



Knowledge in a crisis is power

Working with emergency responders across Europe to enhance crisis communication practices, by Hayley Watson, Kim Hagen, Su Anson and Kush Wadhwa, Trilateral Research & Consulting, London.

Trilateral Research & Consulting is currently a partner on three crisis management projects, all of which are funded by the EC under the 7th Framework Programme. These projects focus on both communication amongst emergency responders and between emergency responders and the public. Here, researchers from Trilateral provide an insight into the different areas that they are examining, how emergency responders can access the lessons learnt and good practices, and the challenges that may be faced when working on European projects.

Community preparedness and involvement

It is increasingly accepted that both emergency responders and communities have responsibilities to prepare for a disaster. Whilst emergency responders develop and exercise plans for responding to a crisis, members of the community can prepare by creating an emergency kit, developing a family emergency plan and by identifying local plans. Before communities undertake preparedness actions such as these, they typically receive communication from government officials and/or emergency responders that may stem from a variety of sources. Our work on the TACTIC (Tools, methods And training for Communities and society to better prepare for a Crisis) project is designed to understand and support this process with the project's aim of increasing preparedness to large-scale and cross-border disasters amongst communities and societies in Europe. TACTIC is a two-year project that began in May 2014, with Trilateral being one of seven partners from five European countries (Germany, Greece, Poland, Turkey and the UK). We are working with our partner organisations to:

- Develop a learning tool for emergency responders and government organisations to both assess and improve their strategies for increasing community preparedness
- Develop a learning tool for communities to assess their preparedness for multi-hazards
- Create a digital catalogue of good practices of communication and education for organisations and communities to learn about preparedness.

As designing these outputs with their end users in mind is at the core of TACTIC, a series of workshops are currently being held across Europe with key stakeholders to gain their

feedback and input. Two workshops will be held in each country focusing on community preparedness for different types of hazard (eg flooding, earthquakes, epidemics) and in February, Trilateral hosted the first workshop on the risk of terrorism in London. This workshop brought together representatives from the police, media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups, business and academia. Participants worked in groups to discuss and provide feedback on the tools, good practices and platform. A second workshop will be held in the UK later in 2015. Emergency responders can access the project outputs on the TACTIC project on <http://www.tacticproject.eu/>

Building good practices in using social media for risk and crisis communication

In May 2013, Trilateral began working on a two-year project, COSMIC – Contribution Of Social Media in Crisis management – with colleagues from across Europe.

The aim of COSMIC is to support those involved in crises, including authorities, emergency response organisations, civil society organisations and members of the public, to harness the value that can come from engaging with social media for risk and crisis communication purposes. COSMIC provides good practices in using social media by focusing on several key areas including:

- Understanding the impact of the 'type' of crisis and the nature of the affected population on optimising social media
- Ethical, legal and social considerations (eg privacy)
- Building trust between different types of stakeholders in communicating before, during and after a crisis
- Responding to miscommunication and the challenge of verification of information
- Social media and situational awareness
- Social media and the mobilisation of resources.

A key component in our social media work has been to work with emergency responders in order to understand not only their concerns in using social media but also to understand their own experiences in using social media. Disseminating these experiences and the project's findings at conferences and workshops enables stakeholders and researchers alike to learn from each other's experiences and

to build their knowledge and expertise in engaging with social media. For instance, we have been involved in producing guidelines covering the organisational and public use of social media during a crisis. To access the guidelines and reports produced during COSMIC, visit: <http://www.cosmic-project.eu/>

Moving forward, we will use the knowledge gained from COSMIC to help provide recommendations and guidance on the role and limitations of social media use in risk and crisis communication in our other projects. For instance, in TACTIC, a key component of enhancing community preparedness is via risk and crisis communication activities – where social media can play a crucial role

Understanding past crises to learn lessons for the future

In the FORTRESS (Foresight Tools for Responding to cascading effects in a crisis) project we analyse such past crises with the aim of developing tools to assist crisis managers in decision making during a crisis. These tools will enable users to model the cascading and cross-border effects in crisis situations in order to aid their understanding of the potential effects that their decisions may have as the crisis unfolds. Similar to how decision-making in unanticipated crisis situations draws on experiences of past crises, the development of these tools takes into account lessons learnt from past crisis situations.

In collaboration with two of our partners we have analysed nine crises that occurred over the past 15 years to learn more about the triggers of cascading effects, and about crucial connections between different actors involved in crisis response. The crises included the Galtür avalanche in Austria (1999), the Central European floods (2000), the London bombings (2005), and the MH17 plane crash in the Ukraine (2014).

As part of analysing past crises we also interviewed crisis managers regarding their involvement in several of the crises mentioned above. Questions concerned the circumstances that led to decisions that stood out because they proved to have large beneficial or detrimental effects. These

circumstances were often related to flaws in communication, as well as to reaching out for alternative means to achieve intended outcomes.

Examples included presenting uncertain information about the danger associated with the crisis as facts to minimise disaster tourism and evacuate the area. Although the goal of evacuation was achieved, and hence positively impacted on the operational crisis management as well as the safety of civilians, the negative unintended consequences when the nature of the information was revealed included widespread criticism by the media and public. These and other examples are accounted for in the development of the tools aimed at facilitating decision making and creating situational awareness in crisis management. Through presenting preliminary versions of the tools to crisis managers, and inviting them to test them and provide feedback, we hope to strengthen the applicability of the tools, adding to their subsequent uptake in crisis management. For further information on FORTRESS and the tools that are being developed, visit: www.fortress-project.eu

Working on European projects – challenges

Whilst there are many benefits of working on European research projects, it is important for us to acknowledge some of the challenges that organisations may face when working on projects such as those outlined above. A key challenge is overcoming the language barriers that exist when conducting cross-national research with partners across Europe. Concepts may mean something very different in different countries. Regular communication between project partners and with end users in each country can help to reduce this issue. The availability of time can also be a challenge; largely a result of conflicting schedules and responsibilities. Once again, communication is key to addressing this issue. A final challenge is balancing the resources required to contribute to the projects. Participating in European projects involves resources to attend regular meetings, to contribute to outputs and to promote the work that is being undertaken. Although there are some challenges, the benefits of participating in European research definitely outweigh these challenges!

Trilateral Research & Consulting is a London-based niche research and advisory consultancy bringing together strategy, technology and policy. It specialises in research and the provision of strategic, policy and regulatory advice on new technologies, privacy, trust, risk and security issues.

PROJECT

Full project name: Contribution of Social Media in Crisis management

Number of partners: 7
Number of countries: 5
Budget: €997,040.20
Website: www.cosmic-project.eu
Twitter: @COSMIC_FP7

COSMIC

FORTRESS

Foresight Tools for Responding to cascading effects in a crisis

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 €3,400,665.70
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