

Kelman, I. 2006. "Interdisciplinary Cities on Volcanoes". Disaster and Social Crisis Research Network Electronic Newsletter, no. 25 (January-March), pp. 11-12.

Full Text:

"Interdisciplinary" is a popular buzzword, including for disasters research and practice. Transdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, crossdisciplinary, pluri-disciplinary, and other related terms appear too. What does it all mean? The conference "Cities on Volcanoes 4" <http://www.citiesonvolcanoes4.com> in January 2006 showed good practice, with thanks to the International Volcano Health Hazard Network <http://www.ivhhn.org> for funding my trip.

The strong representation from social scientists, especially compared to previous "Cities on Volcanoes" meetings, was impressive along with the interest shown in their work by physical scientists. Volcano physical and mental health effects, risk communication, and interpreting volcanoes through archaeology and history were prominent subjects alongside four-dimensional computational modelling, monitoring technologies, and geology. Emergency managers made superb contributions, especially on how they and physical and social scientists should engage each other—long before a crisis strikes.

Yet there were still senior field volcanologists, with extensive international experience in managing crises, perpetuating myths which should have been long buried. For example, disaster mitigation must take money away from other endeavours, scientific knowledge is objective, and anecdotal evidence and traditional knowledge are less worthy than data collected from modern instruments. There was also mixed acceptance of livelihoods, the social construction of risk, and contextual vulnerability as important elements in understanding the human impact of volcanoes.

Many physical scientists have a long road yet to travel to acknowledge the impacts and implications of their work. To assist that journey, social scientists must be willing to attend physical science meetings, to learn some physical science, and to be patient and open-minded in working with other fields. "Cities on Volcanoes" provides a venue and it was encouraging to see attendees listening to each other—and then thinking about it. A similar "interdisciplinary et al." approach should be tackled for non-volcanic topics. Atmospheric sciences have also started it, with Weather and Society Integrated Studies [http://www.rap.ucar.edu/was\\_is](http://www.rap.ucar.edu/was_is) and Climate Affairs <http://www.ccb.ucar.edu/cxa/index.html>

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