

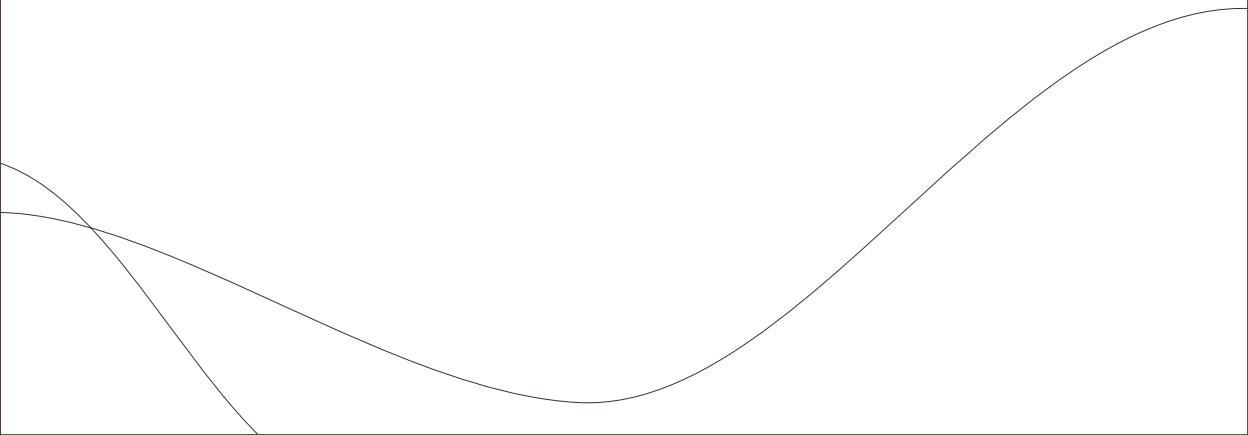


# Cap**H**az-Net

Social Capacity Building  
for Natural Hazards  
Toward More Resilient  
Societies

**POLICY BRIEF N° I**  
Introducing CapHaz-Net  
to a Wider Audience

by Annett Steinführer,  
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Jochen Luther

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Snow avalanche in  
the Alps (2008)



## 1 Why social capacity building for natural hazards?

### Welcome to capHaz-Net's first policy brief!

Despite long-lasting attempts to mitigate and reduce the damages due to natural hazards and a constant accumulation of scientific and practical knowledge, the human and economic losses caused by disasters are not decreasing. On the contrary, they have increased significantly in Europe over the past decades. Why is it like that – and what can research and societies do about it?

To find explanations for this paradoxical development, capHaz-Net is particularly concerned with people's capacities and how they are influenced by contextual conditions – we thus speak of »social capacities« to stress this intention. capHaz-Net is not considering the physical conditions of a hazard. We rather regard the occurrence of a disaster as a result of people, communities and organisations lacking capacities to anticipate, cope with and recover from the impact of a natural hazard.

It is these conditions which transform a natural hazard in a social disaster. The central question capHaz-Net is dealing with is therefore:

How can we enhance the capacities of European societies to prepare for, cope with and recover from the negative impacts of a ›natural‹ hazard?

Social capacity building is understood as an umbrella term which comprises all efforts to build individual, organisational, technical, as well as institutional capacities.

Obviously one should not expect a simple answer to this question (otherwise it would have been provided in the past). Therefore capHaz-net asks further: What should be the goals of social capacity building efforts? Should these goals be the same for each individual, for each organisation, for each community? What is the appropriate level of social capacity building? Who defines who is lacking social capacities (and who not, respectively)? But there are also other questions we are concerned with: How do people perceive, interpret and communicate natural hazards? How are they affected by them and how do they cope with and recover from them?

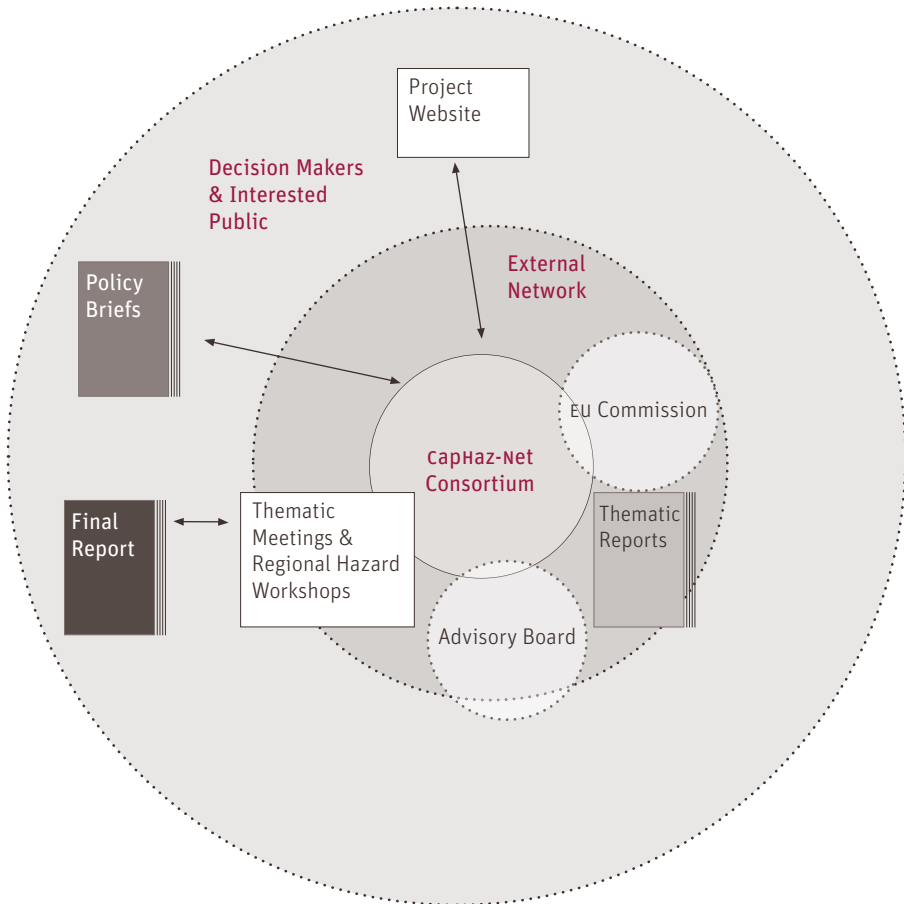
CapHaz-Net aims at stimulating discussion among the natural hazards community at large and providing state-of-the-art knowledge of social science research on natural hazards.

capHaz-net is not a closed circle, on the contrary: We give interested researchers, practitioners and stakeholders from across Europe the opportunity to contribute with their expertise, experiences and opinions. capHaz-net is a growing network of people who share an interest in the social dimensions of natural hazards. There are different ways of interacting: On a regular basis we organise workshops which are open to participants with a special expertise. We provide interested people and institutions with information via policy briefs. We will make our results accessible on the public parts of our website and are open for feedback and further inputs. We are particularly interested in concrete case studies from across Europe, from any spatial scale or cultural context.

Next capHaz-net workshops:

HAIGERLOCH NEAR  
STUTTART (Germany),  
11 March 2010

LJUBLJANA (Slovenia),  
8 June 2010  
(details at the end  
of this Policy Brief)



CapHaz-Net's activities and structure

If you are interested in certain topics, if you want to contribute to our joint efforts or if you want to get involved – just send an **email** to [caphaz-net@ufz.de](mailto:caphaz-net@ufz.de) and visit our **website** at <http://www.caphaz-net.org>!

## 2 Who & what is capHaz-net?

capHaz-net stands for ›Social Capacity Building for Natural Hazards: Toward More Resilient Societies‹. We understand it both as an open and growing network of researchers, practitioners and stakeholders from across Europe sharing an interest in the social dimensions of natural hazards as well as a research project. However, capHaz-net does not conduct ›first hand‹ empirical research. It rather builds upon existing knowledge. We review and synthesise previous and ongoing research and aim at stimulating discussion and exchange. Thus, sharing experiences between researchers and practitioners is at the heart of capHaz-net's activities!

capHaz-net is financially supported by the European Commission in its 7th Framework Programme (as a so-called ›Coordination Action‹).

capHaz-net's consortium is made up of 8 partners from 6 European countries. These are:

- Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ, LEIPZIG, Germany
- Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia (ISIG), GORIZIA, Italy
- Middlesex University (MU), Flood Hazard Research Centre (FHRC), LONDON, United Kingdom
- Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (ICTA), BARCELONA, Spain
- Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), Anton Melik Geographical Institute (GIAM), LJUBLJANA, Slovenia
- Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL) & WSL Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research SLF, BIRMENSdorf & DAVOS, Switzerland
- **dialogik** Non-Profit Institute for Communication and Cooperative Research (DIA), STUTTGART, Germany
- Lancaster University (LU), Lancaster Environment Centre (LEC), LANCASTER, United Kingdom



The capHaz-Net Team

**From left to right**

Rebecca Whittle (LEC), Simon McCarthy (FHRC), Gordon Walker (LEC), Giorgos Kallis (ICTA), (slightly hidden) Meera Supramaniam (ICTA), Primož Pipan (GIAM), Corina Höppner (WSL), Jochen Luther (UFZ), Louis Lemkow (ICTA), Birgit Mack (DIA), Gisela Wachinger (DIA), Christian Kuhlicke (UFZ), Matthias Buchecker (WSL), Michael Bründl (SLF), Annett Steinführer (UFZ), Hazel Faulkner (FHRC), Blaž Komac (GIAM), Sue Tapsell (FHRC), Anna Scolobig (ISIG), Annette Schmidt (UFZ)

**Not in the picture**

Bruna De Marchi (ISIG), Marina DiMasso (ICTA), Marta Dinarès Fernández (ICTA), Will Medd (LEC), Miha Pavšek (GIAM), Luigi Pellizzoni (ISIG), Silke Rattei (UFZ), Ortwin Renn (DIA), Nigel Watson (LEC), Matija Zorn (GIAM)





- Involved research institutes (Consortium)
- Advisory Board institutions
- Regional Hazard Workshop sites

CapHaz-Net in Europe – involved research institutes, advisory board institutions and Regional Hazard Workshop sites

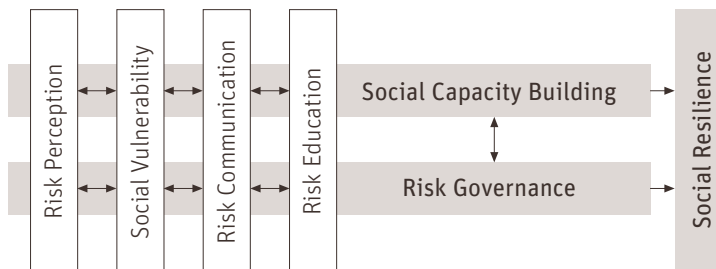
### 3 Which topics is CapHaz-Net dealing with?

capHaz-Net looks back on meanwhile some 70 years of social science research on natural hazards. In that time a rich field of theoretical perspectives, empirical findings and policy-relevant insights developed upon which capHaz-Net builds. We have identified specific, well established topics we concentrate on during the first project phase (until mid-2010). Here CapHaz-Net will meet regularly in an open workshop atmosphere where existing knowledge is reviewed and synthesised. Our geographical focus is on Europe.

The project welcomes the participation of interested colleagues from the field of natural hazards – be they scientists, practitioners or decision-makers.

There are two overarching themes which capHaz-Net will deal with during the entire project duration:

- **SOCIAL CAPACITY BUILDING** describes a process (rather than a simple managerial task) which requires different actors and takes place on various levels. It is understood as an umbrella term including efforts to build individual, organisational, local, technical, as well as institutional capacities (WP 1).
- **RISK GOVERNANCE** covers the entire process of risk assessment and management by integrating formal institutions and informal regimes, diverse and possibly conflicting assumptions and world views as well as a multiplicity of actors (WP 2).



capHaz-Net's thematic workflow

More specifically, CapHaz-Net concentrates on the following topics:

- **RISK PERCEPTION** stands for a variety of socio-psychological factors defining people's interpretations and evaluations of risks (WP 3),
- **SOCIAL VULNERABILITY** relates to the behaviour and responses to natural risks as well as the resources and capacities to deal with them (WP 4),
- **RISK COMMUNICATION** describes all kinds of information exchange between institutions responsible for risk production, forecasting and warning and the public at risk (WP 5),
- **RISK EDUCATION** is a more targeted effort focusing on specific socio-demographic groups (such as children or teenagers; WP 6).

WP means ›work package‹ and refers to the typical division of work in European research projects. It means topic-focused efforts in a restricted amount of time and with a well-defined outcome (usually a research port). CapHaz-Net has 10 such WP.

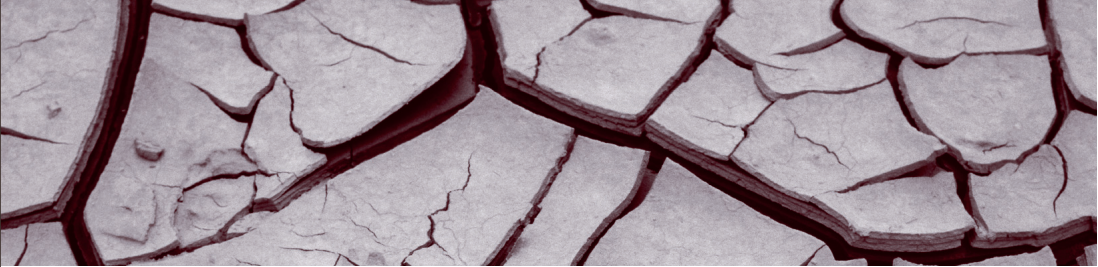
**These topics are permanently reflected in light of the overall aim of:**

- **SOCIAL RESILIENCE** is a concept underlining the need to live with change and uncertainty, to permanently learn and to create opportunities for self-organisation of local communities, institutions and other social entities (WP 10).



Participants of the 1st Thematic Meeting in Lancaster, November 2009

From mid-2010 onwards, we will contextualise the theoretical knowledge gained in the first project phase by confronting it more thoroughly with actual experiences and regional practices related to the core themes of the project. Therefore we will focus on the regional level and conduct three REGIONAL HAZARD WORKSHOPS (RHW) where we will meet with local and regional decision-makers, practitioners and representatives of civil society. This shall allow us to downscale and enrich our previous findings from reviewing literature and practice examples.



**DROUGHTS AND HEAT-RELATED HAZARDS** in Southern Europe which are socio-environmental phenomena produced by mixtures of climatic, hydrological, environmental, socio-economic and cultural forces. Their complexity and context-specificity confounds severity and impact assessments. Enhancing adaptive capacity becomes essential in the face of such uncertain future extremes (WP 7).

Dried-up earth during a heat wave

Mountains prone to Alpine hazards

Consequences of riverine flooding



**ALPINE HAZARDS**, such as flash floods, avalanches and debris flows, are amongst the most threatening hazards in the entire Alpine space. These phenomena occur suddenly, are localised, fast moving, generally violent, and difficult to predict. Thus, risk communication, education and social capacity building are key issues for effective short and long term responses (WP 8).



**RIVERINE FLOODS IN CENTRAL EUROPE** causing substantial damages have been regularly occurring since the early 1990s at the Rhine, Oder and Elbe rivers. But flooding is a key risk threatening most European societies. Consequently, transnational flood policy is currently striving toward the new approach of flood risk management which is particularly visible in the European Floods Directive from 2007 (WP 9).


## 16 WHICH TOPICS IS CAPHAZ-NET DEALING WITH?

WP N°	WP NAME	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	CONTACT PERSON
1	Social Capacity Building	UFZ	Annett Steinführer
2	Risk Governance	LEC	Gordon Walker
3	Risk Perception	DIA	Gisela Wachinger
4	Social Vulnerability	FHRC	Sue Tapsell
5	Risk Communication	WSL	Matthias Buchecker
6	Risk Education	GIAM	Blaž Komac
7	RHW Heat-Related Hazards	ICTA	Louis Lemkow
8	RHW Alpine Hazards	ISIG	Anna Scolobig
9	RHW Riverine Floods	UFZ	Christian Kuhlicke
10	Social Resilience	All partners	Christian Kuhlicke
11	Project Coordination	UFZ	Jochen Luther

capHaz-Net's  
distribution of work

## 4 What does CapHaz-Net aim to achieve?

The overall goal of CapHaz-Net is to develop deeper insights and recommendations on how to enhance the capacities of European societies to prepare for, cope with and recover from the impact of a ›natural‹ hazard. Therefore the following outcomes are foreseen:

- A state-of-the-art overview of natural hazards research in the social sciences
  - Recommendations for and prioritisation of future research needs by identifying gaps of knowledge and open questions
  - A network of scholars and stakeholders from across Europe committed to this subject
  - Recommendations and praxis examples on how to enhance social capacities for natural hazards and increase social resilience
- 



## 5 How can you contribute to capHaz-Net?

If you are interested in certain topics or if you want to get involved – just send us an e-mail to [caphaz-net@ufz.de](mailto:caphaz-net@ufz.de) and/or visit our website at <http://www.caphaz-net.org>!

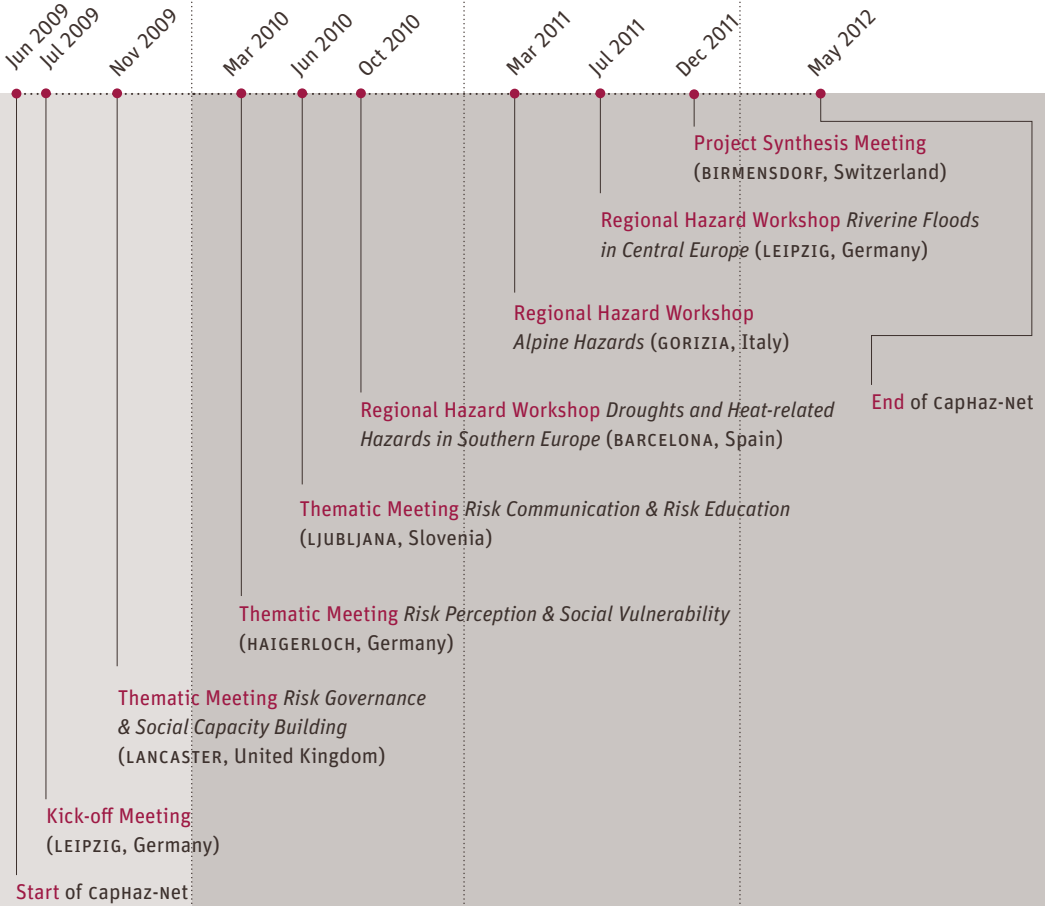
**There are many different ways of how you can contribute to capHaz-Net:**

- You can send us insights of your work that you consider as relevant or provide us with good (or poor) practice examples in the field of natural hazards.
- You can register on our website in order to receive the latest information of capHaz-Net including policy briefs and other documents.
- You can send us direct feedback, critical remarks and questions concerning these documents via e-mail.
- We invite a number of experts, stakeholders etc. for each Thematic Meeting and the Regional Hazard Workshops.





Consequences of a  
rock fall in Längenfeld  
(Tyrol, Austria)



CAPHAZ-NET's project progress

**POLICY BRIEF N°1**  
Introducing CAPHAZ-NET to a wider audience

**POLICY BRIEF N°3**  
Results of the RHW on Droughts and Heat-Related Hazards in Southern Europe

**POLICY BRIEF N°4**  
Results of the RHW on Alpine Hazards

**POLICY BRIEF N°2**  
Results gained by CAPHAZ-NET throughout the Thematic Meetings

**POLICY BRIEF N°5**  
Results of the RHW on Riverine Floods in Central Europe

## 6 What happens next?

### Next capHaz-net event

- 2nd Thematic Meeting on RISK PERCEPTION AND SOCIAL VULNERABILITY (10–12 March 2010; HAIGERLOCH, Germany), with an open workshop on 11 March 2010

### Upcoming capHaz-net events

- 3rd Thematic Meeting on RISK COMMUNICATION AND RISK EDUCATION (7–9 June 2010; LJUBLJANA, Slovenia), with an open workshop on 8 June 2010
- 1st Regional Hazard Workshop on DROUGHTS AND HEAT-RELATED HAZARDS IN SOUTHERN EUROPE (October 2010, BARCELONA, Spain)
- 2nd Regional Hazard Workshop ON ALPINE HAZARDS (March 2011, GORIZIA, Italy)
- 3rd Regional Hazard Workshop ON RIVERINE FLOODS IN CENTRAL EUROPE (July 2011, SAXONY, Germany)
- Project Synthesis Meeting (December 2011, BIRMENSCHWIL, Switzerland)

### Further activities

capHaz-net will host a session at the 21st IAPS conference *Vulnerability, Risk and Complexity: Impacts of Global Change on Human Habitats* (27 June–2 July 2010) held in Leipzig / Germany.

