

## **"Areas liable to be affected by natural hazards are often heavily populated"**

Densely populated areas often exist in areas which have a large source of natural resources. I.e. coastal areas, floodplains, volcanoes are often heavily populated due to the natural resources or the relief of the land and the fertility of the soil in the surrounding areas .

These areas though are often the most vulnerable to natural hazards such as flooding, volcanic eruptions and wild fires . This essay will examine critically the advantages and disadvantages of living in such areas and why people live in such places .

Gloucestershire in England has made headlines recently because of the recent flash floods. The people who live there have expressed their anger at the lack of provisions that have been made by the government as a whole and the local councils and constituencies who deal with the floods both with the defences and the fact that their houses were built on the flood plains in the first place .

From May to July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 387.6mm of rain fell across England and Wales, more than twice the average. This brought on widespread flooding which affected about 500,000 houses nationwide and is estimated to cost £2 billion to repair and renovate houses. 340,000 people in Gloucestershire were left without running water after the Water Treatment Plant near Tewkesbury was forced to close when rising flood waters seriously threatened to get into the Plant and contaminate water. All four access roads to Tewksbury had to be closed due to the flooding and the only way in and out was either with specialised trucks used by the army to bring in bottled water for the residents to drink while their water supply was suspended or over an abandoned railway embankment by foot or by bike .

The people of Tewkesbury are outraged that the government has chosen to build their houses on the floodplains in the first place and that they choose to continue with an estimated 1 million more homes being built on floodplains and their surrounding areas in the next 25 years which will be extremely vulnerable to flooding .

The people are angry that the council allowed houses to be built on the floodplain whilst knowing the risk of flooding is becoming more and more likely as global warming increases the risk of more frequent and violent freak weather.

The protesters claim that the government should not put people's lives and livelihoods at risk by allowing developers to build on floodplains. They think that because they live in a developed country, the government should be prepared for such disasters and have measures to defend from them and anticipated the events that have happened over the summer, although slashing the flood budget from £700 million in the last year has now promised an extra £200 million raising the flood

defence budget to £800million by 2010 but as more houses are built on the flood plains people are wondering whether the budget will be increased with time.

So what are the attractions of floodplains? People have been attracted to live on floodplains for centuries mainly because of the physical geography. In pre-industrial Britain, large rivers provided a source of water and land nearby with rich soils for agriculture. Large catches of fish such as salmon could be taken from rivers like the Thames. The rivers also allowed important transportation links for trade to develop. During the Industrial Revolution the rivers became even more important to site factories and provide water for processing. The rivers could be used to generate power and as a coolant for coal-fired power stations. Today, the flat land of floodplains is valuable for the construction of homes. This type of land is attractive to property developers because it is cheaper to build on flatter ground.

It seems the economic benefits of living and working on floodplains outweighs the risks and potential costs of damage from floods. The risk is becoming more likely to strike and the 2007 floods show just how devastating they can be by destroying and damaging thousands of businesses and homes.

Further away from home, Japan is an extremely hazardous country as it is prone to dramatic natural disasters. It is shaken by earthquakes, swamped by tsunami, scorched by volcanoes, flattened by typhoons, crushed by avalanches and mud slides and drowned by river and coastal flooding. All these can easily cause damage to property and loss of life on a catastrophic level. All this affects the Japanese economy and how they feel about living in the country.

The largest natural hazards in Japan come from earthquakes. The country experiences over 7000 tremors a year but the vast majority of these are unnoticed. Since the massive Kanto earthquake in 1923 which claimed the lives of over 100,000 people in Tokyo, the country has experienced 16 major earthquakes.

So why live in Japan when it is at risk the threat of death everyday? Firstly, the figures need to be compared to other risks. Since 1965, the number of people killed in Japanese natural disasters is about 8000. More people (9,000+) were killed annually on the roads and in the same time period, from 1965 to present day.

Japan is a remarkable example that has risen to be a world economic leader, with very few resources on mainland Japan itself it relies heavily on its ability to produce products and its communication systems which could all be disrupted by natural hazard events. The main advantage of Japan's geography is its large access to the oceans with 18,486 miles of coastline. Unsurprisingly, two of the biggest industries in Japan are fishing and shipbuilding. Japan is the second largest fisher in the world behind China. In 1989, a gigantic 11.9 million tons of fish was caught.

It seems the attraction of jobs is a major reason why a lot of people live in Japan. These are provided by the major coastal and farming industries.

It's hard not to encounter natural hazards wherever you live either by flooding of a near by river like we have seen in England and Wales or the total opposite encountered in Greece with a series of wildfires all in the same month of summer wherever you are you most probably will be affected by the natural hazards that go with life.

In conclusion, from the two areas I have studied it is obvious that people are prepared to risk living and setting up businesses in areas that are liable to be affected by natural hazards because these areas happen to be the best areas in terms of geography to make more money. E.g. factories are often situated near rivers for waste disposal and a coolant for the machines, flatter land is often used for housing in more developed countries and agriculture in less developed countries because it is easier and cheaper to build and farm on, People risk farming under volcanoes just because the soil is more fertile etc. It seems that if people carry on living and working in potentially hazardous areas then it is up to the governments of those countries to restrict where people live or put in place disaster prediction and prevention schemes to protect people in cases of natural disasters and the governments need to take action in a changing world to make sure that the effects of a natural hazard are as limited as they possibly can be like Japan is doing now with their springy building and Britain is starting to do by building more flood defences.