

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Flash Flooding and Organisational Resilience Capacity: Qualitative Findings on Implications of the Catastrophic 2017 Flash Flood Event in Mandra, Greece

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Abstract : On November 15th, 2017, a catastrophic flash flood devastated the city of Mandra in Central Greece, resulting in 24 fatalities and extensive damages to the built environment and infrastructure. It was Greece's deadliest and most destructive flood event for the past 40 years. In this paper, we examine the consequences of this event too small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in Mandra during the flood event, which were affected by the floodwaters to varying extents. In this context, we conducted semi-structured interviews with business owners-managers of 45 SMEs located in flood inundated areas and are still active nowadays, based on an interview guide that spanned 27 topics. The topics pertained to the disaster experience of the business and business owners-managers, knowledge and attitudes towards climate change and extreme weather, aspects of disaster preparedness and related assistance needs. Our findings reveal that the vast majority of the affected businesses experienced heavy damages in equipment and infrastructure or total destruction, which resulted in business interruption from several weeks up to several months. Assistance from relatives or friends helped for the damage repairs and business recovery, while state compensations were deemed insufficient compared to the extent of the damages. Most interviewees pinpoint flooding as one of the most critical risks, and many connect it with the climate crisis. However, they are either not willing or unable to apply property-level prevention measures in their businesses due to cost considerations or complex and cumbersome bureaucratic processes. In all cases, the business owners are fully aware of the flood hazard implications, and since the recovery from the event, they have engaged in basic mitigation measures and contingency plans in case of future flood events. Such plans include insurance contracts whenever possible (as the vast majority of the affected SMEs were uninsured at the time of the 2017 event) as well as simple relocations of critical equipment within their property. The study offers fruitful insights on latent drivers and barriers of SMEs' resilience capacity to flash flooding. In this respect, findings such as ours, highlighting tensions that underpin behavioral responses and experiences, can feed into a) bottom-up approaches for devising actionable and practical guidelines, manuals and/or standards on business preparedness to flooding, and, ultimately, b) policy-making for an enabling environment towards a flood-resilient SME sector.

Keywords : flash flood, small and medium-sized enterprises, organizational resilience capacity, disaster preparedness, qualitative study

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