

PROCESSES FOR DECISION-MAKING DURING TSUNAMI EVACUATION IN
CARTAGENA, CHILE: THE RELEVANCE OF COLLECTIVITY ON INDIVIDUAL'S
DISPOSITION.

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ABSTRACT

Evacuation processes have a high level of variance with respect to community practice. The focus of this research is the praxis that informs evacuation decisions: what are the interactions that impact evacuation behavior, and via what mechanism? Cartagena in Chile is a coastal city which has faced two tsunami events over the last generation: 1985 Valparaiso and 2010 Maule. In-depth interviews were conducted with ten subjects around their tsunami experience. Furthermore, a focus group with seven participants was carried, to explore their communal experience of evacuation. Discourse analysis of their stories, with an emphasis on rationale identification, brings to light the elements that shape their disposition and prompt their evacuation decisions. This analytical process illuminates the relation between factors explicit in subjects' narratives and factors non-explicit in their narratives, leading to an exploration of the strong impact of communal expectation on individual decision-making. Although subjects in this research represent a diverse pool of demographics and personal circumstances (such as gender, family composition, age, etc), a common process can be clearly identified in their narratives. Contrary to popular assumptions, subjects do not evacuate because of accurate scientific understanding of tsunamis or a refined process of risk assessment. Instead, the evacuation process is intimately associated to communal expectations of a certain type of behavior, depending on the role each

subject plays in the group. Subjects will navigate life in their community placing a certain emphasis on a specific role they play in their day to day (ie: parent, caretaker, communal representative, etc). The community will acknowledge this definition of their identities and place specific expectations on the most adequate way of reacting during a tsunami evacuation situation. In this sense, parents of children might be expected to evacuate immediately, while caretakers of elderly people might be expected to never leave the side of the person they are looking after and wait for help instead. During a tsunami evacuation alert, subjects will conduct a subconscious mental process of assessing if their duties within this role are compatible with immediate evacuation. If there is conflict between those elements, the decision to not evacuate or delay evacuation might be made.

Although never explicitly discussed, these rules appear to be widely understood within the community, finding little variance amongst subject's perceptions of these duties in the focus group. It is in this context we can appreciate that, even when evacuation is conducted individually, the process is highly collective.

Key words: Tsunami evacuation, Chile earthquake, Discourse analysis, Community resilience