate change towards the specific history of recorded floods in this country, dealing also with its legislation and insurance policies. The fifth chapter is the volume's most original contribution as it reveals the results of the author's empirical research.

In the latter, Anca Mihai has selected four communities in the Siret valley, which has experienced some of the greatest floods (2019, 178), for in-depth analysis. She has carried out 11 expert interviews, four community-level surveys and 15 in-depth interviews. Throughout the interviews, Dr. Mihai has analysed and described in painstaking detail a variety of social processes occurring before, during and after a flood event. The institutional actors describe these processes based on both their experience from previous flood-related interventions and the legal framework that guides their actions. Apart from local and national-level authorities, the author also describes the roles of NGOs and of private organizations, this whole section covering no less than 50 pages. The interviews carried out with rural residents affected by past floods cover a similar number of pages (47). Overall, the information is well-structured, the only shortcoming being the headings outline (which reaches up to seven levels) and makes it rather hard to follow. The large number of quotes from experts and community members is a definite added value of the book, by bringing to light experiences, ways of reasoning and the plans/hopes of the respondents. Moreover, the quotes are well integrated in the flow of the author's arguments.

The interested reader can find valuable information on how respondents from a flood-affected community experience and deal with a disaster, namely: how the flood hazard is experienced (warnings, getting ready, unfolding of the flood event), how the interviewees responded to the flood, how they recovered (including the assessment of damage, limiting the negative effects, support from public

authorities, firefighters, from private sources or the personal network) and getting ready for a new hazard. This provides just a snapshot of the degree of detail with which the author has pursued the documentation of the social processes of limiting the disaster produced by floods. The information is therefore rich and credible and reveals a very systematic analysis.

In the concluding chapter, the author draws together the lessons learned. First, she rightly points out that the management of floods takes place within a neoliberal social and economic context, in which the responsibility for one's welfare is shifted from the state towards the individual. The risks faced by individuals are thereby privatised. She also notes that the management of disasters address the effects of a materialized hazard rather than the social causes of disasters. Disaster-related interventions are mostly coordinated top-down while the affected communities have largely a reactive approach to risk. The intervention of sociologists and social workers is greatly needed in Romania, in order to benefit from the former's knowledge and skills. Finally, she outlines directions for future research, such as analysing personal decisions on flood insurance, the development of social work theories on disasters, building local capacity, dissemination of knowledge on previous flood events (including maps), exploring the link between flood exposure and marginalization and studies of risk perception in flood-prone rural areas.

To conclude, the book is a valuable addition to the social scientific literature on nature-induced but socially-dependent disasters in Romania. Its appeal is wide-ranging and it includes all social scientists interested in how the increasingly visible and consequential impacts of climate change are intertwined with social and political processes. Beyond that, however, a variety of experts and stakeholders involved in the management of floods or similar systemic hazards would greatly benefit from reading this informative piece. Students (undergraduate and graduate alike) can also learn how a really well-informed and systematic field study is to be carried out. Being written in Romanian, the book is naturally devoted to readers in this country and therefore is widely accessible to all those interested in a hands-on approach to the pressing issue of reducing vulnerabilities in the face of a changing climate.

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