

NEEDS 2021

5th edition of the Northern European Conference
on Emergency and Disaster Studies

Östersund / online 21–23 September


Abstracts from the panel

Contingency: exploring an age-old
concept for a new reality



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Measuring Performance in Civil Contingency Management

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As Ulrich Beck (1992) famously predicted, we now live in a social order designed to manage risks and achieve safety. Still practitioners lack systems and metrics for assessing performance in contingent times. Moreover, research on performance measurement during contingencies is limited, not least regarding how relatively new professional civil contingency management functions relate to their work and what metrics they use to determine success (Jong, 2021; Boin & Lodge, 2016; McConnell, 2011). This study addresses this gap in contemporary research by posing the questions: What indicators do Swedish local level civil contingency professionals relate to when they assess performance, and what does that tell us about Swedish civil contingency preparedness? The study builds on the literature streams of crisis *and* disaster management, grouping the fields together under the contingency concept. Drawing on 40 semi-structured interviews with local level civil contingency professionals, we inductively develop eleven performance indicators, which are then separated into three larger categories: Establishing initial frameworks for management; Interacting with internal and external stakeholders; Interacting with the public. The categories work as a practical heuristic to accentuate different elements of civil contingency management.

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Novel Business Models, Digitalization and AI in Public-Private Critical Infrastructure Financialization: An Innovative Crisis Trinity?

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Abstract:

Financialization – implying a shift over time from industrial to global market control – has characterized public-private partnerships (PPP) in critical infrastructure for decades. Already complex, infrastructural financialization is increasingly so with the advent of business models, such as Special Acquisition Companies (SPAC), as well as through increasing digitalization of infrastructure financialization, through for example blockchain. SPACs by design are unclear where investment takes place, which is problematic from PPP governance, accountability and financial crisis prevention perspectives. Algorithms and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are features of digitalization also increasingly employed in infrastructural markets to assess and manipulate capital, often with risky stakes. I argue that novel forms of business models such as SPAC and digitalization progressively increase the contingent nature of infrastructure financing – and thus economic instability - by embracing elements of uncertainty and accepted risk as points of departure. Utilizing uncertainty in this manner may resonate in innovation-driven speculative economies, but how does this deliberate rescinding of agency impact on governance, accountability and political and bureaucratic responsibilities, when pension funds and societal security are wagered? This piece examines novel business and technological developments in the area of public-private infrastructural financing the European context, and implications of applications for governance and accountability.

Keywords: financialization; PPP; infrastructure; digitalization; AI; accountability; governance

From tyche to Wild Cards: Ancient Inspirations for Coping with the Unexpected

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In the *Physics*, Aristotle acknowledges the role of *tyche* - the Greek equivalent of contingency – in nature. His home, the Greek peninsula, was – and still is today – regularly struck by natural hazards like earthquakes, storms, or floods. Ancient records document that oftentimes they wrought substantial damage to the infrastructure and the political integrity of ancient communities. Lacking reliable forecasting systems, for the ancient Greek civilization any of these hazards was contingent, even though there existed accepted interpretation of what (or who) caused these phenomena.

Roughly 2.500 years later, futures studies and foresight call sudden, unpredictable events like these *wild cards*. Occurring with a low probability but a substantial impact on society (Mendonca et al., 2004), wild card events pose challenges not only to long-term planning but also to social, political, and economic stability. Just as natural hazards unexpectedly interrupted and transformed social, political, and economical life in the ancient communities, *wild cards* have the potential to disrupt current and futures societies and economies.

With the modern world increasingly complex and interconnected, contingent “wild card” events will increase in frequency, likelihood, and impact. More than ever, local calamities will show global effects. To mitigate these effects and enable a fast recovery, creative approaches are needed. A gaze into how the societies of the distant past successfully coped with the *wild cards* that hit them, may yield inspiration for that.

After a short introduction of the theoretical concepts, the presentation will focus on how the ancient societies in the Mediterranean area imagined, prepared for, and coped with disasters. Subsequently, implications for disaster risk reduction will be drawn.

Contingency and the inadequacy of cognitive understanding of threats

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International interdependence, global interconnectivity, societal and technological complexity, the Anthropocene – there are many explanations to why we are experiencing a growing number of contingencies that appears to be outside our control. This article adds the Cartesian scientific tradition of cognitive reason to the list. It demonstrates how today's scientific understanding of many threats is insufficient to help us avoid surprise because of its abstract and static nature that do not mobilise the requisite level of crisis awareness and imagination needed to anticipate local consequences and trigger preventive action by politicians and experts. By analysing cases such as the Covid-19-pandemic, the article reveals how national experts, despite analysing numerous international reports and facts and figures on crises in other parts of the world, are surprised by events because they fail to imagine that the threat would develop so quickly that it would reach their own country so soon and with such force. It raises the question of whether nothing less than personal experience of crisis (e.g. earlier pandemics: c.f. Taiwan during Covid-19) can evoke the level of emotional and 'bodily' (all senses) understanding (fear, vulnerability, urgency) required to avoid surprise. It discusses the possibilities of a more practical (less abstract) and time-conscious (less static) internationally transferable knowledge able to generate a deeper understanding and stronger imagination capacity, that can help us to 'Accept the things we cannot change; Courage to change the things we can; And wisdom to know the difference'.