

Hazard Reduction and Response in Metropolitan Regions: An International, Interdisciplinary Model

University researchers and practicing administrators from six major metropolitan regions located on three continents gathered at the University of Pittsburgh on March 17-18, 2003 to address ways to reduce the vulnerability of their cities to natural and technological hazards. Their objective was, first, to explore innovative means of increasing the capacity of metropolitan regions to mitigate hazards, but also to consider ways of managing extreme events more effectively when they do occur.

The group included researchers from the Universidad de Los Andes, Bogota, Colombia; Escuela Politecnica Nacional, Quito, Ecuador; Colegio de Mexico and Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Mexico City, D.F., University of California, Los Angeles and University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Kobe University, Kobe, Japan, Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai, India, and schools, departments and research centers of the University of Pittsburgh. City administrators from the participating cities, Bogota, Quito, Mexico City, Kobe, and Los Angeles contributed their real-world experience to the discussions.

The meeting initiated a major research and education effort to explore innovative methods and models of risk assessment, reduction and response to natural and technical hazards that is being conducted in conjunction with the Earthquakes and Megacities Initiative. The intent is to create a dialogue between university researchers and practicing administrators that will speed the transition of innovative research models to support organizational policies and practice for hazard reduction and response in metropolitan regions. The initiative also includes plans to develop interdisciplinary curricula to address disaster risk reduction that would be taught in the participating universities.

The high point of the meeting was a set of live, interactive dialogues with researchers and students in Bogota, Mexico City, Los Angeles, Kobe and Pittsburgh, via videoconferencing facilities supported by the High Performance Computing Center of the University of Pittsburgh. Louise Comfort, Pitt faculty member who took the lead role in organizing the conference, stated that “the interactive exchange of ideas and models in real time offers an exciting means to speed the development of international networks of researchers and policy makers committed to risk reduction and improved response to disasters.”

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