Second Edition

DISASTER RESILENCE

An Integrated Approach

Douglas Paton and David Johnston

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DISASTER RESILIENCE

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An Integrated Approach

Edited by

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and

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CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD. Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A. Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD. 2600 South First Street Springfield, Illinois 62704

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ISBN 978-0-398-09169-9 (paper) ISBN 978-0-398-09170-5 (ebook)

> First Edition, 2006 Second Edition, 2017

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> Printed in the United States of America TO-C-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Paton, Douglas, editor. | Johnston, David Moore, 1966- editor. Title: Disaster resilience : an integrated approach / edited by Douglas Paton, PhD and David Johnston, PhD.

Description: Second edition. | Springfield, Illinois: Charles C Thomas, Publisher, Ltd., [2017] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017009651 (print) | LCCN 2017019836 (ebook) | ISBN 9780398091705 (ebook) | ISBN 9780398091699 (pbk)

- Subjects: LCSH: Disasters--Social aspects. | Natural disasters--Social aspects. | Hazardous geographic environments. | Risk management. | Emergency management. | Preparedness. | Community organization. | Resilience (Personality trait)
- Classification: LCC HV553 (ebook) | LCC HV553 .D58 2017 (print) | DDC 363.34/7--dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017009651

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PREFACE

Events such as the December 26th 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and the Japanese earthquake and tsunami in 2011 have provided unfortunate reminders of the susceptibility of many communities to devastating losses from natural hazards. These events provided graphic illustrations of how extreme hazard events adversely impact on people, affect communities, and disrupt the community and societal mechanisms that serve to organise and sustain community capacities and functions. While societies and citizens are powerless to prevent the occurrence of, for example, the seismic, volcanic, and tsunami activity that arises from plate tectonics, there is much they can do to mitigate their risk and to understand and manage the consequences they could experience should disaster occur. The construct that has come to epitomize how this is done is resilience.

This book describes resilience in terms of how interdependence between societies, citizens and environment creates a need to develop policies, plans knowledge, competencies, relationships that progressively support the development of strategies that facilitate the ability of societies and citizens to co-exist with an environment that presents opportunities and amenities, but also challenge and change. If the recommendations, resources, and practices contained in this volume can be developed in sustainable ways, estimates of community capability to anticipate, cope with, adapt to, recover from, and learn and develop from natural hazard events will increase substantially, as will confidence in the planning and policies that define societal responsibility and the actions they stimulate to develop resilience in societies and citizens who must co-exist with generally beneficial, but periodically hazardous environmental processes.

> Douglas Paton David Johnston

CONTENTS

Preface	<i>Page</i> xiii
CHAPTER 1–CO-EXISTING WITH NATURAL HAZARDS AND	
THEIR CONSEQUENCES	3
\sim Douglas Paton	
Introduction	3
Responding to Challenge and Change	4
Co-existing with a Hazardous Natural Environment	4
Resilience as Co-Existence.	6
Co-existence in Practice	7
Co-existing with a Hazardous Environment	9
Evolving Hazard-Scapes	10
Societies and Citizens: Coping and Adapting	11
The Building Blocks of a Resilient Society	13
References	16
CHAPTER 2–URBAN RESILIENCE: THE NEED FOR A NEW	
CONTEXT IN SOUTH ASIA.	18
Nitin Srivastava	
Introduction	18
Background: The Concept of Urban Resilience and	
The Evolution of Its Purview	19
Urban Resilience	19
Evolution of the Concept of Urban Resilience in Asia	21
Symbiosis of Urban and Rural Areas	22
Urban-Rural Linkages	23
Urban-Rural Linkages and Climate-Related Hazards	23
Urban-rural linkages and their usability in a Climate-sensitive	
future	25

Provision for utilization of regional natural resources	. 27
Regional Growth	
Poverty reduction through employment generation	. 27
Disaster Management	. 28
Conclusion	. 28
References	. 29
CHAPTER 3–LIFELINES AND URBAN RESILIENCE	. 33
David Johnston, Julia Becker and Jim Cousins	
Introduction	. 33
Case Study 1: Impacts of Volcanic Ash Falls from the 1995-1996	
Eruptions of Ruapehu	. 34
Case Study 2: Impacts of Flooding on Gas Supplies in	
February, 2004	. 36
Case Study 3: Impacts of a Moderate Earthquake-1987 Edgecumbe,	
New Zealand	. 37
Case Study 4: Impacts of the 1931 Hawke's Bay	. 41
Assessing Lifeline Vulnerability	. 45
Methodology	. 48
At Risk Components	. 48
Analysis Process	. 50
Mitigation Measures	
The Contribution of Lifelines Studies to Urban Resilience	. 53
References	. 53
CHAPTER 4–CONSTRUCTION OF AN ECONOMIC	
RESILIENCE INDEX	. 55
Adam Rose	
Introduction	. 55
Defining Economic Resilience	. 56
An Operational Metric	. 59
Economic Theory Underpinnings	. 61
Production Functions	
Resilience in a Production Function Context	. 63
Empirical Measurement of Resilience	. 64
Cost-Effectiveness	. 66
Cost-Benefit Analysis of Resilience	. 68
Construction of a Resilience Index	
Calculation Steps	. 72

xvi

Contents	xvii
Conclusion	76
Conclusion	
References	77
CHAPTER 5–BUSINESS CONTINUITY IN	
DISASTER CONTEXTS	79
Douglas Paton and John McClure	
Introduction	79
Integrating Resilient Practices into Business Activity	80
The Goals of Planning: Preventing Loss Versus	
Facilitating Survival	81
Linking Business Continutiy Planning and Business Resilience	83
Developing Continuity Plans and Strategies	84
Implementation	84
BCM: Management Responsibilities	85
BCM: Implications for Organizational Culture and Change	86
Implementing BCM: Staff Competencies	87
Selection and Training	87
Organizational Implications	89
Business and Community Resilience.	90
References	91
CHAPTER 6–HAZARD MITIGATION: A PRIORITY FOR	
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES	94
Robert O. Schneider	
Introduction	
Sustainability: A Necessary Linkage	
From the Old to The New to the Past Back to the Future	99
Principles and Techniques of Sustainable Hazard Mitigation	
Conclusion	
References	112
CHAPTER 7–HAZARD READINESS AND RESILIENCE	114
Douglas Paton, José Kerstholt and Isabelle Skinner	111
Introduction	114
Readiness and DRR	
Readiness and its Precursors	
Anticipating Hazardous Circumstances	
	110
Cognitive Biases: Unrealistic Optimism and Risk	110
Compensation	110

Personalizing Risk	119
Readiness Theories	122
Family and Community Influences.	124
Relationships Between People and Agencies	
Facilitating Hazard Readiness: Bushfire Ready Neighborhoods .	
Future Work	
Affect and DRR Outcomes	131
Readiness: A Developmental Process	132
Predictors of Functional Readiness Categories.	
Conclusion	134
References	135
CHAPTER 8–CHILD CITIZENSHIP IN DISASTER RISK ANI)
AFFECTED ENVIRONMENTS	
Lisa Gibbs, C. MacDougall, C. Mutch and P. O'Connor	100
Introduction	138
Representations of Childhood	
Applications in Disaster Contexts	
Citizenship in Action	
Citizenship in Action Case Studies	
The Child-at-Risk	
The Developing Child.	
Critical Citizens	
The Politics of Disaster Response and Recovery	
in Christchurch	152
Conclusion	
References	
	100
CHAPTER 9–NEW INSIGHTS INTO OLD AGE AND	
RESILIENCY FROM A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE	158
Odeya Cohen, Diklah Geva, Mooli Lahad, Arkady Bolotin, Dima	
Leykin, Avishay Goldberg and Limor Aharonson-Daniel	
Introduction	158
Materials and Methods	160
Results	161
Discussion	166
Conclusion	170
References	171

xviii

Contents	xix
CHAPTER 10–GENDER AND DISASTER RESILIENCE	175
Cheney Shreve, Belinda Davis and Maureen Fordham	
Introduction	175
Background	176
Situating Gender and Disaster Scholarship within the	
Mainstream Disasters Discourse	
Recent Disaster Paradigms: Vulnerability and Resilience	177
Three Waves of Gender and Disaster Scholarship	178
First Wave: 1980s	179
Second Wave: 1990s	179
Third Wave: 2000s-Present	180
Gender and Disaster Resilience	182
Less Discussed Components of Resilience	184
Rethinking Participation	185
Linking Vulnerability and Resilience	187
Conclusions: Resilience Building	188
References	189
CHAPTER 11–SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMERGENT GROUPS: THE IMPACT OF HIGH FUNCTIONALITY ON	
COMMUNITY RESILIENCE	194
Melanie Irons and Douglas Paton	
Introduction	
Resilience	
Case Study	
Robustness, Rapidity and Redundancy	
Robustness	
Rapidity	
Redundancy	199
Community Resilience as a Set of Networked	~ ~ .
Adaptive Capacities.	
Economic Development	
Social Capital	
Information and Communication	
Community Competence	
Conclusion	
References	208

D · ·	D · 1	•
Incactor	Rocal	100000
Disaster	nesu	wnw

CHAPTER 12-ART AND DISASTER RESILIENCE:	
PERSPECTIVES FROM THE VISUAL AND	
PERFORMING ARTS	212
Douglas Paton, Ioannis Michaloudis, Etan Pavavalung, Kirby Clark,	
Petra Buergelt, Li-ju Jang and Grace Kuo	
Introduction	212
The Sky's Catastrophe	
Labored Breathing at Another Foothill: The Roles of Visual	
Arts in the Post-Morakot Reconstruction	218
The Connections Between My Art Creations and Tribal	
Culture	218
Interactions with Nature (Natural Environment)	219
The Connections Between Art Creations and Tribal Disaster	
Response and Recovery	219
Helping Tribal fellowmen Reconnect with Indigenous Culture	
Through Art Creations	222
Australian Aboriginal Songlines	
Music, Song and DRR	
Coping	
Sharing Knowledge	228
Sharing Experience	
Conclusions and Future Work	
References	233
CHAPTER 13–COPING WITH AND ADAPTING TO NATURAL	
HAZARD CONSEQUENCES: CROSS-CULTURAL	
PERSPECTIVES	236
Douglas Paton, Li-ju Jang, Kaori Kitagawa, Ljubica Mamula-Seadon	
and Yingying Sun	
Introduction	236
Cross-Cultural Assessment of the Community Engagement	
Theory	237
Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Disaster Response What	
People had to Respond To	240
Coping with and Adapting to Hazard Consequences	242
New Zealand	242
Taiwan	243
Future Directions and Conclusions	250
References	252

xx

Contents	xxi
CHAPTER 14–RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND COMMUNITY	
RESILIENCE	955
Steve Sutton	200
Introduction	255
Traditional and Proposed Interactions Between Religion	200
and Disasters	955
How Religions Might Provide Models for Developing Risk	233
	959
Communication Programs	
Case Study: Silkwood Subdivision	
Conclusion	
References	204
CHAPTER 15–LIVING WITH WIDDIJITH – PROTOCOLS FOR	
BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN REMOTE	
COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA	268
Bevlyne Sithole with H. Hmalan Hunter-Xenie and H. Cherry Daniels,	
Grace Daniels, Kesley Daniels, Antony Daniels, Geraldine Daniels, Debra	
Daniels, Howard Turner, Cherry Anne Daniels, Tammy Daniels, Patrina	
Thomas, David Thomas (Ngukurr Community Based Research Team) and	
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Narorroga, Otto Dann, Kingswood Dirdi, Gwen Nayilibibj, Christine	
Brown (Gunbalanya Community Based Research Team)	
Introduction	268
Remote Communities in Northern Australia	270
Facing Up to the Reality of Community Resilience	271
Who Should Build Community Resilience?	
Community Ideas on Building Resilient Communities	
Discussion	
Conclusion	285
References	287
CHAPTER 16–LIVING IN HARMONY WITH OUR	
ENVIRONMENT: A PARADIGM SHIFT	280
P. T. Buergelt, D. Paton, B. Sithole, K. Sangha, P.S.D.V Prasadarao, L.	209
6	
Campion, & J. Campion	900
Introduction	
Living in Disharmony with Nature: Source of Disasters Living in Harmony with Nature: Source of Well-being and	291
Adaptive Capacities	202
1 Mapure Superines	202

Living in Harmony: Requires Individual and Collective Adaptive Capacities	203
Indigenous People: Knowledges, Sensitivities and Practices	230
for Living in Harmony	204
Fire	
Living in Harmony with Nature: Socio-Economic Benefits	
Conclusion	
References	
References	304
CHAPTER 17–RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS AND	
DISASTERS: FACILITATING RESILIENCE IN HIGH RISK	
PROFESSIONS	308
Douglas Paton, Simon Moss, John Violanti, Jezamine De Leon and	
Hana Morrissey	
Introduction	
What Do Officers Need to be Resilient To?	
Empowerment	
Critical Incidents, Incident Interpretation and Adaptation	
Empowerment Schema and Resilience	
Person-Level Sources	
Trust	
Team Cohesion and Support	
Senior Officers	
Resilience, Organizational Learning and Organizational Culture	318
Multi-agency Operating Environments: Implications for	
Resilience	
Family	
Conclusions	
References	322
CHARTER 10. COMPRIANCE FOR REGIMENCE	0.07
CHAPTER 18–GOVERNANCE FOR RESILIENCE	327
Ljubica Mamula-Seadon	0.07
Introduction	
Resilience and Governance–Basic Concepts	
Advent of Resilience in Risk Management.	
Governance for Resilience.	
Governance for Resilience–the New Zealand Experience	
Governance for Resilience–Challenges and the Way Forward	
Conclusion	
References	342

xxii

Contents

CHAPTER 19–RESILIENCE TO HEAT WAVES: A FRAME-	
WORK FOR RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE	4
Kerstin K. Zander, Gertrud Hatvani-Kovacs and Stephen T. Garnett	
Introduction	4
The Livelihood Framework	5
Natural Capital	6
Built/Physical Capital	
Human Capital	
Social Capital	
Financial/Economic Capital	
Discussion	
Conclusion	5
References	6
CHAPTER 20–ENHANCING RESILIENCE TO WILDFIRE	
DISASTERS: FROM THE "WAR AGAINST FIRE" TO	
"COEXIST WITH FIRE"	9
Fantina Tedim and Vittorio Leone	2
Introduction	2
The Paradigm Shift from The "War Against Fire" to	-
"Coexist with Fire"	3
The "War Against Fire" Paradigm: a SWOT Analysis	
"Coexist with Fire": a New Paradigm	
Enhancing Resilience in Wildfire Risk Management: Problems,	-
and Challenges	0
Problems and Challenges	
An Operational Wildfire Resilience Framework	
The Fire Smart Territory: An Innovative Strategy of "Coexist	
with Fire"	3
Fire Smart Territory: The Concept	
Conclusion	
Acknowledgements	
References	
CHAPTER 21–A WICKED PROBLEM: MAKING DRR AND	
CCA WORK FOR RESILIENCE	4
Jane Rovins	1
Introduction	4
International Agreements	
	9

xxiv

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 286
Sustainable Development Goals
Why Is This So Complicated?
Indonesian Fires
Solutions
References
CHAPTER 22–DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND DISASTER
RESILIENCE: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES
Douglas Paton
Introduction
Reflection
Invitation
Resilience and Community Development
Strengths and Vulnerabilities
Changes in Adaptive Resource Availability
Experience
Resilience: An Integrated Approach
Conclusion
References
<i>Index</i>

DISASTER RESILIENCE

Chapter 1

CO-EXISTING WITH NATURAL HAZARDS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

DOUGLAS PATON

Keep my words positive, because my words become behaviors. Keep my behaviors positive, because my behaviors become habits. Keep my habits positive, because my habits become my values. Keep my values positive, because they become my destiny.

Mahatma Gandhi

INTRODUCTION

Fifty-thousand years ago, it has been estimated that there were some 5,000 humans on planet earth. The intervening millennia have seen this grow (and exponentially over the past 100 or so years) to over seven billion. During this time, humans have colonized every corner of the globe (except Antarctica) and demonstrated their capacity to cope with, adapt to and recover from many threats and challenging circumstances, including natural disasters, famine, flood, pestilence, disease and climate change, along the way (e.g., Burton, Diringer & Smith, 2006). As climate change looms as a significant threat to all humanity, and at a time of considerable political and social reluctance to accept the need to respond to this challenge, it is perhaps ironic that the human capacity to adapt and change may be due to that very phenomenon.

Slezak (2015) reviewed evidence suggesting that it was environmental change, rather than a specific environment, that drove human evolution. The research Slezak reviewed suggests that in environments in which substantial climatic shifts occurred every 10,000 to 20,000 years (over a period of a few million years), humans with a capacity to change and adapt to these dynamic conditions would have been selected for. While the work discussed by Slezak remains tentative, it is possible to speculate that the legacy of such

experiences has been a capacity to adapt to environmental change in modern humans that underpins the beliefs, behaviors and relationships encapsulated in contemporary understanding of "resilience." One thing is for certain, a need to be responsive and adaptive to environmental challenge and change is a capability that is becoming increasingly important for people, communities and societies.

Responding to Challenge and Change

A prominent reason why being responsive and adaptive to environmental challenge and change is important derives from the growing risk societies and citizens the world over face from the action of natural processes, such as volcanic, wildfire, storm, flooding, tsunami and seismic phenomena. Given the dynamic and complex nature of the characteristics and behaviors of these phenomena (Gregg & Houghton, 2006), it is not surprising that effectively managing the risk they pose is not a straightforward task.

Objectively, societal risk from natural hazards is constantly increasing. Even if the probability and intensity of the activity of the natural phenomena that create the hazards societies and citizens will encounter remain constant, factors such as continuing population growth and economic and infrastructure development in at-risk areas, are making incremental contributions to the potential magnitude and significance of the loss and disruption societies and citizens experience when disasters occur.

It is not possible for societies and citizens to directly influence the natural sources of the hazards (e.g., the seismic, volcanic and tsunami activity that arises from plate tectonics) they face. There is, however, much they can do to mitigate their risk and to understand and manage the consequences they could experience should disaster occur. The construct that has come to epitomize how this is done is resilience. This book explores how adding an environmental co-existence perspective can assist understanding the multifaced and dynamic nature of resilience. First, it is pertinent to ask why placing emphasis on environmental co-existence can complement and contribute to understanding risk management in general and resilience in particular.

Co-existing with a Hazardous Natural Environment

Decisions regarding the location of societal development have often reflected the association between geological and other natural processes and the resources and amenities (e.g., fertile soils, natural harbours, navigable rivers that serve as commercial highways, forests and wood products, water supplies, coastal and mountain scenery etc.) they create for societies and citizens. The fact that the activities societies and citizens engage in to secure beneficial outcomes from their environment (e.g., where and how they build cities, develop economies through environmental resource use, harvesting forests, develop on flood plains, etc. –see Chapter 2) contribute to their evergrowing risk provides the fundamental rationale for including a co-existence perspective in how resilience is conceptualized. A co-existence framework may facilitate resilience by reconciling societal development goals with the concomitant need to manage risks emanating from the environmental context in which development is situated. There are precedents to adopting this kind of think to frame risk management.

A conceptualization which seeks to balance development with the proactive management of the challenges environmental processes present to societies and citizens is consistent with the original definition of risk. Dake (1992) discussed how the term risk originally defined a process of accounting for the *gains* and the *losses* that arise in circumstances in which chance influences outcomes. This way of thinking about risk, as a combination of gains and losses, echoes the meaning inherent in the Chinese symbol for crisis. By defining it as a mix of a 'danger' and an 'opportunity,' a crisis is represented as an event from which both losses and gains can ensue. Which outcome occurs, gain or loss or the balance between them, is something that is amenable to human intervention. The application of the concept of resilience is intended to tip the balance in favour of gains and development.

If the reality of being faced with potential gains (from environmental situation and characteristics) and potential losses (when the action of environmental processes turn hazardous) can be anticipated, societies and citizens can take steps to minimize potential losses and optimize the attainment of environmental gains. If transferred to a societal risk management setting, a co-existence framework thus affords opportunities for risk management to contribute to reconciling the benefits of sustainable societal development with the management of the periodic hazard activity that occurs when nature presents societies and citizens with its more malevolent side (Paton, 2000; Tobin, 1999). Pulling these various threads together, this book describes resilience in terms of how interdependence between societies, citizens and environment creates a need to develop policies, plans knowledge, competencies, and relationships that progressively support the development of strategies that facilitate the ability of societies and citizens to co-exist with an environment that presents opportunities and amenities, but also challenge and change.