

## Abstract

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The Tsunami Catastrophe with the Terror Attacks in London

## Abstract

### »On The Logic Of Wealth Distribution And Risk Distribution«

In his text, Ulrich Beck compares the distribution of wealth to the distribution of risk in the past until today and points out the similarities and differences between the distribution of risk and wealth.

In West-Germany, in the early 1970 the conflicts of a 'wealth-distributing' society began to be joint by the conflicts of a 'risk-distributing' society, Beck points out as his theses. So, we are dealing not primary with the distribution of wealth but the distribution of risks and the problems of techno-economic development.

Beck makes a distinction between individual risks or risks given by nature on the one hand, and the risks of modernisation, as a consequence of industrialisation, on the other hand. While in traditional societies, risks were local, in modern society risks become global. The pollution of highly industrialised countries has also effects on the woods of countries, which hardly have pollutant-intensive industries.

The risks produced by modern societies are mostly invisible risks like toxins in the food or radioactivity, which in long terms harm the health of the people. They mostly can not be recognised by human perceptive abilities, but occur in scientific knowledge about them by being measured, while in the past, one could for example smell the lack of hygienic facilities.

Another dimension of risk is, that they need to be socially recognised. If they are, they become a matter of politics and of public discussions about the definition of risks. Politics and public also rule in private decisions on producing risks.

Beck states, that modern risks contain a boomerang-effect. They will some day strike those who produce them. In the third world there is a careless use of pesticides with high risks for the people. But they accept the risks, because they hope to escape from poverty. Later, the industrial states re-import those pesticides with the food from the third world.

So the distribution of risks create new inequalities, on one hand those in a society, and on the other hand in the world between the industrial states and the Third World as a consequence of the international co-operation.

Beck also states, that rich people are in some ways able to avoid risks, and that poor people are more exposed to risks than rich people are. Risk can result from the place where you can afford to live, from education and even from the food you can afford to buy. So some risks are class-specific risks, as far as they do concern lower class people more than the upper class people.

The main message of the text is that there are different forms of risks that are distributed in a different way on rich and poor people. The risks of modern society are mostly invisible risks and contain a boomerang-effect, which will return on those, who produce the risks. In the end, the risks of an industrialised world make no difference between poor and rich people, because there are risks that strike everyone, if the catastrophe happens without regard if he is rich or poor.

An interesting aspect of the text is that risks are socially defined. So there is a selection of risks, which depend on the one hand of expert research and on the other hand on what a society recognises as a risk and defines how important it is to deal with the risk. There are also different ways to deal with risks. If one for example takes the average of exposure of people to pollution, he avoids the question, that certain social groups are exposed more than others to pollution, and what the consequences are of a view like that. Hence, the knowledge about risks plays an important role.

Also an interesting aspect is the two main types of modern risks, Beck points out in his text, those self-produced risks that rich people can avoid for some time, and those that will strike everyone, like an accident in a chemical plant.

Interesting as well is the point of social definition of risks. Part of this aspect might be, that there are times when everyone is talking about a risk like the danger of ozone in summer, which is forgotten, when the next risk occurs like the discussion about »Feinstaub« in Germany at this time.

The consequence of these risks getting global is, that there is also international co-operation on fighting the risks. For example, the European Union made a »Clean Air for Europe Programme« to »establish a long-term, integrated strategy to tackle air pollution and to protect against its effects on human health and the environment.« (Homepage of the European Union, <http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l28026.htm>)

So this proves in a way Beck's conclusion at the end of his text, that the risk society acts defensively. He points out, that the dream of the risk-society is safety and not being poisoned on contrary to the class society, where the ideal is equality. At last, Beck points out, that anxiety is not a foundation of rational action.

#### Literatur:

Beck, Ulrich (1992): Risk Society, Towards a New Modernity. London et al.: Sage, Chapter I

## Review on »The Lack Of Clarity In The Precautionary Principle«

The text by Derek Turner and Lauren Hartzell deals with the problems of the precautionary principle. The authors introduce formulations of the precautionary principle and the objection that were made by Neil A. Manson to one of those principles called the catastrophe principle. The authors claim to consider one popular formulation of the precautionary principle and also to consider several revisions to reduce the vagueness of the principle in order to make it invulnerable to Mansons objection without sacrificing plausibility of the principle considered.

The authors pointed out, that Manson identified three elements of a core-structure in the precautionary principles as there are the at first the *suggested damage condition*, the *knowledge condition* and the *suggested remedy*.

Turner and Hartzell introduce the Wingspread Principle as a canonical version of the precautionary principle. The authors state five questions that point out the problems of vagueness with this principle. First, there is the question who must bear the cost of precaution, second question is that what happens if precaution for human health gets into conflict with precaution for the environment and vice versa, third is the question of the definition what a »threat of harm« means, the fourth question is what there has to be understood by a »precautionary measure« and the fifth question raises the problem of the »precaution excess«.

They introduce different suggestions to fix the problem of vagueness by strengthening the damage condition, the knowledge condition or the suggested remedy.

All suggestions introduced bring up the problem that the precautionary principle does not apply on the situations it was created for. For example if there is an attempt to define the treat of harm which means to strengthen the knowledge condition by requiring more scientific certainty about the relationship between an action and a threat of harm, it won't be possible to say when the precautionary principle has to be activated to avoid damage to human health or the environment.

If there is a conflict whether an action that benefits human health but may cause a thread of damage to the environment or vice versa, the authors point out that in such cases one has to decide which aspect is more important.

When the possibility of an precautionary excess is mentioned, the suggestion by Turner and Hartzell is that there needs to be added a cost-effective dimension to the precautionary principle. But this also is a problem because there is no idea who should tell what measure is the most cost-effective.

In conclusion, the authors state that they had not discovered any possibility to reduce the

vagueness of the precautionary principle without reducing the plausibility of this principle. They state, that the vagueness is a virtue of the precautionary principle if it is applied to situations where scientific certainty is not given, but it is a weak principle for decision-making and for moral philosophy.

So it can be said, that Turner and Hartzell did not achieve the aim they claimed at the beginning of their text, which is to reduce the vagueness of the precautionary principle. Although this text offers a lot of important aspects. It points out that one has to decide whether to be more careful or to be more risky. Even when the aspect is discussed, that there should be paid more attention to the prophecy of doom than to the prophecy of risk, and that it is better to be safe than sorry, important aspects of decision-making are pointed out.

By being that vague, the precautionary principle gives a great deal of responsibility to those who have to decide about an action, that may cause a threat of harm to the human health or the environment.

There are aspects of the risk society perspective and also of the systems theory in this text. At one hand, the risky activities are self produced risks in the sense of the risk society mentioned in the text by Beck. When there is considered that the society has to bear the cost of precautions, but they have to be distributed fairly, this element is quite strong.

On the other hand the precautionary principle refers very much to those do the risky action, and at this state the system theory is quite strong, because there are decision-makers and those affected by decisions like the customers, who buy genetically modified without knowing it if this food is not labelled.

There is the fact that the precautionary principle is quite weak regarding to the question, who is responsible for a risky action, it is difficult to say whether this text fits more to the systems theory or the risk society perspective. Mainly, the text would fit into the risk society perspective, because it bases on the presumption that risks are discussed in society like the advantages or disadvantages of genetically modified food.

At least, the precautionary principle gives a hint to society how to handle situations, where there is no scientific certainty. Although being weak relating to decision-making, it is a strong principle relating to strengthening people's conscience about problems of human health and the environment. Here, the text of Turner and Hartzell could stress the last aspect a little more.

*Literatur:* Turner, Derek/Hartzell, Lauren (2004): The Lack of Clarity in the Precautionary Principle. In: Environmental Values 13: 449 - 460

## Comparing the Tsunami Catastrophe with the Terror Attacks in London

In the following text, the tsunami catastrophe and the terror attacks in London will be compared. There shall be looked for differences and common features of the types of risks.

Between Christmas and New Year, an earthquake in the Indian Ocean caused a tsunami wave, which spread over the coasts of the states in that area. Thousands of people died, were injured or missing. The worst destruction was done to the coasts of Sri Lanka, South India and Sumatra. The governments of the affected states fear that there were more than 10 000 people killed by the tsunami. The catastrophe hit centres of tourism in the affected states, so there were also many tourists killed, also a big number from western states. Councils say, there were one million people affected by the tsunami waves. (see Süddeutsche Zeitung: 27.12.2004).

After the catastrophe, international help was organised for the region, which is a very poor region which depends mainly on tourism. Organisations like the Red Cross and other help organisations called for charitable contributions to help the people in the area affected. Also Governments of different industrial countries and the United Nations provided immediate help.

The second case is the terror attack in London in July of 2005. Terrorist attacked underground trains and busses with bombs. There was at the first stage no knowledge if the attacks were suicide bombers, but security forces said that this was probable. At least 49 people were killed. (see Süddeutsche Zeitung, 11.07.2005).

Two weeks later, there were again bombings in underground trains and busses in London. The terrorist were soon identified by the police, because there were cameras in London, which filmed the assassins on video.

The terror attacks in London reminded the people at the terror attacks in Spain. The discussion, whether Europe needs an own strategy to fight terrorists attacks, again became more attention by the public.

Both cases have in common, that they gained the attention of the public to a subject, mainly experts discussed before those events happened.

In the case of tsunamis, the main problem is, that it is not possible to forecast an earthquake on the one hand, and on the other hand it is not sure, if an earthquake, that takes place under water, causes a tsunami wave.

After the catastrophe in the Indian Oceans, experts criticised, that »the nations devastated by tsunamis on December 26 have no warning system« (New York Times, 03.01.2005). Al-

though earthquakes are not predictable, there are possibilities to forecast a tsunami wave and where it will travel, if there is installed a computer system, that can quickly project where a tsunami may travel. (see New York Times, 03.01.2005). A system like that is installed in the Pacific Ocean. The data are collected at the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre on Hawaii, which guards the ocean since 1965. (see Süddeutsche Zeitung, Silvester/Neujahr 2004/05).

It will take some years to create a computer program that is able to predict a tsunami, because several data have to be collected as there are for example the conditions at the ocean bed or the shape of the coast to model a tsunami. This would be a precautionary measure, as it is already established in the Pacific Ocean (see New York Times, 03.01.2005).

Although the risk of an earthquake, that happens under water, is known, this precautionary measure wasn't taken in the Indian Ocean. The reason for the failure to take the same precautionary means, as it was taken at the Pacific Ocean, may be because the affected region is poor and doesn't have the money and the knowledge to build such a system without help of the rich countries.

Installing a warning system as a precautionary measure would at least be a measure of mitigation, because the earthquake and the tsunami it may cause, can not be prevented. This system just would help preventing the consequences if a tsunami would again strike the coast of the countries devastated in December 2004.

Victims of other disasters say, that the help of the world fades fast with the media attention. After the Hurricane Mitch, which struck parts of Honduras, the people though have new houses built, but the rest as for example the poverty stayed the same. But tsunami relief officials say, that the tsunami crisis could educate themselves of the importance of staying in the course (see New York Times, 17.01.2005). So, there is a chance, that the world could help the countries devastated by the tsunami, to take the precautionary measure of the warning system to avoid the catastrophic consequences of future tsunamis.

In the case of the terrorist attacks, there can be observed that since September 11<sup>th</sup> of 2001 the public is more interested in this topic. Although this topic is more aware to the public, the attention rises and falls with attacks, that happen or do not happen.

There are discussed anti-terror-laws mainly by experts, but sometimes, they are also a topic in the public. Also, there are taken precautionary measures to prevent attacks from happening. In this case, there are several measures discussed, and it is controversial, whether those means have any effect in preventing attacks or don't.

With the London bombing, there is a discussion about the installation of video-cameras in the public. The London police quite fast could identify the assassins with the help of the videos,

shot by the cameras placed in the public. So, the cameras indeed could not prevent the attacks on the public transport system from happening, but it helped finding the assassins.

In Germany, some Home Secretary claimed to install also more cameras to public places, because they might help to solve crimes and terror attacks.

As a consequence of the London bombing, the discussion about precautionary measures against terrorism gained more attention in the public and the governments.

The discussion escalated, when civil policemen in London killed a man from which they thought he was a suicide bomber. Afterwards it turned out that the man was innocent and had no connections to terrorists networks, as also the police granted (see *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25.07.2005).

To shoot to kill a suspicious person as a precautionary measure is highly controversial. In Germany, the legal situation is very different in the sixteen federal states. It is not sure, if a shoot-to-kill-praxis is legal in Germany, says a member of the trade union of the police in Germany (see *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 26.07.2005 a). France is also planning a new law against terror, but rejects to allow fatal shots. (see *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 28.07.2005).

Another precautionary means became legal in Germany, which is a flight ban zone for private plains around the parliament area. This was discussed and decided after a private plain crashed accidentally in the government sector. Flying across the parliament area is now forbidden, and in case someone does, police helicopters are allowed to drag the plains down to land and in extreme cases even to crash (see *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30.07.2005).

Installing of video-cameras, the shoot-to-kill-praxis and the flight ban zone for private plains are precautionary measures of different kinds. While video-cameras are not really expected to prevent an terror attack, but help to clear up attacks, the shoot-to-kill-praxis and the flight ban area shall prevent the attack in cases, where the attack might take place. The two latter measures can be defined as the precautionary principle, because if there is a thread of harm, measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established (see Turner/Hartzell 2004: p. 451).

The examples mentioned show that in dealing with the risk of terrorism, there are mostly precautionary measures taken, but also measures of mitigation, as the cameras at public places are, to clear up terrorist attacks if they can not be prevented.

The question whether a means is successful or not is with the problem of terrorism hard to clear up. The video-cameras could not prevent the terrorist attacks from happening, but they were helpful investigating the suspects.

The shoot-to-kill-praxis and the flight ban zone may be successful precautionary means if the

danger is seen in time. So there is always a risk that even these means may fail.

Comparing these two cases of the earthquake risk and the risk of terrorism, there are some similarities and also some differences.

As mentioned above, in both cases causes the concrete event of an tsunami or an terrorist attack the attention of the public on those topics. But after September 11<sup>th</sup>, it is more easy to promote the risk of terrorism, even because since then, there were several terrorist attacks, that kept the attention on this risk awake in the public. One can say, that the risk of terrorism is far more present in the public than the risk of tsunamis, even afterwards both risk have carried out, and even after having seen, that the tsunami killed far more people than the terrorist with their attacks since September 11<sup>th</sup>.

So the risk of terrorism is a more social constructed risk as tsunamis are, even because that terrorist attacks can strike every country, while tsunamis are limited to certain regions.

Another difference between those risks are the acceptance of the measures that can be taken to avoid or to mitigate the consequences. In the case of the tsunami, there is a technical approach for the »risk is treated as an objective fact« (Bradbury 1989: p. 382). There is no real discussion or controversy in the public about the quality of the risk or the suggested measures.

On the other hand, the risk and the measures taken with terrorism are controversy not just in the public, but also with the experts. Even in Germany is a very strong controversy about the degree of the thread of terrorism. This can be shown for example with the air ban for private plains on the parliament area in Berlin.

While politicians say that the air ban is an important measure against terrorism, the chairman of the Bundeswehrverband said the discussion about air ban is hysteric. The idea of combat helicopters securing the airspace over Berlin is complete nonsense (see *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 26.07.2005 b). Although the private plain, that caused the discussion on the air ban, was driven a man who committed suicide when he crashed the plain, so there is also the question if there was a terrorist thread at all. (see *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30.07.2005)

So the way to deal with the risks of tsunami is not controversy though no one has a doubt that the warning system at the coast of the areas concerned would help to mitigate the consequences of the tsunami. The main problem is seen in building this system and educate the people how they should act if there is a tsunami alert.

On the other hand, it is controversy not only in the public but also with the experts, how to deal with the risk of terrorism, and how real the thread of terrorism is at all.

And there is another difference between both risks. The risk of terrorism often gets personalised for example with Osama bin Laden or his deputy, while the tsunami is a natural disaster,

which is not personalised. There was even no concrete blame-shifting after the tsunami catastrophe happened, although scientists criticised that there was no warning system, but didn't name concrete persons who shall be responsible for this lack of this precautionary measure.

Today, more than half a year after the tsunami catastrophe, there is also no real discussion in the European public about installing a warning system in the Indian Ocean, although many tourists from Europe died in the waves of the tsunami. This may be also because there is not expected another tsunami in the near future, while on the other hand, there is fear of another terrorist attack maybe in the near future in some European Countries.

This might explain why the thread of terrorism is more socially constructed as the thread of the tsunami. It is more easy promoting risks that are present to the public than those, who might happen somewhere in the future (see Stallings 1995: p. 204). This might be an explanation, why the risk of terrorism is that much more present in the public than the risk of a tsunami.

#### Literature:

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Stallings, Robert A. (1995): Promoting Risk. Construction The Earthquake Threat. New York: de Gruyter, pp 202-209