

Kelman, I. and T. Rauken. 2009. "Climate change or not? Policy lessons for flooding". Presentation at the Society for Risk Analysis - Europe Conference, From the Everyday to the Extraordinary, Karlstad, Sweden, 28 June to 1 July 2009.

Abstract:

Even though municipalities in Norway have dealt with floods for decades or longer, with varying degrees of success, recent discourse has highlighted and framed the local flood problem in the context of climate change. Framing floods as a climate change topic, rather than a more expansive view of disaster risk reduction, has both advantages and disadvantages. These are explored through qualitative interviews and surveys with flood-related decision makers across several Norwegian municipalities, using written surveys sent to the mayors and environmental officers of all municipalities as well as in-depth interviews with individuals from selected locations. The results are then compared with observations and experience from non-Norwegian municipalities around the world.

Three sectors are chosen to illustrate the consequences for policy formulation. Moss, Norway is compared with Boulder, Colorado regarding the connections between floods and drinking water supply. Åmot, Norway and Cambridge, England exemplify the effects of flooding on cultural heritage. Flisa, Norway and Toronto, Ontario have parallels regarding the use of structural defences for flood risk reduction.

The policy implications are that framing flood risk reduction as a climate change problem has detrimental implications for long-term sustainability of measures undertaken. Instead, climate change should be seen as one disaster amongst many, or as one contributor amongst many to flood disasters, in order to ensure that lessons from the past are used in the present in order to improve the future under any climate change scenarios.