

*Confronting climate: Linking knowledge, values and decision-making to vulnerability and adaptation in Ireland's coastal cities*

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Abstract: Despite well-established critiques from hazards geographers, political ecologists and other social scientists, flood hazards policy and decision-making remain dominated by a technocratic approach to risk. Environmental hazards are understood through an ecological modernization lens that emphasizes quantifying biophysical risk and technological fixes. Flood induced losses are not distinguished from flood events with prevention becoming the overall goal of decision-making and policy. Risk is viewed as an egalitarian force impacting everyone equally and socio-economic vulnerability is rarely considered in local decision-making. Drawing on empirical research from three of Ireland's coastal cities this paper presents evidence for the persistence of the technocratic approach and examines several reasons for its perseverance. The results of qualitative research including semi-structured interviews with local decision-makers and content analyses of local and national policies illustrate that the persistence of the technocratic approach can be explained by several barriers and challenges to the integration of vulnerability research into public policy. The lack of an agreed methodology to present socio-economic vulnerability in applied and policy ready formats is a significant limitation. However the conceptual barriers to integrating perspectives on vulnerability into a decision-making and policy system that structurally and discursively frames flood risk almost exclusively in terms of physical exposure may represent an even greater challenge.