What happens to the boats? The 1755 Lisbon earthquake and Portuguese tsunami literacy
10 April 2017

The earthquake and its aftermath remains part of the generational memory of area residents, but it has been forgotten or not heard of by younger groups.

The main aim of this study was to evaluate Portuguese citizens' scientific literacy regarding tsunamis and to analyze their knowledge related to the 1755 earthquake. Vasconcelos and colleagues conducted 206 structured interviews and asked the general public to collaborate. At the beginning of the interviews, people were shown a drawing representing a tsunami epicenter and three boats in different locations. They were asked to decide which boat they thought would suffer the most. Only 42.7% of the interviewees gave the correct answer, that boat three (the one closest to shore) would experience the most damage. An equally high percentage of respondents (43.4%) chose boat 1 (farthest from shore), and 13.6% of respondents chose boat 2 (in the middle).

In analyzing the results of that and other questions, the authors found that people showed a wide lack of knowledge regarding tsunamis, including the 1755 event. However, the majority of interviewees recognized the need to know more about these issues.

The authors conclude that this evidence indicates the importance of including historical, social, and scientific issues in geosciences programs, giving more relevance to teaching seismic risks, their prevention, and possible responses.

They write, "If we want citizens to be active and to play a responsible role in the development of their own society, these historical socio-scientific issues must be clearly and decisively addressed in the classroom."

Provided by Geological Society of America

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.