

COMMENT

Valencia floods: problem is anthropological change not climate change

CREATION

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Recovering victims, searching for the missing, counting damage, controversy and furious reactions from the population. The tragic flood that hit the province of Valencia and claimed 222 lives (the toll is still provisional) does not cease to raise questions as to how

such a disaster was possible.

As always happens in similar circumstances, unfortunately, on the one hand there is the chorus (politicians and media) of those who have already decided that everything is due to climate change caused by human activity; and on the other hand the voices (especially on social media) of those who see a conspiracy or the hand of someone who, for no one knows what reason, enjoys triggering natural disasters.

The truth is that what happened in the Valencia region - and in the following days also in Barcelona - is undoubtedly an extreme event, but by no means a new one. The last disastrous flood to hit Valencia **took place in 1957** (at least 81 dead, but according to other sources the victims numbered more than a hundred), but it is estimated that since 1321 there have been at least 75 major flooding events. This is why after the 1957 event, the then dictator Francisco Franco ordered the diversion of the Turia river out of the city (and the river bed became a park). This does not detract from the fact that even after 1957 there have been extreme events in the province of Valencia, most recently in January 2020, with floods that spared the main population centres.

A similar argument should be made for Barcelona and the whole of Catalonia, a region also subject to what are called 'flash floods', with rainfall so intense that numerous watercourses overflow in a few hours. It should be remembered that the worst natural disaster in the history of Spain occurred in **Barcelona in 1962** with the flood caused by the Rubí river, with a death toll of over 800.

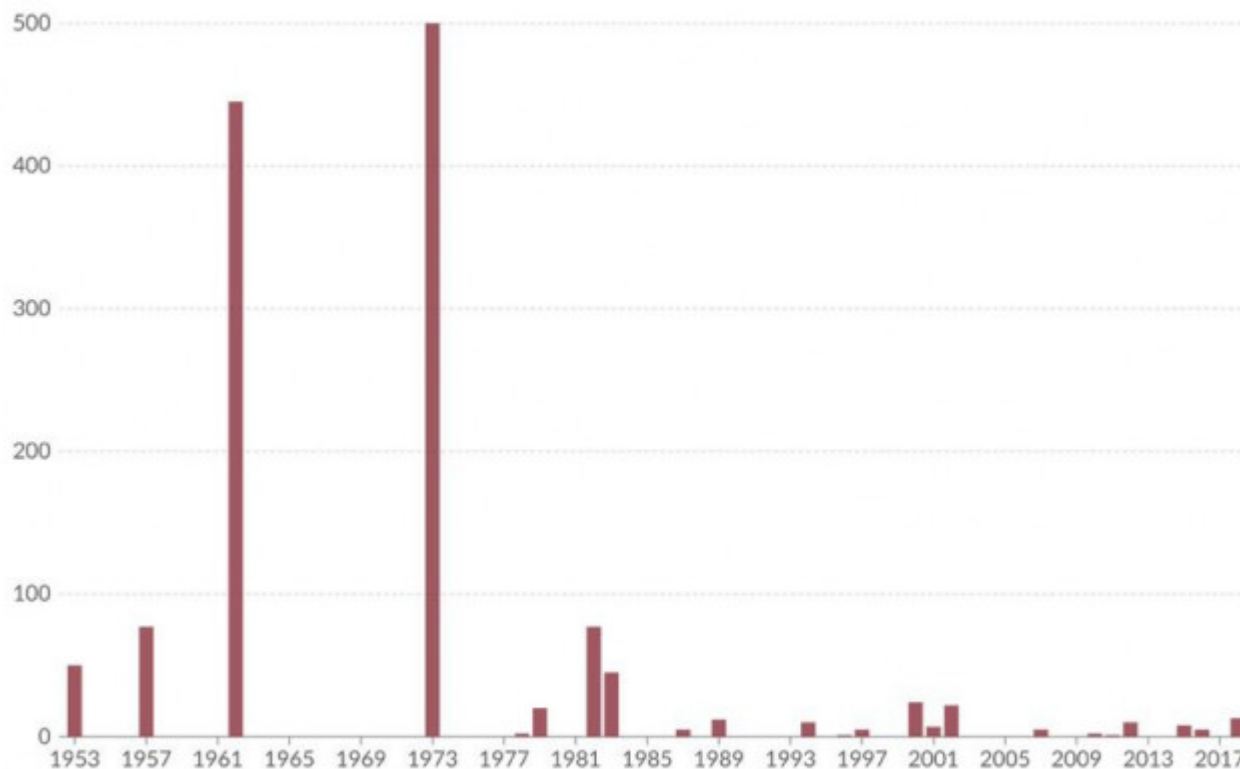
Therefore, to invoke phantom man-made climate change is idiotic and disrespectful to the victims, just as it is ridiculous to bring up the 'cloud seeding' that is allegedly taking place in Morocco.

If there is any human responsibility for the seriousness of the toll, it is probably to be found in the management of the emergency. Indeed, the images on TV and social media give the distinct impression of citizens caught by surprise, overwhelmed by the muddy waters while going about their normal daily activities. It is not without reason that much of the controversy focuses on the delay with which the weather alert was communicated. A blatant case of underestimation and superficiality one might say, all the more serious considering that these extreme events in that area are recurrent. There are also those who point out that the situation has been worsened by the building boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which has multiplied the cementing of green areas, even close to rivers, making it more difficult for water to be absorbed.

But there is also a cultural and ideological responsibility in the matter. By now,

whatever happens, the responsibility is attributed to anthropogenic global warming and ecological hysteria now dominates politics, which produces a series of harmful side effects. Meanwhile, the old principles of wisdom that accompanied the development of mankind are being abandoned: extreme weather events are a reality to which humans have always tried to adapt. So much so that where there has been development, populations have become less vulnerable and therefore human budgets have become less severe despite the increase in population. Keeping to Spain, this graph shows the number of flood victims over the last 80 years.

Number of deaths from floods, Spain



Data source: Our World in Data based on EM-DAT, CRED / UCLouvain, Brussels, Belgium – www.emdat.be (D. Guha-Sapir)
Note: Data includes disasters recorded up to April 2024.

Since we are talking about floods, adaptation works involve dikes, dams, diversions of watercourses (as in the case of Valencia post-1957), lamination basins, etc. Today, however, ecological ideology has convinced politicians that it is better to try to change the weather by reducing CO2 emissions, assuming that this is the cause of natural disasters. In practice, it is like deciding to stop spending 10-15 euros to buy an umbrella, and instead spend thousands of euros in the vain endeavour to stop the rain.

An ideological madness that is now, however, an established policy; and public opinion, terrorised by years of hammering propaganda, in the name of the climate

accepts the scrapping of cars, the devaluation of houses, exorbitant costs to adapt houses to the new regulations, restrictions on movement, rising energy costs and so on; without batting an eyelid.

Also part of this collective madness is the European law on the 'Restoration of Nature' (here and here) which, in the name of protecting biodiversity, prevents embankments, dams and other interventions that protect people from flooding.

A second nefarious effect of this ideology is the shift in investment from observing reality and monitoring and protecting the land to building ever more sophisticated climate models to predict the future climate. Thus there is less and less real data and more and more statistical projections, which, moreover, is a paradox because projections on the future are all the more reliable the more real data is available. It is not wrong, therefore, for those who have wondered in recent days how it is possible to state with such certainty what the climate will be like in 50 years' time when one cannot predict what the storm will be like in two hours' time.

And linked to this is a third factor, namely the discharge of responsibility by politicians and administrators. As the case of Valencia demonstrates, but also what has happened in Italy, in Emilia Romagna devastated by floods recently, for example, the responsibility of administrators who do not implement projects already approved decades ago to avoid or limit floods, who allow reckless cementing, who penalise agriculture, is enormous. But since it is always the fault of anthropogenic global warming, they justify themselves with what they are doing to incentivise green energy, stop car traffic and other such amenities. And the blame lies with the government or companies that are not doing enough to reduce CO2 emissions.

So let's not be surprised if we see a reversal in the trend of decreasing casualties from natural disasters from now on: but it is not climate change but anthropological change.