



## Introduction

*Jeroen Warner, Helena de Jong,  
Elena López-Gunn, Marta Rica*

*WUR, NLDA, ICATALIST*

## Disaster and Culture literature

Disaster and culture had its heyday in the 1960s and '70s, with American scholars like Moore, Anderson and Wenger and Weller, but fell out of fashion, except for a great book by Hoffmann and Oliver Smith on Cultures and Catastrophe in the late 1990s.

The theme returned to the limelight when the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies made it its theme in the 2014 World Disasters Report and its companion volume, 'Cultures and Disasters' edited by Fred Krüger et al. We acknowledge and build on their excellent work, taking it to Europe and seeking to give it some practical 'hands and feet'.

As none of these books pays a lot of attention to urban disaster or to Europe, we hope our hand-book goes some way towards filling this gap.

## Guide to the EDUCEN Handbook: purpose, logic and structure

More than half the global population now live in cities, many of whom lack 'urban survival skills' to sit out an extreme situation. Cities moreover bring together people from a wide variety of backgrounds. They may not know their next-door neighbours, but usually they have networks of people coming from the same region, religion, or other affiliation. Rather than treat urban dwellers as individuals, we claim there is great merit in situating them in their identity and solidarity networks.

Systems theory teaches us that there is strength in diversity. Socio-cultural diversity however is mighty puzzling. This is a guide for the intrigued and perplexed by disaster and culture. It is not a recipe book, but gives you the "what", "why" and, where possible, "how" on working with cultural diversity and urban social networks when adversity strikes. Culture, we claim, is not only a hindrance and a source of misunderstandings, but also an asset that can bring creative solutions and save lives. Cultural networks, we find, have communication lines and repertoires of action that help them survive in and learn from disaster.

But culture is not so easily identified; you only notice culture when you trip over it. The present book aims to help you at four levels:

- recognise
- analyse
- instrumentalise
- act

The present Handbook, a printable, digital tool that is easily and freely accessible by users, has the option to download different sections. It includes a series of sections and chapters on key themes, a wiki, a toolkit, a series of Guiding Questions for reflections and a video library.

Many of our examples draw on our own experiences. In the two-year EDUCEN Coordination and Support Action, funded by the European Commission ([www.educenproject.eu](http://www.educenproject.eu)), we exchanged, tested, adapted, and learned from each other in seven disaster-prone European cities and urban regions: L'Aquila, Dordrecht, Istanbul, Lorca, Milan, Umbria and Volos. "We" are a diverse group of European researchers and practitioners, many not steeped in social sciences but stumbling on culture and finding ways of handing it in our daily work.

The core chapters of the Handbook consist of the experiences, procedures and tools developed and collected by the participant EDUCEN city teams and experts. We thank the non-team colleagues inside EDUCEN as well as external experts who kindly contributed inputs.

Apart from drawing liberally on the city manuals, the handbook relies on the State of the Art report developed for and with EDUCEN. The State of the Art constitutes the base and organising principle for the conceptual chapters, the guiding questions and the Wiki-section. In principle, supporting material can continue to be uploaded in the platform since it is in digital format. In this way, the handbook can evolve as a living document with new experiences in EDUCEN cities but also from 'new' cities.

Especially the city manuals exemplify the EDUCEN approach, and the development and implementation of the different approaches and tools developed. The EDUCEN approach is to engage with and see the benefits of cultural diversity, and the importance of treating people as social beings: people are not (only) rational individuals, but are social actors, embedded in (often multiple) networks, which they turn to for information and help in a crisis.

All these aim to support disaster risk reduction professionals in particular to better appraise relevant cultural aspects in their own 'communities of practice'. Each EDUCEN city or urban region has its manual, systematising its experiences, tools and lessons learned, to help others working and living in the relevant city along. Of course other cities may benefit as well. The examples in the Handbook part draw on these learnings to illustrate the wider points on culture and disaster. It has two main elements:

- a *substantive element*, in a series of Sections and thematic chapters on how to integrate culture into Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR);
- a *procedural element*, on tools, methods and steps to identify and include elements of culture in DRR.

A word of warning: it can get a bit complex in places. To help you along, we start with an easy-access part with some definitions and key starting points to orient you on the topic. From there you can move on to the trickier stuff: how to do social network analysis with mathematical modelling; the debates on whether there is such a thing as a 'community'. Each section in the handbook consists of a practical and accessible 'front end' and a more in-depth 'back end'. The front end starts with 5 general sections, which are divided into a number of chapters (including boxes, photos, etc.), that resonate with the interests of disaster (risk) managers and city planners (see below for Detailed Index). In some cases, the chapters are further divided into sub-topics. The back-end of the handbook provides users with the opportunity to gain more in-depth knowledge on theories, methods, discussions and experiences underlying the questions, tools and methods of the front

end. This information is retrieved through 'read more' buttons throughout the handbook.

We also bring to the table practical tools – games, social network analysis, focus groups, exhibitions – and guiding questions that may serve as points for professional reflection. We aim to provide decision-makers, planners and trainers with knowledge and tools on integrating culture in DRR and DRR in urban planning, throughout the stages of the Disaster Risk Life Cycle – prevention, mitigation, preparation, response and rehabilitation. While many of our tools and insights are “all-hazard”, our focus has mainly been limited to earthquakes and (pluvial and fluvial) floods.

While we of course hope that, for example, city planners will benefit from reading the forward thinking we offer on cities as complex systems, we also would like to encourage them to read the chapters on domains they may not be so familiar with. City planners are often focussed on buildings and infrastructure, but need an understanding of the social complexity and cultural characteristics of the people living in urban centers. Disaster Risk Managers on the other hand are by training focussed on saving people, but may want to increase their understanding of what kind of city they will work in and (sub)cultures they will work with and for. Community leaders may at times feel excluded by disaster planning and communication, and may use ideas from this handbook to engage responders with fresh, inclusive initiatives.

The Sections have the following topics:

- Culture and risk
- Cities and disaster risk reduction
- Inclusion in disaster risk reduction: engaging with diverse disaster affected groups
- Actors, response, and interaction in disaster risk reduction
- Replicability, empathy and cultural learning

We also present tools, methods and steps, guiding questions and a wiki to identify elements of culture and integrate them into DRR in Section 6.

Intrigued? Want to know more? Please feel free to contact us for information and collaboration:

[jeroen.warner@wur.nl](mailto:jeroen.warner@wur.nl); [consortium@educen.eu](mailto:consortium@educen.eu).