

Simplified Planning Regulations in Germany and the Effects of Landslides

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ABSTRACT *In recent years, German laws pertaining to construction have been simplified with the goals of reducing administrative procedures and government expenditures. On the one hand, the new regulations are intended to simplify construction activities by the elimination of obstacles toward approval and by the simplification of governmental supervision procedures. On the other hand, a simplified approval process shifts the responsibility for compliance with building codes to the owners, consultants (architects, civil engineers, experts, etc.) and construction project managers. First experiences of damage to buildings show that streamlined construction approvals run the risk of neglecting basic geomorphologic and geologic fundamentals. Omissions are evident, which have led to failures at embankments and on building sites, causing considerable losses. The responsible administrations have reacted in different ways to the changed conditions, as far as they already are aware of the possible implications. In southern Lower Saxony State, the planning agencies have reacted to the growing responsibilities by attempting to determine at an early stage hazards in areas that are being developed. The practice aims to ensure that neither the planned construction activities nor the buildings themselves pose a threat for the residents. However, in the context of weighing these land-use decisions, it becomes apparent that in the future, administrative employees will have to be trained to foresee potential problems caused by the new regulations, while those affected by the decisions must receive advice on how to proceed. At the same time, latitudes and guidelines for dealing with geomorphologic hazards have to be defined.*

Introduction

Integrated approaches in natural hazard research that link process-related and administrative aspects are becoming more important, because economic losses caused by natural hazards are increasing (e.g. Becht & Damm, 2004; Calcaterra *et al.*, 2003; Kertész & Schweitzer, 1991; USGS, 2004). Landslides pose a threat to settlement areas if buildings are built on unstable subsoil. Buildings may be damaged or destroyed by movements in a shear zone, as well as buildings located in a ‘toe area’ of a sliding land mass. In both cases natural factors and/or faults in construction have to be considered as triggers. Since buildings and routes are constructed in hazard areas the susceptibility to slope movements is generally

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