A Sharing Meanings Approach for Interdisciplinary Hazards Research

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Abstract

Hazards researchers frequently examine complex socioenvironmental problems, a difficult undertaking that is further compounded by the challenge of navigating the many disciplinary approaches in the field. This article draws on key insights from studies of the interdisciplinary process and proposes the “sharing meanings approach” for improving interdisciplinary collaboration in hazards research. The sharing meanings approach addresses common challenges to interdisciplinary teamwork and organizes them into four focal areas: (1) worldviews (including ontological, epistemological, and philosophical perspectives), (2) language, (3) research design, and (4) project goals. The approach emphasizes the process of sharing rather than seeking to develop a single set of shared meanings related to the four focal areas. The article identifies common challenges and recommends strategies and actions within each focal area for guiding teams toward sharing their implicit meanings. A hypothetical example is introduced to demonstrate how the approach offers a path for revealing and overcoming the common roadblocks experienced in interdisciplinary hazards research. By making interdisciplinary hazards teams’ implicit assumptions explicit, the sharing meanings approach offers an operational process to seize on moments of difference as productive tension and to see such challenges as opportunities—rather than obstacles—for innovating toward hybrid methodological research designs in hazards research.

Read the full article in Risk Analysis [1].

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