

From past to present: the culture of flood markers in France

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As Duvat and Magnan (2014), among others, have pointed out: "in the vast majority of societies today, hazards that have not manifested themselves for a long time have no imprint in human memory, nor therefore in their awareness of risk". One of the reasons societies are vulnerable to hazards is linked to the breach in memory created notably by infrequent occurrences and the failure of memory transmission where past disasters are concerned.

This paper is part of a larger study in the potential roles and limitations of the material culture of disaster (monuments, memorials, remains, etc.) in the creation and maintenance of a risk culture and its contributions to risk awareness. The present study focuses specifically on flood markers in France and their positioning within a specific risk culture. Here, "flood marker" refers to the deliberate marking of a height of water (generally the highest) reached at a specific location during a past flood event.

While research focused specifically on flood markers in France is still sparse, scholars have

repeatedly pointed out how these markers contribute to the memory of floods and more generally of remarkable historical events (Macdonald 2007, Labeur 2011, McEwen et al. 2012, Griffiths, 2014, Garnier 2015). Common across the French territory in areas prone to water-related hazards, flood markers have a long history. Written sources indicate the existence of this practice in the city of Lyon as early as the 17th century, with the oldest flood marker currently referenced for the Rhône river dating back to 1616.

This paper proposes to address the positioning of flood markers as material culture of disaster, by first exploring their various manifestations in the public space, their potential benefits and limitations as vector of disaster memory, and lastly their inclusion in the legal framework relating to the prevention of technological and natural risks.