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Public Opinion on Flood Management (September 2013) in Galați County, Romania

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The floods that occurred in Galați County (southeastern Romania) in the period September 11-13, 2013, were the result of the heavy precipitation fallen between September 11-12 (more than 150 l/m²) and September 13-14, on the one hand, and the torrential flows loaded with high amounts of sediments (September 14-15), on the other hand. Thus, on the Geru River, in the perimeter of Cudalbi commune (which was the most affected by floods), the discharge recorded on September 11, 2013, (11 hours p.m.) reached a maximum of 118 m³/s; two days later, on the Chineja River, at Fărânești, the maximum discharge was 153 m³/s (5 hours p.m.) (Galați County Prefecture).

The floods, which affected 39 settlements (of which 15 communes), had the following consequences: 9 deceased persons, 8000 people evacuated, 17000 dead animals, 2500 households affected to various degrees, a railway, 22 km of national roads, 169 km of county roads and 304 km of communal roads damaged (Fig. 1) (Galați County Prefecture).

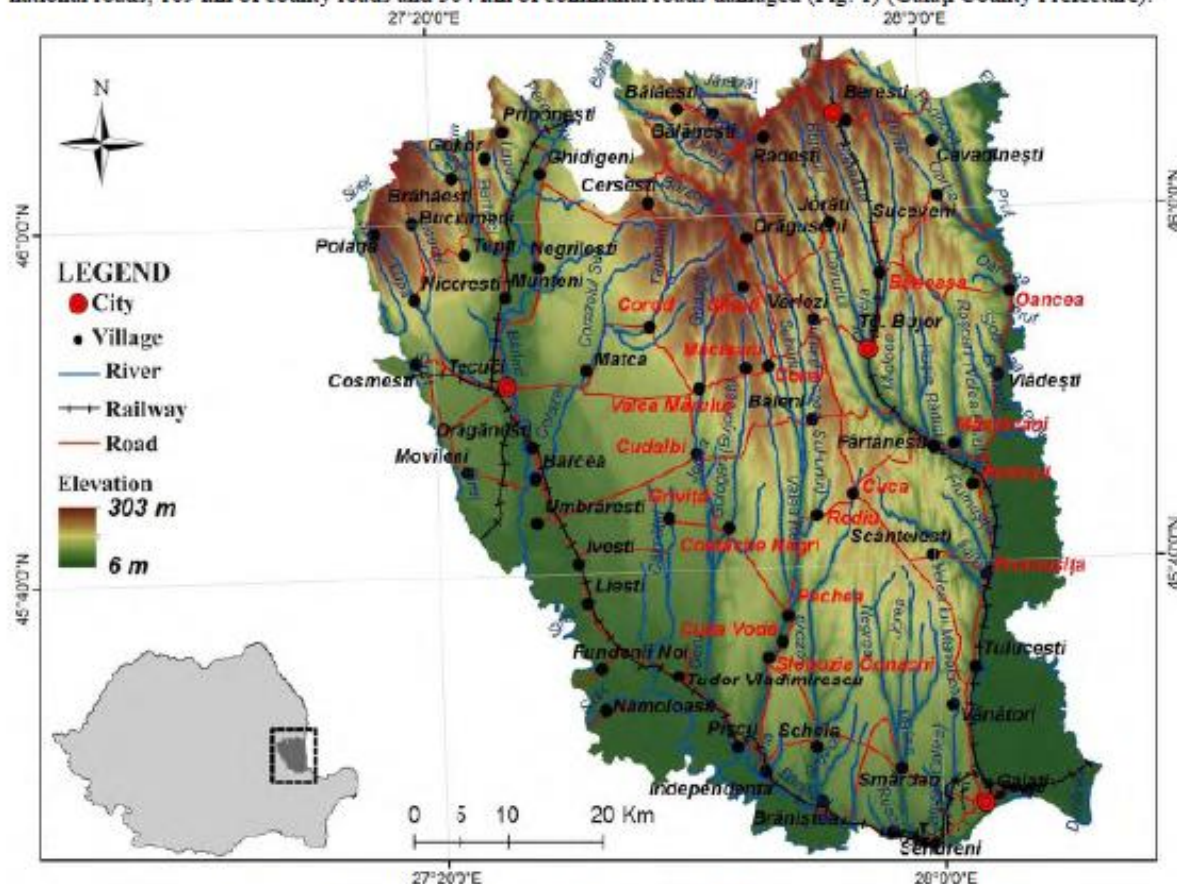


Figure 1- The settlements affected by floods in Galați County (September 2013)

The purpose of our approach was to know the people's opinion on how the authorities managed this event in Cudalbi commune (the most affected settlement in the county). In this respect, we applied a questionnaire to a representative sample in terms of number and structure over the periods September 20-28 and November 10-15, 2013. The questionnaire, which was structured in three chapters (data on the study subjects, data regarding the settlement and the dwellings, and data regarding the people's experience and their awareness about the floods), included 26 questions, most of

them multiple-choice ones. Of these questions, 13 were related to how the floods had been managed (before, during and after their occurrence) and especially to how the people perceived the authorities' involvement.

The individual or collective perception (the two being often different) of the potential of natural phenomena (in this case the floods) to produce material damage and human loss is important for the management of hazards, especially before their occurrence (Cheval, 2003). The results of perception studies should be put at the disposal of local authorities, so that to support appropriate future measures in order to control the floods and diminish their negative effects. The information level of the people and their previous experience define the complexity of perceptive act and directly influence the given answers.

Summarizing the results obtained from the questionnaire, we can conclude the following:

- Mass media is the main source of information with regard to meteorological and hydrological forecasts;
- Only a small part of the interviewed population had property insurance policies, while life insurance policies were absent;
- The interviewed people had not been informed in advance about the risk of flood occurrence;
- People had no idea about a community-based warning system;
- In case of flood occurrence, the people that had previously suffered from such an event are ready to leave their homes;
- Most respondents appreciated that in the aftermath of the floods the authorities had taken appropriate measures;
- The local community is not aware of the importance of volunteer actions, waiting from help from the outside;
- Population believes the authorities fail to take appropriate measures to prevent the floods. Of the proposals made in this regard we can mention the following: dyke construction; dredging the river channels and the ditches; relocation of the buildings to safe areas; erecting more resistant buildings, with higher groundworks; adequate instruction of the population; accurate warnings, in good time;
- People are not aware of the plans designed for emergency situations.

The results obtained from the citizens of Cudalbi commune differ to some extent from the answers and the vision of the local and/or county authorities, who appreciate they had a prompt response and enough material resources at their disposal, which were distributed responsibly in the territory. Some of the weaknesses emphasized by the citizens and also admitted by the authorities point at the lack of prevention measures and the low education level of the citizens.

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