
The Role of Sustainability-Based Crisis Communication in Building Social Resilience in the Local Community*

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Abstract:

Purpose: To analyse the role of sustainable crisis communication in enhancing social resilience in local communities. The aim is to identify the key elements that influence the preparedness to respond to a crisis while pursuing the principles of sustainability.

Design/Methodology/Approach: We used a qualitative approach, based on semi-structured interviews with seven experts, including practitioners, academics and a combination of both perspectives. The data collected was analysed through a three-stage coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding, which allowed the identification of main themes and relationships. A Polish local community context was used in the study to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of crisis communication at the local level.

Findings: The compiled results of the study show that effective crisis communication at the local level depends on several factors: the awareness of residents about available resources, coordination between different administrative levels and the use of modern communication technologies. The analysis of the interviews also identified challenges, such as low levels of awareness among residents and a lack of standardised procedures, which limit the effectiveness of crisis management. Education and citizen involvement are key to building long-term social resilience. For rapid and effective communication, it is particularly important to adapt communication strategies to local needs and to use tools such as social media and mobile apps.

Practical implications: The results of the study provide practical guidance for decision-makers and local leaders, highlighting the need to implement educational initiatives, invest in modern technology-based communication tools and strengthen cooperation between administrative levels to improve crisis management strategies.

Originality: the research findings contribute to the body of knowledge on sustainable crisis communication, focusing on its application in local communities. The unique challenges of Polish local communities combining theory and practice in the field of crisis communication, analysed in the article, offer the reader practical lessons that can be adapted in other socio-cultural and administrative contexts.

Keywords: Crisis communication, sustainability, social resilience, local communities, crisis management, digital technologies in crisis, innovation in crisis management.

JEL codes: M31, H12, Q01, Q54.

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1. Introduction

In the face of today's security challenges, communities are faced with increasingly complex problems. In such situations, appropriate crisis management, in which sustainable communication proves to be one of the leading elements, plays a key role. Sustainable crisis communication not only supports the crisis management process, but also contributes to the construction of community resilience.

This approach allows for the effective exchange of information, the strengthening of social cohesion and a more efficient use of available resources. In the context of crisis management, this means not only responding to sudden events, but also preparing communities for future challenges, and minimising their negative impact. The aim of this article is to explore how the principles of sustainability can be applied in crisis communication to enhance community resilience.

The article presents the results of interviews with Polish experts, which provide practical guidance on how well-directed communication can support crisis management. The research attempts to answer key questions such as: what elements of crisis communication have the greatest impact on building social resilience? What communication principles should be implemented in local communities to meet the requirements and demands of crisis and sustainability?

The answers to these questions will provide a better understanding of which communication mechanisms are most effective in the context of crises, as well as indicating what changes are worth making in the practice of institutions responsible for protecting the public. In this way, the article contributes to the body of knowledge on sustainable crisis communication, providing a valuable source of inspiration for leaders and decision-makers.

2. Literature Review

Crisis communication: Crisis communication in crisis management makes it possible to minimise negative effects on communities and organisations and to build long-term trust. Its importance particularly increases in the context of sustainable development, where not only the response to crises but also prevention and education activities are vital. The literature emphasises that effective crisis communication requires adherence to the principles of transparency, consistency and tailoring the message to the audience.

As W. Timothy Coombs (2010) points out, crisis communication is the process of collecting, processing and communicating information, which is indispensable in crisis management. The Government Security Centre (RCB) points out that the main objective of crisis communication is to conduct a coherent information policy, especially in the first hours of a crisis, when the pressure of the media and time is the greatest (RCB, 2024). As Szymanska (2004) points out, crisis communication has

three key objectives, containing the situation, minimising losses and rebuilding the credibility of the organisation.

The effectiveness of crisis communication depends on adherence to principles that ensure clarity and consistency of the message. As Danielewicz (2014, pp. 12-13) notes, it is essential to designate a single reliable source of information, avoid unverified data and deliver messages tailored to local needs and cultural contexts.

Goban-Klas (1997, p. 15) classifies forms of communication in terms of their effectiveness, indicating that face-to-face conversations and face-to-face meetings have the greatest impact on building relationships and trust. In the context of risk communication, Sandman ((1993) cited after RCB, p. 29) emphasises that the key is to understand the needs of the audience and to tailor the message to their level of knowledge and specific local circumstances.

Guidance on the importance of crisis communication in the context of sustainable development can be found in the literature with increasing frequency. The RCB's Crisis Communication Book (2024, p. 27) emphasises that communication should not be limited to responding to incidents, but should also include educating the public about potential risks and how to avoid them. Such a proactive stance allows communities to be better prepared for future challenges and strengthens their resilience.

The growing role of social media in crisis communication must also not be overlooked. The media enables rapid spread of information and ongoing dialogue with audiences. Skilful use of social media, which can support both informational messages and interactive trust-building, is crucial.

However, as the RCB (2024) emphasises, inappropriate management of these resources can lead to escalation of disinformation and increased social unrest, which M. Kochan confirms by saying that the source of a crisis situation is not so much the real actions of companies or their employees, but rather poorly prepared acts of communication which cause outrage and opposition from the recipients (Kochan, 2019; Pyka 2023) continues this thought by pointing out that lack of preparation among managers, inconsistent messages and insufficient information provided to employees and stakeholders are some of the most common problems.

Therefore, according to Szymańska (2004), there is a need for regular information updates and openness in the communication of data; these factors are crucial to prevent speculation and build credibility in the eyes of the public.

Social resilience: In the context of the challenges of the modern world, strengthening local community resilience gains particular importance. Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek emphasises that resilience is an interdisciplinary concept, encompassing the ability of individuals, organisations or systems to cope with threats, absorb their

effects, and adapt to changing conditions. Social resilience is a dynamic process, which allows communities to continue to function in adverse circumstances and to use crises as opportunities for development.

The author points out that resilience is based on several universal characteristics, such as: dependence on the type of threats, a process-based nature which allows for development over time, activation of learning processes during crises, and use of challenges as impulses for change and progress (Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2020, p. 27). Local communities play a key role in shaping security and resilience.

Local communities, defined as communities living in isolated, relatively small territories such as parishes, villages or settlements (Rozwadowski, 2014, p. 247), are distinguished by strong ties stemming from common interests, needs and a sense of belonging and rootedness in their place of residence. It is these characteristics that underpin their ability to mobilise resources and respond collectively to challenges.

At the same time, the security of local communities, according to Rozwadowski, requires civic activism on the part of residents who, through their actions, can support not only public institutions but also each other, improving the quality of life in a given environment. They play a key role in shaping security and resilience.

A key element of building resilience in local communities is the diagnosis of their level of preparedness for threats, as highlighted by Górską-Różej (2022, p. 57). The author points out that resilient communities are not only aware of threats, but also able to respond effectively to sudden changes and recover. The resilience of communities depends on a number of factors, such as geophysical conditions, characteristics of hazards (e.g., duration, intensity or frequency), as well as the current socio-economic situation (e.g., migration crises, epidemics, increased crime). According to Górską-Różej, the process of building resilience requires cooperation between community members, social and public organisations, as well as continuous education and development of risk awareness.

Sustainable development: Achieving the goals of sustainable development requires a comprehensive approach that includes preventing risks, involving local communities in decision-making processes and creating harmonious living environments that are friendly to both people and nature.

The authors of the publications analysed emphasise that a key element of this process is a proactive approach to identifying and minimising risks, which allows an effective response to contemporary challenges such as climate change or natural disasters.

Above all, risk prevention requires systematic risk analysis and actions based on long-term planning. A provision in the UNESCO document for the implementation of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* indicates that ‘building the

resilience of local communities to the impacts of natural disasters reduces their vulnerability to extreme events', which becomes the basis for the implementation of Agenda 2030 (UNESCO, 2017, p. 3). Additionally, as Tuziak notes, sustainable resource management consists of key elements of environmental protection that help reduce the negative impacts of human activities on nature (Tuziak, 2010).

The authors agree that preventative activities need to be complemented by environmental education that builds public awareness and prepares local communities to make informed decisions. Burchard-Dziubińska and co-authors note that deficits in this area limit the possibilities for effective risk prevention, which requires immediate action (Burchard-Dziubińska *et al.*, 2014, p. 166).

No less important is the active involvement of local communities in decision-making processes. The authors emphasise that such participation strengthens local structures, increases the effectiveness of actions taken and builds trust between residents and authorities. Sekuła and co-authors point out that local partnerships, integrating a variety of institutions and organisations, allow for more effective actions and also prevent duplication of initiatives (Sekuła *et al.*, 2022, 95).

As Legutko-Kobus notes, consultative methods that involve residents in strategic planning and allow for a better response to their needs prove to be particularly effective (Legutko-Kobus, 2014, p. 182).

Creating a harmonious living environment that is safe and friendly for both people and the environment is another key aspect discussed in the literature. Contemporary cities, striving for sustainable development, are increasingly adopting the smart city concept. As Szaja notes, through the use of 'modern technologies and active cooperation between citizens and authorities, smart cities improve the quality of life while supporting environmental protection' (Szaja, 2018, 348).

Transparency of decision-making processes, as described by Burchard-Dziubińska and co-authors, fosters social trust and allows for more efficient management of resources and public space (Burchard-Dziubińska *et al.*, 2014, p. 219). UNESCO additionally emphasises the role of preventive education in shaping pro-environmental attitudes, which supports harmonious coexistence between humans and nature (UNESCO, 2017, p. 8).

In conclusion, the authors make it clear that achieving the goals of sustainable development requires a synergy between hazard prevention, public participation and the creation of a living environment that balances the needs of man and nature.

Proactive measures, the use of modern technologies and transparent decision-making processes form the basis for effective action in this area. Only such an integrated approach will achieve sustainable and positive results.

3. Research Methodology

The study on the role of crisis communication in building community resilience based on sustainable development principles was designed as a preliminary step to a broader study, aiming to deepen the knowledge and set directions for further quantitative research. The main objective of the study was to understand key trends in crisis management, particularly in the area of sustainable crisis communication, and to capture the specificity of the issue in the context of local communities.

3.1 Data Collection

Initially, it was assumed that five people would participate in the study. However, during the implementation and in accordance with the principles of qualitative research, interviews were continued until the responses started to become repetitive and did not contribute new information – i.e. until the so-called data saturation. In the end, seven interviews were conducted, which is in line with the practice of qualitative research, where the sample size is usually between a few and a few dozen people (Dworkin, 2012; Beşzbih and Ago, 2022).

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility to tailor questions to the respondents' experiences and answers. The participants were experts from three different groups: academics (2 people), practitioners (2 people) and people who combined both practical and academic experience (3 people).

This selection of participants, in accordance with the principles of purposive sampling, allowed for a diverse and richer data set, representing diverse perspectives on the problem of crisis communication (Charmaz, 1990; Beszbih and Ago, 2022).

Each interview was recorded and then transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the analysis. The recordings were destroyed after transcription to ensure respondents' anonymity and compliance with research ethics.

A qualitative research methodology was used to analyse the data, namely coding the collected data. Three-step coding is an integral part of grounded theory, which was not included in the presented article.

Open coding, a key stage in qualitative data analysis, has been defined by many authors in a variety of ways, highlighting its relevance to the grounded theory process. Kathy Charmaz, in her book *Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide to Qualitative Analysis* (2009), describes it as a process in which the researcher assigns labels to pieces of data in order to identify and name their content. In a similar vein, Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin in their publication *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (1990; 1998).

According to them, open coding involves breaking down the data, and then examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising it, which provides a foundation for further analysis.

Uwe Flick, on the other hand, in his book *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (2009), emphasises the analytical dimension of this process, pointing out that open coding involves assigning codes to fragments of data and phenomena, enabling an understanding of their essence during qualitative analysis. Barney Glaser's take in his work *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978) is also worth noting. Glaser defines open coding as the process of breaking down data into parts, analysing, comparing, conceptualising and categorising them, thus allowing the researcher to create new concepts and categories.

These different approaches show that, although authors differ on the details of the process, open coding is an indispensable part of qualitative data analysis, enabling the systematic identification of key concepts and building a theoretical foundation for the study.

Axial coding was first described in detail by Strauss and Corbin in 1990 in their book *Basics of Qualitative Research*. The authors defined it as an analytical process in which categories, subcategories and their properties are systematically combined using a paradigmatic model. The key aim of axial coding is to transform fragmented data into a coherent and integrated theory.

Selective coding is a key step in the analysis of qualitative data, especially within the framework of grounded theory. In addition to well-known authors such as Kathy Charmaz, Anselm Strauss, Juliet Corbin, Barney Glaser and Uwe Flick, this topic was also addressed by Krzysztof Konecki. In his article *Visual Grounded Theory. Coding Families Used in Visual Analysis*, he describes selective coding as a stage in which the researcher focuses on a selected central category, integrating it with other categories and their properties. He points out that an important element of this process is to avoid imposing 'favourite, ready-made theories' and to be open to a variety of typologies, thus better capturing the specificity of the phenomenon under study.

The axial coding process has found wide application in social and interdisciplinary research. Konecki (2000) points to the exceptional usefulness of this method in exploratory research, as it allows us to understand the complex relationships between data and their context.

3.2 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed in three steps, following a grounded theory methodology with the use of triangulation. The first step was open coding, during which the data were broken down into smaller fragments, analysed for meaning and

context, and then the main thematic categories were extracted (Charmaz, 2009). At this stage, the first patterns and relationships in the collected information were captured.

The second stage – axial coding – allowed the categories to be organised and the relationships between them to be explored. The focus was on key aspects of social resilience, such as trust, cooperation and the ability to use local resources in emergencies (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2009).

Finally, selective coding was carried out, which allowed for the key themes to be extracted and a coherent theoretical model to be developed. This model demonstrates how crisis communication can contribute to building social resilience based on principles of sustainability (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Gorzko, 2010).

3.3 Triangulation in the Study

Triangulation, as used in this study, allowed for more comprehensive and reliable results (Denzin, 1978). A variety of data sources were used – respondents with different profiles (academics, practitioners, people combining both approaches) – which allowed for the problem to be viewed from multiple perspectives. In addition, the participants in the study came from different regions, which made it possible to take the local conditions of crisis management into account.

The flexible format of the interviews and the use of three-stage coding enriched the analysis of the data, allowing for a thorough comparison of themes and the identification of recurring patterns. All results were supplemented with references to the literature, further enhancing the validity of the findings (Beszbih and Ago, 2022).

4. Research Results

4.1 Data Structuring: Open Coding in the Analysis of the Interviews

All interviews were subjected to open coding data analysis, which allowed for the extraction of 25 key concepts and phrases that recurred in the respondents' statements. The following first codes were established based on the recurring statements:

1. Lack of awareness and knowledge about crisis communication
2. Ineffectiveness and lack of standardisation of crisis strategies
3. Role of formal communication rules and procedures
4. Problems with coordination between different actors
5. Inaccessibility and incomplete implementation of crisis resources
- 6 The use of digital technologies and social media
7. The role of local initiatives and adaptations to regional specificities
8. Lack of practice and preparation for real emergencies

9. Importance of SMS alerts and direct messages
10. Bureaucratic burden in crisis management plans

4.2 Data Structuring: Axial Coding in Interview Analysis

The codes that emerged during the open coding stage formed the basis for further thematic analysis, known as axial coding. This process involves combining related categories into larger, more complex themes.

First thematic group. The respondents' answers demonstrate a clear need to increase the local community's awareness of the existence of crisis management resources and.

Related codes: *Lack of awareness and knowledge of crisis communication; Inaccessibility and incomplete implementation of crisis resources.*

Second thematic group. Respondents noted that existing strategies are often ineffective and bureaucratic.

Related codes: *Ineffectiveness and lack of standardisation of crisis strategies; Lack of practice and preparation for real emergencies; Bureaucratic burden in crisis management plans.*

Third thematic group. Interviews reveal that there is a lack of coordinated communication and cooperation between the different actors involved in crisis management, especially at local level and between services.

Related codes: *Coordination problems between different actors; The role of formal communication rules and procedures.*

Fourth thematic group. Respondents point to the growing role of new technologies.

Related codes: *Use of digital technologies and social media; Importance of SMS alerts and direct messages*

Fifth thematic group. Many responses indicate the need to adapt communication strategies to local needs and the specifics of the community.

Related codes: *The role of local initiatives and adaptations to the specificities of the region; Coordinated communication with local inhabitants.*

Sixth thematic group. A key element of effective crisis communication is engaging citizens and building their awareness of the risks and procedures to be followed.

Related codes: *Community awareness and citizen involvement; Lack of awareness and knowledge of crisis communication.*

4.3 Data Structuring: Selective Coding in Interview Analysis

Based on the axial coding, selective coding was carried out to extract key categories related to communication in security and its links to sustainable development.

Five linkage groups emerged:

1. Building citizens' awareness and commitment to social resilience. Related axial codes: *Awareness and access to crisis information, Citizen engagement and public education, Local adaptation and flexibility in communication.*

2. Adaptation of crisis communication to the specificities of local communities. Related axial codes: *Local adaptation and flexibility in communication, Importance of local initiatives and adaptations to the specifics of the region, Use of technology and innovation in crisis communication.*

3. Technological innovation as support for sustainable communication. Related axial codes: *digital technologies as tools for crisis communication, Efficiency and simplification of crisis documentation*

4 Transparency and inclusiveness in communication at all administrative levels. Related axial codes: *Coordination between actors and levels of administration, Role of formal communication rules and procedures.*

5. Education and support for citizens with respect to proactive and preventative measures. Related axial codes: *Citizen engagement and public education, Use of technology and innovation in crisis communication.*

5. Discussion

Effective crisis communication requires close cooperation between different levels of government and services, which should be based on clear and consistent procedures for information exchange. In this context—are becoming indispensable tools in reaching citizens quickly and effectively in emergency situations. It is also important that communication strategies are flexible and tailored to the specific needs of local communities. At the same time, strengthening citizen engagement and educating them on how to respond to crises is fundamental to building social resilience and enhances the effectiveness of emergency response.

5.1. Results of Interview Analysis through Axial Coding:

Many people are not aware that crisis communication books, plans or protocols exist and do not always have access to them. There is also a lack of standardised sources of information on the subject.

There is a lack of standardisation and practical solutions that would respond to actual crisis situations. Strategies often exist only 'on paper' and documentation can be extensive and difficult to use in practice.

There is also a lack of procedures that clearly define the rules for cooperation and information exchange in emergency situations.

Social media, SMS alerts, mobile apps and other digital tools that can support crisis communication. These innovative solutions are becoming increasingly important, enabling faster and more effective outreach to the public.

Different municipalities have different priorities and needs, and should therefore be able to adapt their communication methods to local conditions, taking into account demographic, cultural and geographical specificities

Without the active involvement of the community in prevention and education, it is more difficult to establish sustainable and effective communication structures

5.2 Results of Interview Analysis through Selective Coding:

Sustainable development requires the active participation of citizens in security and crisis management activities. Inclusion of the public in communication processes and education about potential risks (climate, technological, social) is key. By raising awareness and involving citizens, social resilience can be built, which is an element of sustainable development that enables society to adapt to dynamic change.

The effectiveness of crisis communication must be adapted to local conditions - both in terms of language and the tools used.. Diverse communities, especially in smaller, less urbanised municipalities, require flexible solutions that account for their specific needs. This approach promotes local initiatives and supports inclusive, equitable development.

Digital technologies such as SMS, social media and mobile applications of all kinds ensure that citizens can be reached quickly and more effectively in a crisis situation to reduce losses and ensure their safety. These innovations are more environmentally friendly (less paper, faster flow of information) and make it possible to adapt communication to sustainability requirements, creating a more integrated and faster crisis management systems.

Ensuring transparency in crisis communication contributes to public trust and is fundamental to sustainable development, based on engagement and openness. Clear procedures and transparent exchange of information between different administrative levels (from municipalities to provinces) are essential for citizens to participate in crisis management processes. This approach promotes social cohesion and ensures that all citizens – regardless of where they live – have access to the necessary information.

The sustainability of crisis communication requires educating citizens and supporting them to take proactive measures, such as preparing for emergencies,

building neighbourhood support networks or using warning apps. Such actions help reduce risk and strengthen the community's ability to respond to hazards. This education should be made widely available, promoting collaboration with NGOs and local leaders.

6. Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The study focused on the Polish context of local communities, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other countries. Further research should include:

1. a comparative analysis of different approaches to crisis management in different countries.
2. quantitative studies assessing the effectiveness of specific communication tools in crises.
3. Long-term monitoring of the impact of sustainable crisis communication on community resilience.

In summary, the results of the study show that sustainable crisis communication, based on education, technology and transparency, is not only a key element of crisis management, but also supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Promoting these principles in practice can contribute to building more resilient and informed local communities.

7. Conclusions

The study provides important insights into the role of sustainable crisis communication in building social resilience at the local level. The results of the analysis of the seven semi-structured interviews with experts reveal key challenges and opportunities that can be used to improve crisis management:

1. A low level of awareness among residents about available emergency resources and procedures was identified, which significantly limits the effectiveness of preventative activities. Promoting awareness of emergency management and involving local leaders and organisations can improve the preparedness of communities for emergencies.
2. Effective crisis communication should be tailored to specific local needs and conditions. The survey results highlight that 'one-size-fits-all' strategies often fail to take into account the cultural, demographic and geographical diversity of local communities. Supporting local initiatives and creating flexible communication plans can increase the effectiveness of crisis management activities.
3. The use of digital technologies allows for quick and precise outreach to citizens, while minimising bureaucratic burdens and reducing negative environmental impacts, which is particularly important in the context of sustainable development.

4. The results of the study indicate a lack of standardisation of procedures and problems with the flow of information between services and institutions. The introduction of clear rules for cooperation and consistent systems for information exchange can significantly increase the effectiveness of crisis management.

5. Sustainable crisis communication should integrate the principles of efficiency, inclusiveness and sustainability. Involving local communities in crisis planning and response processes, while using modern technologies and transparent procedures, lays the foundation for long-term social resilience.

6. The study provides practical guidance for politicians and local leaders.

The most important of these activities are:

- Implementing education programmes and outreach activities targeting residents.
- Investing in communication technologies that enable rapid and accurate outreach to communities.
- Promoting transparency in communication processes and emergency coordination.
- Tailoring crisis management strategies to the specific needs of communities local.

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