Pedagogies of The Unknown: Preparing in a state of uncertainty

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Abstract:
Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies at global level are contributing significantly to building what is generically described as a 'culture of resilience', making individuals and local communities more reactive and better equipped to cope with catastrophe. The European Commission (EC), as well as other international agencies and multilateral bodies have identified the fostering of such a culture as a strategic objective of Disaster Education (DE) guidelines.

DE is based on the conviction that a permanent state of uncertainty requires an attitude of constant readiness, which must, in turn, be continuously reinforced through appropriate learning activities. This agenda, however, is characterized by a high degree of standardization at both the linguistic level and that of mechanisms of action. Terms such as 'preparedness' and 'resilience' are becoming buzzwords and their use is progressively naturalized.

This presentation outlines the political framework in which DE is set. It illustrates the kind of discursive strategies that produce this homogenization and subsequent standardization of language and action devices. Building on the approach developed by critical anthropology, the paper will illustrate some of the political and practical consequences of DRR educational devices. After providing a brief outline of the current trends in DRR that display a widespread investment in education at both the international and European levels, the presentation develops in two parts. I begin by analysing how much influence the concept of culture has gained in DRR education. I then highlight some problematic consequences, including a 'deterministic' and 'normative' use of this concept and an enduring opposition between expert and indigenous forms of knowledge, between tradition and modernity, as well as between culture and the cultures of risk, safety, and preparedness. Secondly, I seek to locate the concept of culture within the so-called resilience paradigm. I argue that the notion of resilience contains some problematic elements, as it may absolve public institutions from core responsibilities by shifting those responsibilities (through education) to local populations.