

Editorial – Communication of socio-environmental risks and disasters in Brazil: an area under development

Editorial – Comunicação de riscos e desastres socioambientais no Brasil: uma área em estágio de amadurecimento

The purpose of this special section in the **Revista Desenvolvimento e Meio Ambiente (Development and Environment Journal)**, an interdisciplinary publication widely known in Brazil and Latin America, was to gather and stimulate studies focused on the communication of risks and disasters, especially with the understanding that they are permeated by relationships between society and nature. We endorse the proposition that there are no natural disasters, seeking to demystify the idea that human decisions are not part of the process and highlighting the need to give more visibility to the processes that generate vulnerability. Meteorological, hydrological, or geological hazards trigger outbreaks that will only become disasters when there is vulnerability, low response capacity, and low large-scale risk mitigation.

As researchers in this area, we have observed the expansion of the communication debate across different disciplines and practice spaces, but at the same time, we understand that it is necessary to qualify the studies, especially in Brazil, so that there are no reductionisms or misunderstandings about risk and disaster communication. Before, during, and after disasters, with different objectives and audiences, communication is called upon by technicians, managers, and politicians as a possibility to mitigate damage and broaden a perspective of prevention, contributing to the reduction of disaster risks.

The expression “risk communication”, although it has become popular due to the recent disasters that have erupted in Brazil, especially the unprecedented floods that affected Rio Grande do Sul in May 2024, remains a challenge in multiple meanings, whether due to the absence of a theoretical-epistemological deepening or due to its interdisciplinary origin. The interest of communication scholars in this subject has been sporadic. This topic is also relatively recent in our country: the first thesis in the area is dated 2001, by the researcher Cilene Victor, one of the authors of this edition.

Powell and Leiss (2005) recall that the expression “risk communication” was first used in 1984, from the growing interest in risk perception studies, which attempted to discover why views on risks were so different. Since

then, the expression has had several emphases, with the aim of improving dialogue between audiences and obtaining more effective results in their management process. Loose and Quinteros (2025) point to four communication approaches linked to this concept: management, media, community and governance. Of these, the management perspective, associated with the understanding that communication would be a tool, means or instrument that would contribute to risk and disaster management, remains the most common.

The manuscripts received to compose this special edition perform a good representation of the state of the art. Often, authors mentioned the key expression without pointing out the references or theoretical affiliations, as communication was seen as a path to other debates, such as education, public policies, or management, to cite a few examples. This experience underscores the lack of literature that goes beyond instrumental logic and advances the debate on risk and disaster communication as a complex process. In this special edition, we add another factor of possible confusion: the sum of the better-known “risk communication” with “disaster communication”. In addition to promoting the interconnections between these themes, we consider that “risk and disaster communication” would be more comprehensive, allowing us to think about the communication process at all stages of the management cycle. The expression “disaster risk communication” was also accepted, being more specific to the management stages prior to the outbreak of the disaster.

The wide variety of denominations, uses, and understandings, from different fields of knowledge, proved to be problematic. Some manuscripts failed to mention communication, while others understood it as a mere transmission of information, sometimes at a very specific point in the risk and disaster management cycle. On the other hand, the high number of submissions indicates an interest in the area, which we believe is under a development phase.

This edition opens a space for us to broaden the debate - with authors from all regions of Brazil, and also from different countries (Chile, Argentina, Spain, and the United States). We also highlight that the scarcity of Brazilian scientists with this focus of study was felt in the search for reviewers for the texts received, confirming the perception that this area is still little explored in the country, being an occasional or secondary topic for some researchers.

We chose to include in this edition a set of texts very close to “experience reports”, which delineate practices and articulations from the researchers’ work. We believe that interaction and dialogue between these different professionals can be a way to build a more robust and efficient communication of socio-environmental risks and disasters. In addition to these, other studies that start from different points of view, aligned with classic scientific articles, were also published.

The published works reinforce the multidisciplinary nature of risk communication, including, for example, interfaces with religious institutions (Esteves et al., 2026)), climate environmental education (Ferreira et al., 2026; Monteiro et al., 2026; Esteves et al., 2026), discussion of nomenclatures (Câmara & Laranjeiras, 2026), institutional capacities (Marchezini et al., 2026), traditional peoples (Santos et al., 2026), and health (Karen et al., 2026; Broitman et al., 2026).

In addition to multidisciplinary, there is the challenge of a cross-sectoral and holistic view of the interaction between environmental factors. Air pollution, for example, can add to the effects of various disasters, especially those related to wildfires and forest fires (Bezerra et al., 2026). A communication about the risk of vegetation fires, for example, needs information about air quality to compose the content of this communication. Knowing how the population understands the topic (risk perception) helps to make choices about the language, content, flow, and audience of this communication.

The disaster experienced in Rio Grande do Sul in 2024 is presented in three studies in this edition: one focusing on promoting effective dialogues that consider the complexity of climatic phenomena and their social, economic, and environmental implications (Ely & Redin, 2026); another discussing the social construction of volunteering during floods (Lobato da Costa et al., 2026); and a third presenting the chronology of the disaster and an account of the voluntary actions of researchers in the production and dissemination of essential information (Possanti et al., 2026).

From the perspective of studies based on experiences, we highlight the text by Victor and Sanches (2026), which mobilizes risk communication within the scope of the elaboration of the National Plan of Civil Protection and Defense, recently published in October 2025, and which, for the first time, includes in its objectives “to improve risk and disaster communication”.

The role of journalistic media is analyzed based on coverage of risks and disasters in four quality newspapers from Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and Spain (Catalina-García et al., 2026), as well as through local outlets, focusing on the water crisis that affected Curitiba and its metropolitan region (Jorge et al., 2026) and on events triggered by extreme rainfall in Santarém (Cortes et al., 2026). Television news coverage of heatwaves was examined in the study by Costa and Luiz (2026).

The lack of communication also emerges as a point of interest. The study by Chaves et al. (2026) verified how vulnerable populations in Puerto Rico experienced and dealt with the collapse of communications infrastructure before, during and after Hurricane Maria.

The intersection of risk communication with public communication is present in two papers: Cozzi (2026) discusses aspects of resilience in cases

of flooding in Argentina and Brazil; and Oliveira e Morais (2026) present the theoretical proposition entitled “public risk communication”.

This collection of articles sought to offer a space for more voices to be heard, including those outside the Brazilian South-Southeast domain. The expression “giving voice” was very common among the contributions. Although we recognize the importance of listening to voices that are usually not listened to, we chose not to use the expression “giving voice” because we believe that everyone has their own voice – both literally and figuratively (each human being has something to say about their experiences and their worldview) – and what is needed is to offer means for these voices to be heard more often and with more attention.

This dossier brings together, to some extent, a diagnosis of the multifaceted and developing nature of studies aimed at better communicating risks and disasters. This variety of perspectives is an invitation that the publishers extend to all interested readers to learn more about the challenges and potential of the field. We wish you an excellent reading experience!

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Eloisa Beling Loose
Luciana R. Londe
Organizers