Living with water in Hull: flood histories and resilience

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Background

In more recent years, the social dimension of flooding has gained importance among flood experts. Flooding not only results in destroyed infrastructure and damaged properties, but it also has an adverse social impact on the communities affected by floods. Floods damage homes but also social networks; they can affect physical and mental health, alongside family and community cohesion. Evidence of these social effects is important to improve future response by authorities and to help people understand what a flood could do to their lives. 5

Some of the main pressing issues include the level of preparedness, adaptation and resilience among communities living in flood risk areas around the country. It is crucial to encourage communities to learn from past floods, have them build a strong sense of their flood histories and an awareness of risk, and know how to cope and live with flooding.

Introduction

My research explores flood risk perception in both historical and contemporary contexts with a case study in the city of Kingston upon Hull, East Yorkshire. The first strand of my research will study past flood histories in Hull, specifically how communities have dealt with flood events in the past and how the risk of flooding was perceived by Hull residents in the 1900s. The second strand of my research will investigate why flood expectations were different in the past and what made people lose awareness of flood risk in the city of Hull over time.

Methods

The project will use a range of archival and visual material (e.g., legal documents, diaries, estate records, maps, travel accounts, photographs) in conjunction with oral history interviews. Archival research will be mostly carried out at the Hull History Centre in Hull and the East Riding Archives in Beverley. The project also employs digital archives such as the British Newspaper Archive, to recover specific flood events occurred in Hull and explore feelings and responses of residents to such events. Oral history interviews will then be used to collect memories of past floods. They will be adding to the data from the archives by also allowing me to integrate the public into the flood debate.

Discussion

Reconstructing local flood histories and investigating the impacts of and responses to flood events in the past can provide a better understanding of the nature and impacts of future events. With the use of oral history interviews, the project will explore not only the connection to the past but to place. The link between place-attachment theory and flooding will be analyzed in more detail; therefore, looking at how people’s attachment to a place can offer new insights into disaster preparedness. 2

Findings would help local authorities to plan targeted communication campaigns on risk awareness and hazard preparedness, so to ensure that Hull residents are better prepared for floods and better able to adapt and cope with the consequences of future flood events. Ultimately, the aim is to build more resilient communities able to “live with water” rather than “to fight against water”.

References

1 Flooding - a social impact archive, Lancaster University. https://www.library.lancs.ac.uk/brdc/brdcweb/kg/brdcweb/154252906-SSCF-RA-BIB- FILE-201901095029