

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

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**Abstract:** *Crisis management is rather old managerial practice, but the very term is rather new. In last decades of XX century in a number of European countries Crisis management has become recognized as an academic discipline and education and research field. Although it is included in the curriculum of number of faculties, it is not understand in the same way. There is confusion in terminology, methods, concepts and approaches. What is also confusing is the fact that the discipline of Crisis management is most developed in rich and politically stable countries like Sweden and Netherland, while it is still in the rudimentary phase in countries that have faced serious crisis situations in recent past, like ex Yugoslav countries. However situation in this field is rapidly changing in the Western Balkans and the conditions for dynamic development of crisis management as an academic discipline emerged, which might contribute to improvement of managerial practice both in profit and public sector.*

**KEY WORDS:** CRISIS, CRISIS MANAGEMENT, EDUCATION, RESEARCH, ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

## 1. Introduction

Crises and disasters are an inevitable companion of human communities and a historical constant. In accordance with that fact, people's efforts to anticipate and avoid different kind of social crisis and natural disasters and mitigate their consequences are as old as mankind. The academic literature often refers to Noah as the first crisis manager who began to build the boat before it started to rain (Dynes, 2003). However, on the other hand, crisis management is a relatively new concept in generally, and in countries in transition particularly, both in the theoretical sense as a scientific-educational discipline and research field, and as a practical activity in private corporations, state administration, state-owned companies and organizations in the non-profit sector. Its, relative to global tendencies, belated and slow entry into the academic and practical-management sphere is accompanied by terminological confusion about basic phenomena – emergency situations, crises, conflicts and catastrophes, as well as various kinds of attempts at managing, either proactively or reactively, various kinds of hazards and uncertainties that threaten society and individual organizations and groups. Concepts are often translated literally or inadequately from the English language, and then inappropriately used, without a clear awareness of their meaning and scope. (Milašinović and Kešetović, 2008)

In the last decades, in a number of European countries, Crisis Management has become recognized academic discipline and education and research field. It is included in faculty curriculum and research plans in scientific institutes, scientific conferences and round tables are organized, books, monographs and journals are published. (Kešetović et al., 2011)

## 2. Crisis management as an emerging discipline

Nowadays, crisis management is rapidly developing and in the same time adjusting to ever-changing practical and academic environments. Incentives for change come from both economic and political sphere, as well as from academia. Today, we are facing the massive transformation in emergency management arena after the

September 11, 2001. These terrorist attacks on the United States have resulted in a significant reformulation of the purpose and nature of emergency management so the terrorism has become the hazard of priority among policy makers.<sup>1</sup> Besides these social impacts, crisis management is also affected by further urbanization and industrialization, modern infrastructure and recent technological developments such as GIS. The demands placed on emergency managers have risen, and on the other hand the training and educational opportunities now can provide a more knowledgeable cadre. Also, similar changes are occurring in disaster and emergency management research. Our views about the causes of disasters have shifted, and we now better understand the plethora of variables that contribute to their occurrence. The lessons from Sociology and Geography remain as important as ever, but other disciplines are generating vital contributions to the research literature. Revolutionary paradigms have been proposed and others have been introduced as a way to integrate them with the perspectives of the past. Although there are many understudied issues and functions, the knowledge base in emergency management is expanding at a dramatic pace. It is very interesting to see academic efforts in this area evolve, even though there are many obstacles yet to be overcome (McEntire, 2004).

However it is difficult to say if theory as an entire body of accurate scientific knowledge exists in emergency management and what that entails since the field is relatively new and because it intersects with so many other academic disciplines. Regardless, such a collection of philosophy, data and research findings is based on a number of components that help to generate theory. These building blocks include definitions, concepts, principles, classifications, typologies, models and causal relationships. (McEntire, 2004).

There is still no dominant or prevailing paradigm in crisis/emergency/disaster management.

There are a number of problems and obstacles in the constitution of this field as a scientific discipline. Prerequisite to convey and share

<sup>1</sup> It is obvious even on the institutional level - for example new established Department of Homeland Security (DHS) incorporated the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

information and knowledge in any meaningful way is to clarify terms. First there is a need to provide adequate and sound academic definitions of all relevant issues and phenomena. That is the first step in clarifying the priorities and boundaries of the discipline.

Also, the central concepts and paradigms are still missing and there is probably no single overarching theory that is currently ascribed to in emergency management. For many years, Comprehensive Emergency Management has been the traditional theory of emergency management has organized emergency management functions into useful but perhaps, overly simplified, disaster phases (mitigation/prevention, preparedness, response and recovery). This single perspective can limit understanding and explanation, having trouble capturing the wider political, economic and cultural explanations of disasters (Britton, 1999). Trying to overcome these limits Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman studied disasters from anthropological standpoint and proposed the social construction perspective (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 1999), while some authors suggested a move toward a "disaster resistant community" (Geis, 2000; Armstrong, 2000), focus on "resilience" as a guiding principle (Britton and Clarke, 2000; Burby et. al. 2000) or incorporation of "sustainability or sustainable hazards mitigation." (Boullé et. al. 1992); Berke et. al. 1993)

The prospect of building a single overarching theory of disaster management is problematic as it might be impossible to develop a theory that would be able to capture every single variable and issue associated with disasters. For this reason, chaos or systems theory, which are frameworks that incorporate a plethora of causative variables, appear to be gaining recognition in emergency management as well as in other disciplines (Koehler et. al. 2001; Mileti 1999).

Besides mentioned there are certain barriers preventing theoretical development of disaster management theory. McEntire and Marshall (2003) have identified at least ten significant interrelated concern: how to reconcile the physical dimensions and characteristics of the event (objective / physical dimension) and its perception or social construction (subjective / social dimension), what is emergency management (academic focus is on disasters not on emergencies, not only on reaction/respond but also on prevention and social environment, and finally the term EM may imply that we have total control of disasters, which is not the case); What hazards should we focus on? Should we continue to give preference to the concept of hazards (or vulnerability)? What variables and what actors should be explored in academic research? What phases should be given priority? What disciplines should contribute to emergency management? What paradigms should guide our field?

### **3. Crisis/Disaster management studies - World at glance**

In the USA Emergency management is a growing profession and is projected to continue growing at a rate of 20 percent or more, according to O\*NET OnLine (created for the U.S. Department of Labor), which rates emergency management specialists as a "bright

outlook occupation" in the labor market. That growth is reflected in the increasing number of higher education programs offering degrees or certificates in emergency management. More than 180 emergency management programs (Associate Level; Bachelor-Level Concentrations, Minors; Bachelor Degrees; Masters Certificate, Specialization, Concentration, Track; Masters Level and Doctoral level) dot the country's higher education landscape, and approximately 100 more colleges and universities are investigating, proposing or developing some sort of hazard, disaster and emergency management program, according to background information provided for FEMA's 13th Annual Emergency Management Higher Education Conference held in June 2010. List of college that perform emergency management programs can be found on FEMA web page<sup>2</sup> -major of them are offering bachelor degrees, some of them event with the possibility for online studying. Just as the number of emergency management higher education programs is growing, the number of graduates from those programs is increasing, and expectations about what those degrees mean is often overstated. Students expect an emergency management degree to give them the skills and knowledge they need to walk out of school and into a good job in the field. And employers expect an emergency management degree to give those job applicants skills and knowledge to make up for their lack of experience. Neither expectation is very realistic. (Lucus-McEwen, 2011).

At seven USA universities it is possible to get PhD in crisis/emergency management: George Washington University – Ph.D. in Engineering Management with Research Focus in the Field of Crisis, Emergency and Risk Management, Georgia State University - Ph.D. Degree in Public Policy with Disaster Management Specialization, North Dakota State University - Ph.D. in Emergency Management, Oklahoma State University - PhD in Fire and Emergency Management, Saint Louis University – Doctoral Program in Biosecurity & Disaster Preparedness, University of Delaware – Ph.D. in Disaster Science and Management and University of North Texas –PhD in Public Administration and Management with a Concentration in Emergency Administration and Planning. Even working professionals can get doctorate at the Capella University and Jacksonville State University.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand in Canada there are only two programs of this kind. One is Master of Disaster & Emergency Management (MDEM) on School of administrative Studies within York University (<http://dem.gradstudies.yorku.ca/about/>) and the other is Master of Arts in Disaster and Emergency Management at Royal Roads University, Victoria, Canada (<http://www.royalroads.ca/prospective-students/master-arts-disaster-and-emergency-management> )

<sup>2</sup> <https://training.fema.gov/hiedu/collelist/embadegree/>

<sup>3</sup> See more on <https://www.gradschools.com/doctorate/emergency-management/online?countries=> and <https://training.fema.gov/hiedu/collelist/emdoctorlevel/>

In Europe the largest number of study programs in crisis/disaster management can be found in the UK. Some universities have more than one program of a kind. To name just a few: Risk, Disaster and Resilience, M.Sc. Risk and Disaster Science, M.Sc. *University College London (UCL)*, Shelter after Disaster, Postgrad.Dip. and Development and Emergency Practice (PGDip/ PGCert), M.A. *Oxford Brookes University* Oxford, Emergency Planning and Management, M.Sc. and Disaster Management, M.Sc. *Coventry University*, Security Management (Distance Learning), M.Sc. , Crisis and Disaster Management, M.Sc. and Security Management, M.Sc. *University of Portsmouth*, Safety, Risk and Reliability Engineering (distance Learning Only) MSc/Diploma, M.Sc. *Heriot-Watt University*, Risk, Crisis and Disaster Management MSc, M.Sc. *University of Leicester*, Disaster Management and Sustainable Development, M.Sc. *Northumbria University* London, Hazards and Disaster Management, M.Sc. *Kingston University* London and Disasters, Adaptation & Development, *Master King's College London*.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand in France we could not find particular master programs in disaster management, while in Germany there is only one program in security management - Sicherheitsmanagement - Berufsbegleitendes Fernstudium, M.A. Berlin School of Economics and Law.

Relevant European study programs in crisis/disaster management that should be mentioned are Risk and Emergency Management, M.Sc. *Institute for Advanced Study of Pavia (IUSS)* Italy, Crisis Management and Peacebuilding, M.Sc. *Umea University* Umeå, Sweden, Security, Crisis and Emergency Management (Foundation University Research Institute José Ortega y Gasset), M.Sc. *King Juan Carlos University* Madrid, Spain, Crisis and Security Management *University of Leiden* and Disaster management *University of Copenhagen*.

When it comes to research, publishing, and sharing insights, knowledge and experiences in this field internationally, Swedish CRISMART Institute that operates within Swedish Defence University should be mentioned. CRISMART combines scientific methods and proven experience in developing and disseminating knowledge on crisis management at the local, national and international level. Through their research, analytical support and training activities, CRISMART is a valuable and driving force in helping organizations at all levels of society to deepen their understanding of crisis preparedness and strengthen their crisis management capabilities. CRISMART's core team at the Swedish Defence University consists of about twenty researchers and analysts, as well as an extensive international network.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See more about this programmes on [www.mastersportal.eu/search/#q=cj-30di-297lv-master.preparation!dg-prebachelor.language&order=relevance&start=20](http://www.mastersportal.eu/search/#q=cj-30di-297lv-master.preparation!dg-prebachelor.language&order=relevance&start=20)

<sup>5</sup> Impressive CRISMART publishing is available on <http://www.fhs.se/en/research/research-centres-and-programmes/crismart/articles/crismart-series/#content>

#### 4. *Crisis/Disaster management studies in ex-Yugoslav countries*

In the time of socialist Yugoslavia at the academic institutions in all Yugoslav republics in the first and second academic year of studies *National defense and social self-protection* was a compulsory subject. This teaching subject had much in common with the crisis management, although, due to the political circumstances, it also had a strong ideological component. After the collapse of the socialist system and the dissolution of the SFR Yugoslavia in 1990s, each of ex-Yugoslav countries developed its own educational system, but in academic curriculum in all of them National defense and social self-protection was abandoned. Today only academic institutions in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia offer study programs in crisis management.

At the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Security Studies there is one year master multidisciplinary course Studies in Risk Management in Natural and other Disasters while the University of Sarajevo – Faculty for Criminalistics, Criminology and Security Studies offers master studies in Crisis management in security sector.

The University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica in Croatia is a higher education institution that provides particular Study of crisis management with expert and specialist study group. Expert study programme in Crisis management lasts three years and graduate students acquire the title of professional baccalaureus/baccalaurea engineer of crisis management. Target group of this study programme are decision makers (or their support) in local and regional government, state administration, in particular army and police protection and rescue units. Competencies of graduated experts are planning and implementing of preventive measures for preventing or mitigating consequences of crisis and disasters in companies or environment and giving expert help and coordinating of expert teams and resources in the aftermath of crisis or disaster. Practical teaching is conducted in cooperation with governmental bodies and agencies and other legal entities relevant for protection and rescue (firefighter service, Red Cross, centres 112, Paramedics etc.). Specialist expert study of crisis management results in acquiring title of professional specialist engineer of crisis management, who is competent to solve problems connected with crisis management independently, to supervise the management of security and protection in public and private sector, especially in business on the national and international level. Crisis management that is intended primarily for persons who are involved in protection and security aspects of crises in the activities of legal entities, industry, bodies of local and regional administration units, and bodies of government administration. The graduate students are qualified to solve the problems of managing crises as well as managing public and corporate security and humanitarian and security operations in compliance with the valid national, EU and international relevant directives and norms.

Besides this, crisis/emergency/disaster management as a

teaching subject is present in a number of academic institutions in all ex Yugoslav countries on different level of studies.

## 5. Conclusion

In the modern risk society, crisis management has become an academic and research discipline in a number of European countries. Certainly, emergency management is becoming more complicated and demanding. The numbers and consequences of both natural and man-made disasters are increasing, and public- and private-sector agencies are being taken responsive for failing to mitigate or prevent the effects of those disasters. Employers are looking for emergency management professionals who understand the political and socio-economic nuances of disasters, as well as how to write a continuity of operations plan and maintain an emergency operations center.

Crisis management as the educational profile is mostly present in academic institutions of the United Kingdom, but a significant contribution to the development of the theory and the research results have provided academic institutions of the Netherlands and Sweden.

After stepping into transition, crisis management is also developing as an academic discipline in countries in transition, including ex-Yugoslav countries. Publishing in this field is still humble, but ties between researches and institutions are being restored. Crisis management as an academic discipline in Serbia is still at its very beginning. However, the fact that in only two years it became a teaching subject at five faculties gives hope that lost time will be redeemed and that scientific approach to crisis management will contribute in a way that reacting to a crisis situation in an intuitive, religious and magic-like manner will stay behind us.

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