

Kenneth N. Westgate and P. O'Keefe. *Some Definitions of Disaster*. Bradford: University of Bradford Disaster Research Unit, 1976, 69 pp. James Lewis, P. O'Keefe and K.N. Westgate. *A Philosophy of Planning*. Bradford: University of Bradford Disaster Research Unit, 1976, 25 pp.

Both of these works produced by staff members of the University of Bradford Disaster Research Unit are interesting in that they show how a research organization attempts to establish its own approach and tries to bring intellectual order to a field where many feel it is badly needed. After an introduction in which they refer to the lack of consensus among those offering definitions of disaster, the authors of *Some Definitions of Disaster* discuss the types of organizations which provide data on disasters. Five categories are discussed: organizations connected with the United Nations, national government organizations, nongovernmental voluntary organizations, academic research institutions and private insurance companies. Not surprisingly, it is noted that the definitions of disaster used by these organizations and the data they collect on such phenomena reflect their organizational roles. Another conclusion the authors reach is that the best available data on the incidence and impact of disasters in the world is produced by the Office of the United Nations Disaster

Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) and the Natural Hazards Research group at the University of Colorado. They also suggest that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) produces the most comprehensive data but that these data are limited because the agency concentrates its data collection activity in areas of the world where there is heavy American involvement.

Some Definitions of Disaster might be of interest to those persons needing a brief introduction to some of the major organizations which collect and disseminate disaster information. One problem with the paper, however, is that since only United States organizations are considered in the discussion on national government organizations, one might get the false impression that only organizations from the U.S. operate within a political context in the disaster relief field. Still another problem is that despite their efforts to critique existing definitions of disaster and to offer their own, it is never made clear exactly why they think this subject is important enough to produce a work about it. For example, is a new set of definitions offered to guide the relief efforts of the organizations mentioned, to guide the research efforts of scholars or for some other reason? Without such insight it is almost impossible to evaluate how successful the authors' own efforts are and we merely have a new set of definitions to choose from. Frankly, I found some of the pre-existing ones adequate.

In a *Philosophy of Planning*, a critique is offered of what the authors see as several distinct approaches to predisaster planning. Those approaches identified are: administrative/logical, sociological, regional planning and interdisciplinary. The authors are especially critical of the sociological and regional planning approaches because they see them as emphasizing single factors. They indicate that the interdisciplinary approach is the one taken by their organization, the Disaster Research Unit. The authors are basically interested in disaster planning in developing societies and the heart

of their philosophy seems to be a recognition of the need to make plans to use local or indigenous resources in responding to disaster demands and to tie predisaster planning to development planning. These are interesting ideas but unfortunately the paper is so brief that they are never adequately developed.

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