

## Public Participation for an Effective Flood Risk Management: Building Social Capacities in Ribera Alta Del Ebro, Spain

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**Abstract :** While coming decades are likely to see a higher flood risk in Europe and greater socio-economic damages, traditional flood risk management has become inefficient. In response to that, new approaches such as capacity building and public participation have recently been incorporated in natural hazards mitigation policy (i.e. Sendai Framework for Action, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports and EU Floods Directive). By integrating capacity building and public participation, we present a research concerning the promotion of participatory social capacity building actions for flood risk mitigation at the local level. Social capacities have been defined as the resources and abilities available at individual and collective level that can be used to anticipate, respond to, cope with, recover from and adapt to external stressors. Social capacity building is understood as a process of identifying communities' social capacities and of applying collaborative strategies to improve them. This paper presents a proposal of systematization of participatory social capacity building process for flood risk mitigation, and its implementation in a high risk of flooding area in the Ebro river basin: Ribera Alta del Ebro. To develop this process, we designed and tested a tool that allows measuring and building five types of social capacities: knowledge, motivation, networks, participation and finance. The tool implementation has allowed us to assess social capacities in the area. Upon the results of the assessment we have developed a co-decision process with stakeholders and flood risk management authorities on which participatory activities could be employed to improve social capacities for flood risk mitigation. Based on the results of this process, and focused on the weaker social capacities, we developed a set of participatory actions in the area oriented to general public and stakeholders: informative sessions on flood risk management plan and flood insurances, interpretative river descents on flood risk management (with journalists, teachers, and general public), interpretative visit to the floodplain, workshop on agricultural insurance, deliberative workshop on project funding, deliberative workshops in schools on flood risk management (playing with a flood risk model). The combination of obtaining data through a mixed-methods approach of qualitative inquiry and quantitative surveys, as well as action research through co-decision processes and pilot participatory activities, show us the significant impact of public participation on social capacity building for flood risk mitigation and contributes to the understanding of which main factors intervene in this process.

**Keywords :** flood risk management, public participation, risk reduction, social capacities, vulnerability assessment

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