

Kelman, I. 2007. "My island pathway to disaster research". Disaster & Social Crisis Research Network Electronic Newsletter, nos. 29-30 (January-June), p. 4.

Full text:

My interest and involvement in disaster research emerged because I was seeking a career which was challenging, involved all scales from local to international, provided opportunities for innovation, and linked to long-term sustainability processes. Research was always a strong candidate to match the need for challenging and innovative work. But why disasters?

My main interests were predominantly focused on development and environmental management, which covers multiple scales along with links to sustainability. Within that vast range, I sought a more specific topic. My first approach towards narrowing the topic was geographic: I focused on islands.

Islands present challenges due to their smallness, isolation, and marginality. These same characteristics, along with islands' compactness, present opportunities because they are a useful setting for analysis which can then potentially be extrapolated to larger areas. The interconnectedness of islands, especially regarding the strong ties amongst their social and environmental characteristics, also expose the multiple approaches necessary for addressing the complexity of the sustainability process. Finally, islands are usually of a local scale yet can be sovereign states, so all scales from local to international are encompassed.

As one subset of these topics, disasters emerged as yielding significant challenges and requiring plenty of innovation. In exploring the topic, I discovered a strong disaster research community along with impressive disaster practitioner networks – plus strong and needed interchanges amongst researchers and practitioners. With journals, textbooks, newsletters, and jobs readily available, I realized that disasters on islands presented a viable and valuable topic for my specialty, matching all my criteria.

In addition to retaining the depth and breadth that I seek, pre-disaster and post-disaster activities are necessarily involved. My work is about building and maintaining safer and healthier communities over the long-term rather than always responding in crisis mode. The inspiration, challenges, and creativity emerging from islands means that opportunities to assist and to learn from others will always exist.

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