Cross-cultural symbols as a universal language

The importance of knowledge of languages to ensure effective disaster communication was also discussed by the practitioners. Here, practitioners identified that cross-cultural symbols are important in effective disaster communication, as they can cut across different languages: "If we shift from language to communication, we can go toward the use of pictures, without hesitation. Everybody can understand regardless of their culture and language. But it is not about language anymore, but about communication, and every emergency will have their own signs, words won't be used anymore. We will all have different channels to convey information, we might send a weather alert by social media in order to reach a wider range of people" (G2; R - see source document for full reference). Practitioners felt that, ideally, communication in emergency and disaster situations needs to be clear and simple, so that citizens are fully able to understand the situation in which they find themselves, and that those individuals and organizations interacting with citizens need to better understand this: "My experience tells me that maybe operators overestimate the ability of people to understand fully the details of rescue operations. Citizens usually look for clear and basic and simple information" (G2; R), "we don't have a big experience of direct interaction with people, if not through some channel of direct contacts such as a toll-free number and a contact centre. However, what it is clear for us it is not clear at all to citizens. This is due to the lack of a number of references and background that perhaps we give for granted" (G4; R7), "On a side, institutions speak more and more their own complicated language and there is not that translation in clear and simple terms to the citizen" (G4; R3). Although a small number of practitioners lamented that they may not always be effective in keeping communication simple when informing citizens about disaster situations: "We try to make them more understandable. But I am sure that something gets lost from when the information is issued to when it arrives" (G4; R), "by mistake - I used a technical term… They immediately jump up asking what was it and they were upset about this, because it was incomprehensible for them. In other words, the message I was transmitting arrived maimed, substantially" (G6; R5). Accordingly, the ability of practitioners to critically review the technological language they use in disaster communication is positive and should be further encouraged to ensure an effective disaster communication.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: Languages, Communication

Disaster Phases: Response, Recovery

Types of Actors Concerned: National civil protection body, Local authorities, Non-active citizens, Government, Healthcare and emergency services

Hazards: Natural hazards, Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations, Man-made intentional hazards

Recommendations:

- Social media can be a useful alternative communication channel in all stages of disaster management
- Use cultural factors to improve the effectiveness of disaster communication

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Source

Deliverable D5.11 "Report on Stakeholder Assembly 2 (Italy)" (page 25)

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https://culturalmap.carismand.eu/a/5-11-24-cross-cultural-symbols-as-a-universal-language