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'Understanding volcanoes and society: the key for risk mitigation'



Evolving borders: governing volcanic hazards and aviation infrastructure's post Eyjafjallajökull

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Since the 2010 eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano, the geopolitical dimensions of monitoring and responding to volcanic activity, which has the potential to disrupt aviation, have been continually amended and realigned. The continental, and in some instances, global, impacts of Eyjafjallajökull led to thorough overhauls of the process through which risk is mitigated and the vulnerability of the industry is minimised. With the aviation and hazard communities in Europe striving for greater cohesion, collaboration and interaction, the concept of borders existing between regions within which management practices are carried out, have been significantly weakened. Whilst largely positioned from a European perspective, this paper will use interdisciplinary narratives to provide a more subjective overview of how the global governance of aviation, during a volcanic crisis, has evolved following the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull. As decision-making, policies, agendas and responsibilities have been largely orchestrated by ICAO, and European-wide projects such as FutureVolc have been completed, the flexibility, distribution of data, and synergy between science and the aviation industry can be further critiqued. It is this critique that can renegotiate the symbolism and value of borders, in both a geographical and metaphorical sense, and their existence and power within networks that span multiple stakeholder communities. Through multiple observations of seismic exercises, carried out in both Iceland and the UK, and by interviewing a vast array of stakeholders from airlines, aviation authorities and governing bodies, emerging methods of communication between scientists and the aviation industry can be identified. Establishing the impact of these evolutionary transitions, particularly upon the enforcing of protocol and accountability, can demonstrate a trend towards establishing fluid trans-border management practices that have few boundaries, and which are unrestrained by geopolitical divisions. Re-envisioning networks in this way allows geographical borders to be interpreted as negotiable and more translucent, reducing resistance and improving efficiency.