

# **Risk Perception and the Water Crisis: a Geographical Approach**

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## **Abstract**

The water crisis due to droughts or floods increasingly affects many places in Southern Europe. Linked with climate change, it is a serious emergency causing great concern. More specifically, within the Italian situation, the conditions in Sicily today appear very serious, since the island in 2023 experienced one of the worst droughts in the last thirty years and in the first half of 2024. The low rainfall, well below seasonal averages, is not enough to fill the reservoirs (dams, artificial lakes) with water for crops and livestock. The lack of rainfall is aggravated by an outdated and in many cases undersized water infrastructure. In addition, measures such as water rationing in inland areas and in many towns have become necessary, with many inconveniences for residents, breeders and farmers, as well as a further risk for the tourist economy, one of the most significant in Sicily. This contribution, starting from a Human Geography approach that studies the perception of risk, intends to offer an essay of a research currently underway on the perception of the water crisis that some inhabitants and farmers in some areas of Sicily have. Studying the perception of this risk can help i) to understand certain behaviours implemented by individuals or small communities in a situation of emergency or potential crisis; ii) to highlight which approaches, which solutions and which interventions could be more suitable and effective in mitigating the drought problem because they are shared with the people living in the communities affected by the crisis. The research is conducted using a qualitative method, through ethnographic interviews. This makes it possible to highlight some significant cultural and symbolic elements such as the narratives (re)produced by those living in rural contexts and which include value systems and attributions of meaning to the interaction of human beings with the environment.