



Flood Risk: The Holistic Perspective (Urban Hydroinformatics)

By Zoran Vojinovic

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According to the International Disaster Database (EM-DAT), over the last seventy years, floods have shown the fastest rate of increase relative to any other type of disasters. Devastation due to these events occurs almost daily. Even though our technological capabilities for dealing with floods have advanced rapidly over the same period, and while global economic growth per capita has doubled, flood events have become ever more disastrous. Does this mean that our technological developments have advanced independently from the social and wider ecological needs?

Flood Risk: The Holistic Perspective is a direct response to this question and it argues that this paradoxical situation is a result from our narrow and fragmented perception of reality which has been characteristic of our academic disciplines and government agencies. It suggests that the way forward can be found only if we broaden our view and learn how the natural or social phenomena can provoke a response in a society, or a social group, which in turn can trigger the technical developments, and so on, again and again, in what has the potential to become a network of interactions and relationships through positive feedback (or coevolving) cycles. The holistic perspective however may raise the following question: If everything is connected to everything else, how can we ever hope to understand anything? Our response draws from the understandings brought by complexity theory where individual elements coevolve together both in development and application. This recognition opens a new analysis which goes beyond the direct objects or actors of concern (risk forecasting, early warning, land-use planning technology and systems for example), and into the relationships between them. The book suggests that our initial response to this and many other challenges is to change our perception from a disciplinary and defensive one to a progressive (or transcendental) and transdisciplinary, i.e., the one that turns challenges into the possibilities that can re-shape our future.

The book is structured in eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides exposure to the complexity of flood-related issues and illustrates diversity of multiple points of view. Chapter 2 elaborates on the history of holistic thinking with connection to the flood resilience process. Chapter 3 discusses the holistic risk governance approach which progresses beyond the integrated urban flood management. Chapter 4 describes the Green Cities Initiative, an initiative which is essentially

holistic in its nature as it aims to improve transport, energy efficiency, industrial metabolism including water supply and distribution as well as drainage and sewerage services through the holistic lens of interactions between different sectors. Chapter 5 discusses various risk assessment practices and it concludes that any practice that omits social, ethical and wider ecological points of view will be severely restricted in its scope and its reach. Chapter 6 describes the root causes of floods in the Pasig-Marikina River Basin in Metro Manila, Philippines. Chapter 7 reflects upon the key issues and challenges from 2011 Thailand floods. Finally, Chapter 8 presents some of the key aspects concerning urban stormwater management practice in Beijing, China.

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Ruth Morefield:

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Maureen Smiley:

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