

**THE DISASTER  
RESILIENCY CHALLENGE**



# THE DISASTER RESILIENCY CHALLENGE

**Transforming Theory to Action**

*Edited by*

**JAMES BOHLAND, PHD.**

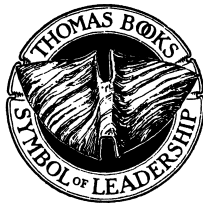
*Senior Research Leader  
Global Forum for Urban and Regional Resilience  
Virginia Tech*

**JACK HARRALD, PHD.**

*Affiliate  
Global Forum for Urban and Regional Resilience  
Virginia Tech*

**DEBORAH BROSNAN**

*Forum Fellow  
Global Forum for Urban and Regional Resilience  
Virginia Tech*



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## CONTRIBUTORS

### **David Bieri, Ph.D.**

David Bieri is Associate Professor of Urban Affairs and of Economics at Virginia Tech, with a joint appointment in the Global Forum on Urban and Regional Resilience. He is faculty member of the VT Program in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, and has endowed appointment as a Fellow in the Program in Real Estate. He has been a faculty member at Taubman College, University of Michigan, and previously held senior positions at the Bank for International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland.

### **James Bohland, Ph.D.**

James Bohland is a Research Team Leader on the social and political dimensions of resilience at the Global Forum for Urban and Regional Resilience, and is a Professor Emeritus in the School of Public and International Affairs at Virginia Tech. He is the former vice president and executive director of Virginia Tech's National Capital Region (NCR) Operations, and was Director of the School of Public and International Affairs at VT.

### **Deborah Brosnan, Ph.D.**

Deborah Brosnan is adjunct professor at Virginia Tech, Forum Fellow at the Global Forum on Urban and Regional Resilience, and President of Brosnan Center. Her expertise is integrating science into real world challenges and the development of strategic science in response to hazards. She works on the importance of environmental and natural resources in disaster risk reduction, climate change planning, and the interface of science and policy.

### **Arrietta Chakos**

Arrietta Chakos, Policy Advisor and a member of the Disaster Roundtable at the National Academies is an expert in urban disaster resilience, risk reduction and public policy consultation. Her professional summary includes: public policy consulting on urban resilience, disaster readiness and climate change adaptation; assessment and management of community and regional comprehensive risk; development of culturally-appropriate hazard mitiga-

tion and recovery solutions; and executive-level experience in local government management and public finance.

**Margaret Cowell, Ph.D.**

Margaret Cowell is an Associate Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning at Virginia Tech. Dr. Cowell previously worked as a Regional Economist for the Buffalo Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. She was a member of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation-funded research project, “Building Resilient Regions.” She is currently a faculty member and co-PI for Virginia Tech’s National Science Foundation Research Traineeship program on Disaster Resilience and Risk Management.

**Kevin Desouza, Ph.D.**

Kevin C. Desouza is an ASU Foundation professor in the School of Public Affairs at Arizona State University. He is also a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. He served as the inaugural Associate Dean for Research for the College of Public Service and Community Solutions from 2012–2016. Desouza has authored, co-authored, and/or edited nine books, the most recent being *Intrapreneurship: Managing Ideas within Your Organization* (University of Toronto Press, 2011).

**Georg Frerks, Ph.D.**

Georg Frerks holds a chair in Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management at Utrecht University and a chair in International Security Studies at the Netherlands Defense Academy. Till mid 2014 he held the chair of Disaster Studies at Wageningen University, the Netherlands. Frerks served for nearly twenty years in the Dutch Foreign Service both at headquarters and abroad. He also was head of the Conflict Research Unit of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael.”

**Duane Gill, Ph.D.**

Duane A. Gill is Regents Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for the Study of Disasters and Extreme Events at Oklahoma State University. His research generally seeks to understand community capacity to respond to and recover from disasters, as well as ways to enhance community preparedness and resilience.

**John (Jack) Harrauld, Ph.D.**

John Harrauld is Research Affiliate at the Virginia Tech Global Forum for Urban and Regional Resilience. He is the Director Emeritus of The George Washington University Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management.

He was a member of the National Research Council's Extreme Event and Resilience Roundtable and past Chair of the National Research Council Disasters Roundtable Steering Committee, and a National Associate Member of the National Academy of Sciences.

**Sallie Keller, Ph.D.**

Sallie Keller is Professor of statistics and Director of the Social and Decision Analytics Laboratory within the Biocomplexity Institute at Virginia Tech. Her prior positions include Academic Vice-President and Provost at the University of Waterloo and Director of the IDA Science and Technology Policy Institute. She is a national associate of the National Academy of Sciences and fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

**Jennifer Lawrence, Ph.D.**

Jennifer L. Lawrence is a Post-Doctoral Research Associate with the Global Forum on Resilience, Virginia Tech. Her research explores the assemblage of extractive governance, by drawing out tensions between chronic and acute socioenvironmental disasters. Her scholarship is conducted from a problem-centered, theory driven methodology and highlights the intersection of economic systems, resource extraction, and socio environmental (in)justice. She is also the editor of *Biopolitical Disaster* (2017, Routledge: Interventions).

**Liesel Ritchie, Ph.D.**

Dr. Liesel Ritchie is Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Disasters and Extreme Events, and Associate Professor of Sociology at Oklahoma State University. Previously she was Associate Director at the Hazards Research Center at University Colorado. Her research focuses on the social impacts of disasters and community resilience, with an emphasis on technological disasters, social capital, renewable resource communities, and program evaluation.

**Stephanie Shipp, Ph.D.**

Stephanie Shipp is Deputy Director and Research professor at the Social and Decision Analytics Laboratory (SDAL) at the Biocomplexity Institute of Virginia Tech. From 2007 to 2013, she was a senior researcher at the Science and Technology Policy Institute. From 2001 to 2008, Dr. Shipp was the director of the Economic Assessment Office in the Advanced Technology Program at the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

**Mary Lou Zoback, Ph.D.**

Mary Lou Zoback is a seismologist and professor in the School of Earth Sciences, Stanford University. She has served as Vice President of Earthquake Risk Applications with Risk Management Solutions. She is an elected member of the National Academy of Sciences, past President of the Geological Society of America, and a member of the Carnegie Foundation Board of Trustees, the NRC Disaster Roundtable, and cochaired the Advisory Committee for San Francisco's Citizens Action Plan for Seismic Safety.



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## Section I

# **BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES: ADAPTIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES**



## Chapter 1

### RESILIENCE: CHALLENGES OF TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

*James Bohland, Jack Harrauld, and Deborah Brosnan*

The concept or idea of resilience has become fashionable in the public and academic literature in the past decade. Articles in the popular press—*New York Times* and the *Huffington Post*, for example—extol the virtues of being resilient. In the academic world, new journals on resilience have emerged, e.g., *Resilience* and the *International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment*, and a sure sign of importance, genealogies of the concept abound (Walker & Cooper, 2011; Meerow et al., 2016). As a consequence, resilience as a concept has become embedded in public policy discourse in countries across the world in a range of contexts—planning, education, emergency management, and supply chains.

Given the plethora of publications on resilience directed to academics, we decided another book of readings for that audience was not appropriate. We believe, however, that elaboration of the concept, its meaning, and potential is important to an audience we call “reflective practitioners,” that is, those individuals who deal with events and conditions where resilience is part of their daily responsibility. Additionally, we believe the content and tone of the book would also engage future community leaders who will be asked to address resilience in the context of their cities and communities. Finally, the book should help the general public become better informed about different aspects of the resilience paradigm in ways that will cause them to think more critically about its appropriateness and utility as a policy approach and encourage them to become citizen participants in local resilience discourses.

Though practitioners are an important audience for the book, it is not intended to be a “how to” or “DIY” tool kit.<sup>1</sup> Rather, we hope to engage people to think about resilience from a broader, conceptual perspective; recognizing that it has variegated means and when incorporated into policies it will have differential impacts on groups, areas, or individuals within your community, many of which will be unintended or unconsidered. If this book helps practitioners be aware of unintended consequences or at least reflect on the unknown/unknowns, it will be a success.

### A FRAMEWORK FOR RESILIENCE POLICY

The contributions in this book reflect the editors’ perspectives on the goals for community resilience and on a framework for understanding resilience and policy. We believe the *goal of resilience policy is to create communities that are secure, sustainable, and equitable into the future*. To achieve this goal communities must be willing and capable of making changes in existing systems and mentalities to address existing vulnerabilities so they can cope successfully with future disruptors that can increase existing societal fractures that diminish the ability to create greater security, sustainability, and equity. Although much of the literature on resilience has focused on natural disaster, or “disaster resilience,” disruptors take many forms—natural, social, technological and ecological—and the seeds for disruptive change are always sown into a community’s socioeconomic, technical, and governance fabric.

Resilience is commonly conceptualized in complex systems terms, where structures and relationships are dynamic with unanticipated emergent properties manifesting themselves as the systems change either suddenly (episodic events) or incrementally (slow burn events). Unfortunately, when resilience is framed in complexity terms, it is difficult to get citizens and policymakers engaged in the issues. Consequently, community leaders may be tempted to disengage and allow change to occur unfettered by policy interventions and simply try to adapt to change when it is possible or hope that existing ways of life are not transformed too radically. Each approach is untenable we argue because they fail to mitigate the consequences of disruptive changes that can threaten the three pillars of resilience—security, sustainability, and equity. It is imperative that leaders understand the complexity of the problem, but equally critical that concise and clear messaging be used in engaging citizens on resiliency issues. Critical interrogation of the resilience concept is essential to ensure intended consequences.

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1. For those interested, there are a number of articles, books and web sites that do offer recommendations on building community resilience. See for example: NIST, 2015 or Masterson et al., 2014.