Preface

The idea of this publication originates from fruitful and, at times, frustrating (not a contradiction in terms!) discussions at the first three North European Emergency and Disaster Studies (NEEDS) events held in Copenhagen in 2015 and 2017 and in Amsterdam in 2018. After the 2017 event, we sat outside under a bright blue sky and discussed the presentations we had heard and the topics we had debated. How to define disaster had been a central theme in many of the keynotes and the parallel sessions, but we both noted how no one had managed to come up with a comprehensive, catch-all definition that satisfied everybody.

It was right there, far from any disaster situation and with a cold Carlsberg within reach, that the idea emerged: Why not collect a variety of different and perhaps even contradictory definitions to show just how multidisciplinary and many-faceted disaster research is? On the spot we agreed to pursue this aim – of course without realising how much work it would be, or how much the world was to change in following years. But it also turned out to be a wonderfully thought-provoking, enlightening and even fun experience that neither of us would have been without.

Despite the name, the NEEDS events also gather scholars from outside Europe, and the topics covered in presentations and discussions are global in nature. Contributors for this volume have been recruited from the pool of scholars affiliated with the NEEDS series as well as other leading international disaster research environments. We hope that the thoughts they have kindly agreed to share with us, and that we now share with you, will be relevant to whatever approach to disaster research or management you have taken. We are deeply grateful to all our friends and colleagues from NEEDS and our respective institutions, to the contributors who embraced the challenge and stayed patiently with the project through the global pandemic, to our publishers and reviewers who supported the idea of defining disaster from a multitude of perspectives. Finally, a warm thank you to our respective partners and families for continuing to support our many endeavours in work and in life.

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