

Corresponding Author:

Peter McGowran

King's College London United Kingdom

peter.mcgowran@kcl.ac.uk

Author(s):

This talk will discuss findings from my PhD research and reflect on how useful dominant contemporary approaches to understanding disasters and complexity are. This section of my findings considers how and why landslides occur in Kalimpong. The findings are discussed in relation to the ideas of 'disasters-in-the-making' and 'Disaster Risk Management Assemblages' (Donovan, 2017; McGowran and Donovan, 2021). The findings problematise some contemporary framings of disasters and risk. First and foremost, they problematise distinctions between man-made and natural disasters/hazards, as has been well documented elsewhere. However, other approaches that are largely based in ecological and/or systems-based approaches also struggle to provide the terminological and theoretical basis for explaining the complexity of these events, usually overlooking cultural and political components of disaster risk (Ahmed and Kelman, 2018). Perhaps at a more fundamental level, many of these theories lack reflexivity about how these framings of disaster exclude certain actors at the level of knowledge production, potentially reproducing problematic power relations (Lizarralde et al., 2020; Mills-Novoa et al., 2020). Assemblage theory provides a useful theoretical platform to address these issues as it is able to speak to the non-linearity and inherent complexity and multiplicity of disaster risk, but it is also oriented towards critiquing and deconstructing (Greenhough, 2012) the politics and power relations that underlie conceptual frameworks—itsself included—and disaster risk reduction initiatives. These arguments are expanded on through a discussion of stories and narratives of landslide disasters based on my empirical PhD research.

References:

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Complex Disasters as Future Challenge for Disaster Research and Management