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Conference abstract

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Vulnerable but not alone – Swedish farmers’ situation after the 2005 storm Gudrun

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The storm Gudrun devastated the southern part of Sweden in January 2005 causing severe damages on the forest and on infrastructure. The aim in my two projects is to investigate social vulnerability and how citizens manage their situation after a disaster. The first study is based on interviews with 16 persons affected by the Asian tsunami 2004, by a toxic accident in a Swedish town and by the 2005 storm Gudrun. The results indicate that the affected were vulnerable in different ways: lack of information, need for existential counseling and economic problems. The farmers were not only vulnerable. They were also using their resources successfully e.g. to make the roads open again. Their efforts had a social dimension when they helped elderly people living alone before the authorities could.

In the ongoing second project I am investigating how the farmers and their organization, LRF, carry on dealing with practical and social issues some years after the storm. What is the impact of the storm today? How are the municipal authorities using the experiences and resources of the farmers and their organization when planning for future disasters and accidents? The seven farmers who participated in the first study were interviewed again two years after the first interview. Three representatives of municipal authorities were also interviewed and three representatives of the farmers’ organization were also interviewed.

The results show that the change of the forest exposed the farmers’ sense of place. The practical measures were possible on account of previous social networks. The municipal authorities have no special interest in the social dimensions of the farmers’ organization, but have supported a local risk and vulnerability analysis where the farmers contributed with their experiences.