



Multidimensionale Risks in the XXI Century

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Risk Communication and Governance in a Post-Truth Environment

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The history of the last four decades has been a success story in terms of conventional risk management. All data show that life expectancy is increasing, accidents become less frequent and habitual risks less severe. The picture becomes, however, less favorable if we look at globally interconnected, non-linear risks such as those posed, for example, by climate change or the global financial system and the closely related growing inequality between rich and poor. Systemic risks can be characterized by four major properties: they are (1) global in nature, (2) highly interconnected and intertwined leading to complex causal structures, (3) non-linear in the cause-effect relationships and (4) stochastic in their effect structure. These elements however, are difficult to communicate and explained in public discourse. In a post-truth environment, stochastic and non-linear relationships defy common sense and are confronted with disbelief and rejection. Furthermore, populist images or simple denial are common strategies to deal with this complex issues.

Responding adequately is a challenge for the risk analysis community since populist movements and simple heuristics conflict with efficient responses. Governance of systemic risks require strategies that address the complexity, scientific uncertainty and socio-political ambiguity of its underlying relationships. However, they need to be framed and communicated in a way that they can be effective in a post-truth environment. Public participation has proven to be an important driver for successful and legitimate risk governance for advancing effective policies to curb systemic risks and overcome populist assessments. In the end risk management and communication needs to address the four characteristics of systemic risks and develop the appropriate instruments to deal with global, interconnected, stochastic and non-linear risks.

Keywords: systemic risks, risk governance, public participation, post-truth environment, risk communication