

Reaction paper Elisa Jaramillo

Transboundary risks

The focus of the readings is the transboundary risks, specifically how they are classified, perceived, communicated and accordingly managed. With respect to classification, Jeanne and Roger Kasperson mention four types of transboundary risks: Type 1 and 2 represent a more precise source of risk and differ basically on extent or reach of such risk and its consequences (the former is localized in border areas the later may affect a bigger region, group of countries). Types 3 and 4 have less identifiable sources of risk (policies, systems or alteration of global systemic environment) which may produce more diffuse effects.

The perception of risk, and therefore risk behavior of institutions or people depends on interaction of risks with psychological, social, institutional and cultural processes including the influence of mass media and personal experience. This interaction will determine if a risk will be amplified or attenuated. Furthermore, people may attenuate risk signals that are inconsistent with their beliefs or in the contrary, magnify these signals when they are more recognizable and according to personal values. This has demonstrated to be valid not only for the general public but expert judgment appears to be also prone to many of the same biases.

It is also important to consider the "ripple effect". Behavioral responses to risk generate secondary and tertiary consequences of social and economic nature that will go beyond the directly affected victims. Through this ripple effect, indirect impacts may affect companies, industries and agencies whose business is minimally related to the particular risk or event (in the case of an accident).

Finally, there is the issue of transboundary risk communication. It is of complex nature because it involves issues of jurisdiction, sharing of sensitive information beyond nation borders and due to the difficulties in establishing transboundary communication networks. Two forms of risk communication are considered: old school with a more paternalistic approach between experts of the field and the general public and new school involving a participative dialogue between these two parties.

I believe that though it is important to finally admit there are cumulative transboundary risks for which a prompt management and solution must be given, it is still disturbing to think about the potential of international control (of developed nations) over the developmental pathways of developing countries. Also disturbing is the recognizing that experts in risk assessment are also biased by psychological, social, cultural and institutional effects. Added to the fact that some actions in response to risk area simple surrogates for other social and ideological concerns, how can we be sure that policies in place are the most appropriate to manage risk in and outside national boundaries? For example, what about the perception of risk from nuclear weapons in Iraq that led to the war?