

Silke Schmidt & Ed Galea (Eds.)

Behaviour – Security – Culture

Human behaviour in emergencies and disasters: A cross-cultural investigation





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# BeseCu

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# Foreword

It is a great privilege to introduce “BeSeCu: Human Behaviour in Emergencies and Disasters: A Cross-Cultural Investigation”, which makes a significant and timely contribution to our knowledge and understanding of human behaviour in a range of emergency events. The value of this work is further enhanced by the number and variety of people contributing to the project and its international perspective – a key consideration in what are increasingly multicultural and fluid communities.

This is a publication that will have a broad appeal and relevance to a range of audiences including academics, design engineers, regulatory bodies, emergency services and other agencies with a professional interest in fire safety and public health.

With a background in psychology, I naturally welcome the project’s emphasis on survivor and first responder accounts along with the evacuation trials themselves. Equally, I recognise that there are many other specialist areas within the “fire and emergency” sector each developing its own methods, beliefs and approaches. What makes this project so valuable is that it brings a number of these together.

I feel there is much to be gained from greater collaboration between all the various disciplines and by adopting more mixed method approaches within projects. Indeed, these will be key features of the research that Kent Fire and Rescue Service are embarking upon with the University of Greenwich to look at human behaviour within accidental dwelling fires.

The rarity with which people experience emergencies mean it can be difficult for them to imagine and predict with any confidence what they would actually do during a life-threatening emergency. Consequently, this underscores the value of learning from survivors’ real life experiences during such events and in turn designing effective tests based upon this.

Through projects such as BeSeCu we can empirically test, record and understand the strongest influences and behaviours present among those experiencing fires and other emergencies, all of which are unfamiliar situations for most people. It of course requires considerable effort and resources to achieve knowledge on the scale of this project, but the findings have such widespread application that the value and worth are immediately clear.

The focus on understanding cultural factors (both social and fire safety) is of particular interest. It is easy to make assumptions based on general cultural knowledge but appreciating their influence in emergency situations is of great relevance. The ability to use BeSeCu methodologies in future will further aid the ability to increasingly understand this important area. It moves forward our ability to ensure buildings and emergency responses incorporate features which work with general and specific cultural behaviours.

The knowledge obtained from the BeSeCu project means organisations can plan and develop prevention or response initiatives with greater confidence and achieve more effective outcomes. They will also be better placed to influence inherent or instinctive human behaviours; rather than try and force desirable, but potentially counter-intuitive, ones during dynamic and unsettling events. Many have tried to “educate” the public without recognising the strength of their behaviours or the potential contribution individuals and groups can make to assisting the responding bodies. The BeSeCu project will underpin the ability to use current approaches more effectively or, perhaps more importantly, develop new approaches.

As such, I welcome and applaud the contribution that this report makes to our knowledge and understanding of such an important topic. The authors, contributors and participants should be congratulated for providing us such rich material. It is now for us all to ensure we not only read this but fully consider and develop its findings together in our respective fields of work.

**Ann Millington**

Chief Executive

Kent Fire and Rescue Service



# Introductory Notes

In recent years, we have witnessed a range of serious emergencies and disasters across Europe and the world, including terrorist incidents such as the World Trade Center attack in New York on 11 September 2001, the Madrid train bombings in March 2004, the London Underground and bus bombings of July 2005, the Turkish bombing campaign of August 2006, earthquakes in Turkey and Japan and devastating fires including the Dusseldorf airport fire of 1996, the Rhode Island disco fire of 2003, the Buenos Aires nightclub fire of 2005, the Paris hotel fire of 2005 and the Kamyshevatskaya (Russia) Nursing Home fire of 2007. Did culture play a role in determining how the people in these events responded? More significantly, could a better understanding of cultural responses to emergencies and disasters assist in developing better procedures for first responders, building designers and emergency management systems?

This book has evolved over 4 years from a multidisciplinary project funded under the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme – Security. BeSeCu stands for BEHAVIOUR, SECURITY and CULTURE and the project has been a cross-cultural investigation of human behaviour in emergencies, disasters and evacuations, with the aim of better tailoring security-related communications, instructions and procedures. The BeSeCu consortium comprised an international group of nine partners and combines the work of researchers and end-users from eight different countries.

This book reveals the methodological developments and first findings from a cross-cultural study of evacuation trials as well as from a large cross-cultural field study of human behaviour in emergencies and disasters. This project is unique in terms of the cross-culturally simultaneous and interdisciplinary approach adopted in each step of the empirical research. The results are essential for the better planning of emergency/disaster management and evacuations as well as for informing future research.

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