

Short and long-term effects of an historic blizzard in Asturias (Northern Spain)

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This research has combined the consult of several historical sources (historic newspapers, church records, meteorological records) with fieldwork (geographical checking and interviews) and the application of statistical techniques for data processing in order to define, locate and analyze the causes and physical, social, economic and demographic effects (both short- and long-term) of an historic natural disaster that concerned the territory of Asturias (Northern Spain).

The storm that hit the Spanish northwest in the winter of 1888 consisted of a four snowstorms concatenation occurred between 14th February 1888 and 8th April 1888. It was a phenomenon that, by its magnitude and rarity, was especially harmful because of the triggering of avalanches of snow and landslides; the generation of large snow deposits (up to 9 meters depth), and the floods related with the effects of the snow thawing.

The first results of this research point to 36 people dead and 23 injured, more than 1,000 buildings ruined and more than 19,000 head of cattle lost as a result of all these events. However, the personal and material losses increase if we investigate the long-term consequences and, in this aspect, we have identified several singularities in the 1888 mortality patterns (ie an increase in neonatal mortality rate), and a clear increase in overall mortality in the two years following this episode, affecting to women more than to men.