



MELBOURNE SUSTAINABLE
SOCIETY INSTITUTE

Resilience and justice

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MSSI RESEARCH PAPERS SERIES – PAPER NO 2 – OCTOBER 2013





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Research Paper No. 2 October 2013

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Editor

Craig Prebble, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute

Acknowledgements

This paper was prepared by Susan S. Fainstein, Senior Research Fellow and former professor of urban planning at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. She is also a visiting professor at Lee Kwan Yu School at the National University of Singapore.

Note: A version of this paper was presented in a plenary session at the joint conference of 2013 AESOP-ACSP in Dublin.

Citing this report

Please cite this paper as Fainstein, S. (2013) Resilience and justice, MSSl Research Paper No. 2, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute.

ISBN: 978 0 7340 4936 0

Introduction

The term resilience has become extraordinarily popular. A recent *New York Times* headline asserts: *Forget sustainability. It's about resilience* (November 2, 2012). According to this article, the purpose of developing resilience is to help vulnerable people deal with unforeseeable disruptions: Where sustainability aims to put the world back into balance, resilience looks for ways to manage in an unbalanced world (Zolli 2012). Another journalistic piece on the recent widespread use of the term inquires whether it has just become one more buzzword like synergy or social capital (Carlson 2013; see also Davoudi 2012) - or one might add, like creative cities or, long ago, comprehensive planning (a once discredited concept that has returned with the aim of planning for resilience). The surge of interest in resilience responds to the damage wrought by hurricanes and earthquakes in the last decade even while it is being stretched beyond natural disasters to encompass economic crisis and social misery. According to the mandate for the 2013 AESOP-ACSP¹ joint conference, the purpose of developing resilience is "to sustain the urban and rural viability and improve the quality of life for their residents amidst the global economic and socio-political crisis and climate change." The question is whether using the term to cover so much disguises the trade-offs involved and the resulting distributions of costs and benefits.

¹ These acronyms refer to the European and American associations of planning faculty members. AESOP stands for Association of European Schools of Planning; ACSP is the US Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning.

For example, efforts to achieve resilience to climate change through developing natural buffers against sea level rise can result in the displacement of populations. Who will be displaced and what measures will be taken to replace lost housing and community are crucial questions not captured by the term resilience. The issue then is whether by using this term we are, as with sustainability, seeking an innocuous label to justify controversial actions, or whether it can be used to mobilise a political force for achieving more just outcomes.

In this paper I argue that the term obscures underlying conflicts of interest that are better understood by turning to Marxist concepts of structural antagonisms and dialectical materialism. As currently used, resilience derives from an idealist formulation of social processes that leads planners to propose responses to crisis divorced from reality. At the same time Marxism, even though it allows for clearer analysis, fails to offer much help to practitioners. Neither, however, does the more conventionally acceptable approach of evolutionary resilience provide a guide to practice. Rather it mainly acts as a rhetorical device that fits with a language of planning in which every challenge produces a win-win solution. Planning practice that aims at more just outcomes requires clear statements regarding who benefits, accepts that some groups will bear losses, does not expect consensus, and directs resources toward the most vulnerable.

What is meant by resilience?

C.S. Holling is generally given credit for developing the model of evolutionary resilience and arguing that rather than resilience meaning a return to a previous equilibrium, it refers to system transformation. As Richard Forman (2008, p. 89) comments, "Ecologists have basically dropped 'balance of nature' and equilibrium community from their vocabulary. Instead they emphasise the *non-equilibrium* nature of nature, since the scientific evidence overwhelmingly highlights change as the norm ... Indeed the prevention of disturbance, rather than disturbance itself, is the threat." In this view humans and the physical world are part of an interactive system rather than one in which nature is objectified and humans are the masters of it. Simin Davoudi (2012), after noting the varied meanings that have been attached to resilience, focuses on its evolutionary content - it requires continuous adaptation rather than a return to a previous equilibrium - and comments that it undermines the assumptions of a steady state on which the linear extrapolations of planners often rely.

Well before Holling's 1973 article Norton Long, an American political scientist, published a widely cited article entitled "The Local Community as an Ecology of Games." In it he argued:

Observation of certain local communities makes it appear that inclusive over-all organisation for many general purposes is weak or non-existent. Much of what occurs seems to just happen with accidental trends becoming cumulative over time and producing results intended by nobody. A great deal of the communities' activities consists of undirected co-operation of particular social structures, each seeking particular goals and, in doing so, meshing with others.

While the historical development of largely unconscious co-operation between the special games in the territorial system gets certain routine, over-all functions performed, the problem of novelty and break-down must be dealt with. Here it would seem that, as in the natural ecology, random adjustment and piecemeal innovation are the normal methods of response. The lack of over-all institutions in the territorial system and the weakness of those that exist insure that co-ordination is largely ecological rather than a matter of conscious rational contriving. (Long 1958, p. 252)

Long's analysis prefigures Holling and Gunderson's concept of panarchy; that is, non-hierarchically directed adaptation. His viewpoint reflects the sophisticated pluralistic analysis of his time, embodied also in the works of Robert Dahl and his followers. The thrust was to debunk those like C. Wright Mills and Floyd Hunter who identified power elites. What the pluralists ignored, however, and what came to the fore in the neo-Marxism of David Harvey and Manuel Castells, is the way in which capitalism sets the overall structure in which the social ecology exists and in which the relationship between society and nature is formed and reproduced. Without fully adopting a Marxist framework, we can still glean from it insights into the theoretical questions raised by resilience scholarship and also see some of the difficulties of planning in practice more clearly.

I will first talk about two theoretical problems: (1) the political question of power, and (2) the epistemological question of describing complex systems. Then I will discuss the issues that come up when planning more resilient cities, including the danger that the terminology of resilience engenders either passivity or a favoring of the already advantaged.

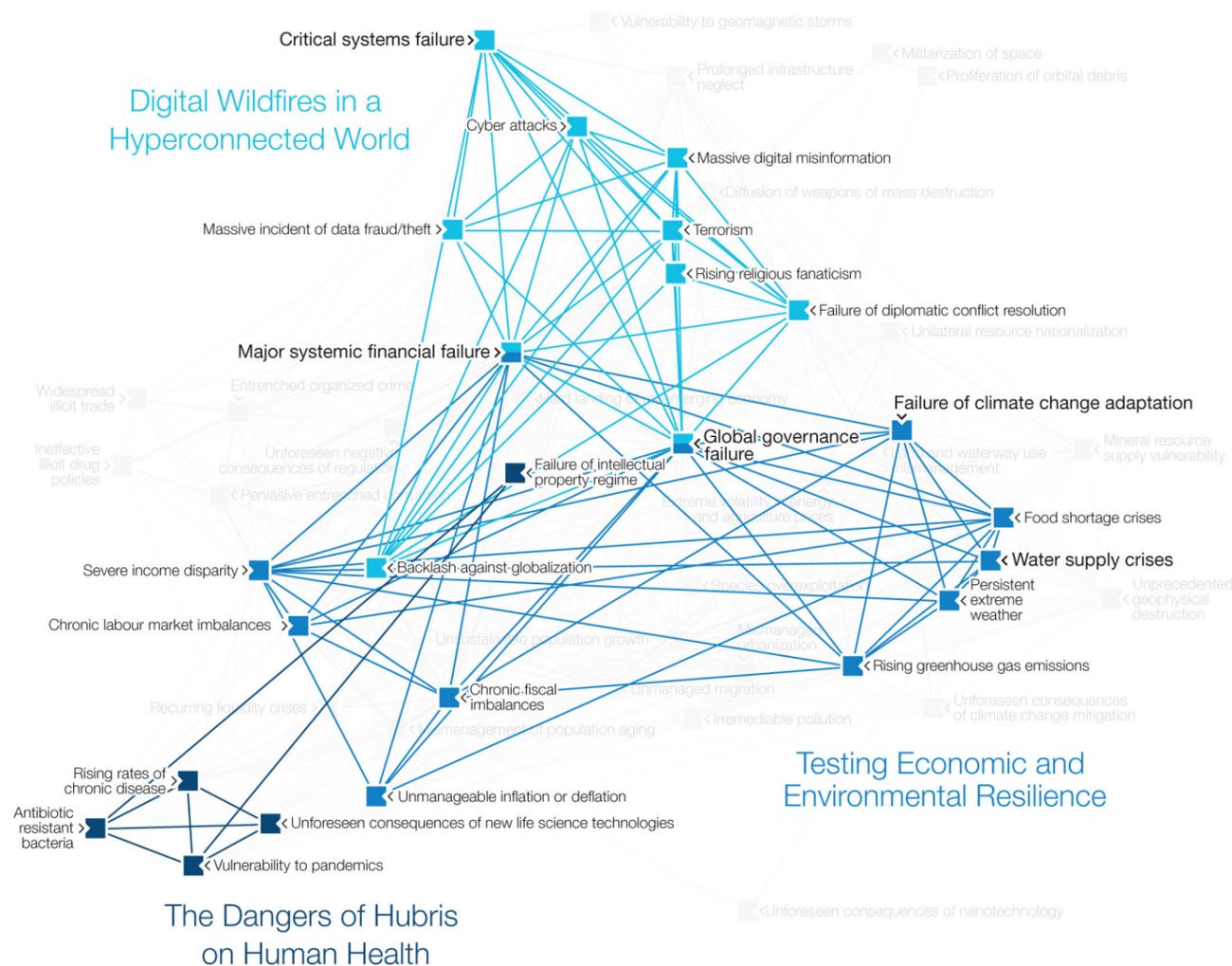
Politics and power

A number of theorists, when discussing the paradigm of social ecology, critique it for inadequately addressing the questions of political power and the role of the state, and for incorporating a conservative political bias. Cathy Wilkinson states: "Socio-ecological resilience ... has yet to develop a strong theoretical basis for addressing matters of power, conflict, contradiction, and culture" (p. 49). According to Todd Swanstrom (2008, p. 16):

Rejecting both the state and the market, ecological thinkers embrace social processes of consensual decision making and network governance ...

[But] the diminishment of the role of the state and political conflict in favor of consensual social networks ends up being profoundly conservative, reinforcing the status quo.

The difficulty in coming to grips with questions of power is obvious when looking at the chart below, which maps the interconnections between various types of risks, using an ecological approach. Developed for the World Economic Forum - the meeting of governmental and corporate leaders that occurs each year at Davos - the chart presents a view of crisis that will not discomfit these elites.



When interactive processes are portrayed in this fashion, whereby everything is connected to everything else, there appears to be no overriding logic, no agents, and no targets for effective action. In the words of Brendan Gleeson: "If left to natural interpretation alone, the tropes of evolution and equilibrium suggest a law bound urban ecology that makes social intervention meaningless or self-defeating. Policy may be confined to maintenance of a naturalised urban order. Naturalism, of course, disavows and therefore misrepresents human agency and social possibility" (Gleeson 2013, p. 13). Examining social phenomena through the lens of complexity leaves the analyst with enormous mapping jobs and model-building challenges but provides little in the way of practical guidance. Eric Swyndegouw (2010, p. 303) comments: "Unforeseen changes are seen either as the effect of 'externalities' ... or as a catastrophic turbulence resulting from initial relations that spiral out in infinitely complex and greatly varying configurations such as those theorized by Chaos or Complexity Theory." For Swyndegouw this perspective amounts to a denial of the socio-ecological relationships of dominance that are upheld by the hidden, conservative ideology of environmentalism.

Marxist analysis explains crisis through analysing the logic of capital. Although Marx himself saw crisis in purely economic terms and accepted the view that humans could, and should, dominate nature (Harvey 1996, p. 126), more recent theorists working within the Marxian tradition, reject that perspective. Instead they extend the analysis to share with the complexity theorists an interactionist understanding of the relations

between humans and the 'natural' world, but they interpret that interaction quite differently. Neil Smith, for instance, contends that nature is entirely a social creation produced within the capitalist mode of production:

In its uncontrolled drive for universality, capitalism creates new barriers to its own future. It creates a scarcity of needed resources, impoverishes the quality of those resources not yet devoured, breeds new diseases, develops a nuclear technology that threatens the future of all humanity, pollutes the entire environment that we must consume in order to reproduce, and in the daily work process it threatens the very existence of those who produce the vital social wealth (Smith 1994, p. 59).

According to David Harvey (1996, p. 131) eighteenth century political economy (and equally, contemporary neo-liberalism) disguises the question of humans' relationship to nature as "a technical discourse concerning the proper allocation of scarce resources (including those in nature) for the benefit of human welfare." He counterpoises the ecological modernisation movement to the environmental justice movement. Ecological modernisation refers to policies that provide incentives to the private sector with sustainability as the objective; in contrast, environmental justice focuses on the protection of the disadvantaged. Harvey argues that the former is co-optive as it attempts to gain consensual or win-win policies, promoting programs like green industries that are simultaneously profitable and environmentally beneficial. This approach implies that programs which are not profitable or protective of private property rights would be neglected, regardless of their environmental or social impact.

Source: World Economic Forum, Global Risks 2013, 8th edition.

An illustration of Harvey's point comes from a new, highly publicised book by Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley (2013, p. 3) of the Brookings Institution:

Four years after the recession's official end, it is clear that the real, durable reshaping [of the American economy] is being led by networks of city and metropolitan leaders - mayors and other local elected officials, for sure, but also heads of companies, universities, medical campuses, metropolitan business associations, labor unions, civic organisations, environmental groups, cultural institutions, and philanthropies. These leaders are measuring what matters, unveiling their distinctive strengths and starting points in the real economy: manufacturing, innovation, technology, advanced services, and exports ... [They are] using business planning techniques honed in the private sector. They are remaking their urban and suburban places as livable, quality, affordable, sustainable communities and offering more residential, transport, and work options to firms and families alike. And they are doing all these things through coinvention and coproduction.

From this perspective there are no structural conflicts within metropolitan areas and cooperation among all the various interests - capital and labor, white and black, industrialists and environmentalists - will insure resilience, sustainability, and economic stability.

In sharp contrast the Marxist viewpoint identifies contradictions in the capitalist mode of production that make environmental despoliation inevitable and points to the power of capitalists as the underlying cause of ecological crisis. This thinking accepts the argument, espoused by non-Marxists as well, that there is no such thing as a natural disaster, in that human activity always underlies environmental crisis (see Hartman and Squires 2006). Marxists, however, differ from liberals in that they are much more willing to assess blame. Unlike complexity theory Marxist thought is deeply political. Its weakness, from the perspective of planners, is that it offers relatively little, beyond political mobilisation in defense of the weak, in terms of creating resilience in the present. Furthermore, and with little supporting evidence, it assumes that under socialism contradictions resulting in environment crisis would be eliminated. It cannot, however, on these grounds be simply dismissed, since its depiction of the environmental consequences of capital accumulation is largely valid. (In fact, complexity theory, with its multiplicity of variables and numerous feedback effects offers no greater practicality, but its political acceptability and scientific trappings prevent it from being disregarded or treated contemptuously).

Davoudi (2012, pp. 302-3) comments that the concept of evolutionary resilience means that "small-scale changes in systems can amplify and cascade into major shifts" in a process of creative destruction (p. 302-3). This picture of what, in Hegelian thought, is characterised as the qualitative leap, captures also the understanding of social change within the Marxist dialectic (it is Marxist because it is describing materiality not ideas). Within dialectical materialism nothing ever remains the same in history, and although changes may be imperceptible, eventually they result in a systemic leap. Thus, the accumulation of wealth by a merchant trading class eventually gave rise to the capitalization of industry, leading to the jump from a rural-agricultural mode of production to the urban-industrial one. Within the present epoch, the fiscal crises of the 1970s in the West stimulated a new international division of labor under which manufacturing moved to developing countries. Along with the outsourcing of production also came the outsourcing of pollution, as regulation in the West and poverty in the rest caused dirty industries to move to places where they could profitably continue their activities. Thus, reforms in the major industrial countries aimed at environmental protection and public welfare cumulated during the postwar years until they produced a crisis of profitability and a major transformation in the relations of production, characterised by a new international division of labor and the globalisation of production.

The term 'creative destruction' is frequently used by both Marxists and their critics to characterise processes resulting in new sets of ecological relationships. The difference between the Marxian and Schumpeterian understandings of "creative destruction" lies in the normative evaluation of its effects. In the latter, the emphasis is on creativity and innovation as the driving forces of progress. In the Marxian view it is in the destruction of communities and ways of life. Thus, Marx laments the loss of independence of the skilled craftsman, and Harvey mourns the destruction of the working-class quarters of Paris under the aegis of Haussmann. At the same time the process is attributed to the logic of the capitalist drive for profit, and the set of interactions as a whole produces a dynamic that undermines the system. Consequently industrial production and high-level consumption lead to massive employment of energy and water sources with consequent global warming and depletion of water supplies.

Dialectical materialism allows the identification of new qualitative stages. It is part of a critical social science that regards social relationships as conflictual and inherently power-driven rather than consensual or the product of an invisible (and implicitly beneficent) hand. In the latter part of the twentieth century, theorists in the Marxist tradition developed regulation theory to explain changes in capitalism in response to crises of profitability.

While not involving a leap into a post-capitalist stage, these changes nevertheless marked a substantial shift from the preceding years. According to this theory the Keynesian welfare state, mass production for mass consumption, and manufacturing dominance (Fordism) characterised the wealthy countries of the West during the years immediately following the Second World War. Under the 'post-Fordist' regime of accumulation that commenced during the 1970s, finance capital became dominant within a globalised economic system, a new international division of labor was imposed, and privatisation and deregulation reduced the role of the state in maintaining social well-being (Amin 1994). The labeling of the supportive ideology of post-Fordism as neoliberalism derives from this kind of approach, which considers that the continuing acceptance of capitalist accumulation results from its embeddedness in a system of regulation involving cultural, social, and political conventions (Brenner and Theodore 2002). Regulation theorists thus consider conventional thinking to be a mechanism that supports a particular regime of accumulation. The current attempt to use market mechanisms as the means for environmental protection, as in the establishment of markets for the right to pollute (i.e. "cap and trade"), illustrates the way in which neoliberal thinking limits the range of acceptable policy to those benefiting capital.

Key to the intellectual outlook formed by the Marxian tradition is a focus on economy rather than communication as the determinative factor in explanation. In David Harvey's words critiquing Habermas:

For all his occasional references to material circumstances, he treats of the problem of communicative action as a linguistic discursive problem and consequently provides a very weak understanding of how the discursive 'moment' ... internalises effects of power, of material practices, of imaginaries, of institutions, and of social relations. (Harvey 1996, p. 354)

Marxist analysis leads to the identification of the contradictions and crisis-prone nature of capitalism. The negative environmental effects of commodity production - what mainstream economists call market failures - arise from such contradictions, are inevitable, and do indeed cause crisis. What is remarkable about capitalism, however, and not predicted by Marx, is the extraordinary resilience of capitalism. Marx considered that the contradictions of capitalism would cause crisis, the breakdown of the system, and the empowerment of the working class. And indeed, the crises of over-accumulation, environmental disaster, and rebellion have occurred. Since its inception capitalism has been characterised by financial bubbles and their subsequent puncture, by the destruction of environments embodied in ghost towns and London fogs, by the spread of diseases engendered by poor sanitary conditions within cities, and by inequality giving rise to antagonistic classes and nations. Yet there has been adaptation and the defeat of socialism as it really existed (and which suffered from its own contradictions). Dialectical thought allows the observer to see the relationships within a system, but it does not, any better than complexity theory, allow us to know the ultimate outcome - and in fact in the absence of Marx's utopianism, we should not expect any final outcome.

The depoliticising character of standard ecological analysis causes the term resilience to be broadly acceptable - hence, its appeal. Protecting bucolic suburban areas from high-density housing becomes justified as maintaining green spaces that will absorb run-off. These are the same suburban areas that feature mowed lawns and golf courses even while their negative impacts on the water table and water quality are widely known. What exists is seen as normal, and resilience is typically defined as a return to normality after a disruption. Normality tends to be what is in the interests of property owners: thus, the effort to re-create Berlin as it was before the Wall (expressed in the terms "we are a normal city again") or to reduce social housing in Amsterdam (where the director of planning informed me that Amsterdam was finally becoming a normal city). What appears "normal" produces ontological security for many but only because we accept insecurity for certain groups.

Planning for resilience generally is conducted as an exercise in risk assessment followed by a calculation of alternative responses. Risk calculations, however, cannot tell us what level of risk is tolerable nor do they break down the question into that of risk for whom? Instead they aim at giving precise numbers, despite the actual uncertainty involved: "The clearest message from

the changing evidence base over the last decade concerns the dangers of false precision ... With regard to flooding, the data appears to be particularly subject to rapid and fundamental change and raises questions as to the extent to which it can be distilled to a probabilistic figure or clear spatial delineation between 'safe' areas and those 'at risk'" (White 2013, p. 110). These numbers, however, are demanded by insurers so that they can develop underwriting criteria and calculate premiums and by planners so that they can decide on levels of density. They fit into the current fad of 'evidence-based planning.'

Patsy Healey (2012) refers to 'traveling ideas' and warns us to be careful about applying models or best practices that work well in one place but may be inappropriate elsewhere. There are two such ideas currently prevalent in regard to making cities more resilient to natural disasters, one dealing with outcomes and the other with process:

- (1) going along with rather than trying to defeat ecological processes - e.g. making room for water; allowing forest fires to burn away undergrowth;
- (2) arriving at a participatory, consensual agreement on what is to be done

In conclusion I address and critique these two ideas within the framework already laid out, then advance some modest proposals.

Accommodating to natural processes as the new outcome

The Dutch have pioneered the approach of making room for water, which involves accommodating flooding rather than using barriers to protect low-lying land. Of course, there is really nothing new about this strategy except within the context of a country that previously relied on massive public works to fend off the surrounding seas. In fact, less developed countries have traditionally relied on annual flooding as the basis for agricultural productivity. Therefore, it is its social-historical positioning that makes it novel. We hear similar calls in the United States, where the Army Corps of Engineers is dismantling some dams and rebuilding wetlands in the Mississippi Delta. When we are speaking of unbuilt areas little harm will be done, but even there some land owners will benefit while others will lose out. In cities the potential hardships are much greater when inhabited neighborhoods are marked for inundation. Moreover, even the Dutch will continue to rely primarily on engineered barriers to water flows and the use of high-technology-based emergency responses; they are modifying rather than leaving behind the mastery of nature model.

Most notoriously in New Orleans making room for water was the basis for the 'green dot' map where certain impoverished parts of the city were designated by planning experts as appropriate locations to return to open space. The resulting furor caused the withdrawal of the plan and a willingness to allow any neighborhood to rebuild if its former residents could find the will and finances to do so (Nelson, Ehrenfeucht, and Laska 2007). The New Orleans case highlights the difficulty of allowing flooding in already built-up areas. Since the most environmentally challenged land is typically inhabited by low-income residents who initially had few choices, returning the land to its pre-inhabited state places the cost burden of relocation on those least able to sustain it.

Where waterfront land has been colonised by upper-income residents seeking views, the effort has largely been to protect them and keep them in place. Hypothetically a poor community could be moved "en bloc" to a more salubrious area, but this approach is very costly and seldom applied to marginalized communities. Simple compensation to individual households for the loss of their land would not supply the amount of money needed for former residents to settle in a decent home in more environmentally beneficial surroundings nor would it reconstruct the community relations that had been severed. This situation, within the standard view of social ecology, is simply a dilemma of governance; within a more radical theory it is the consequence of capitalism under neoliberalism where the resources to support everyone in a decent home and suitable living environment are not made available.

A progressive approach would be to evaluate the costs and benefits of moving or keeping in place rich and poor communities using the criteria of use values. If it is determined that poor communities ought to move, then they should not be required to do so until a new location is developed, and members should be given the resources to move together. Dealing with environmental threat should not be considered in isolation from the broader question of producing affordable housing. Conventional thinking regards government production of housing as inefficient and limiting choice, but empirical investigation shows that only countries that have had large-scale production of social housing provide adequate shelter for low-income households. Just outcomes require a move away from reliance on market processes and a return to a dominant state role in housing provision (Marcuse and Keating 2006).

Participatory processes: do they produce better outcomes than expert-driven ones?

The New Orleans example points also to the process issue. Participation led ultimately to a resolution whereby the city would be rebuilt pretty much as it was for those with resources, while many of those lacking in financial and social capital were unable to return or rebuild - although they were not prohibited from doing so. Participants at the local level, even while their participation resulted in their being allowed to stay in place, were unable to command funding in relation to need. Although considerable federal money did flow into New Orleans, calculations of property values were based on exchange values not use values, as was also the case for private insurers. The hurricane was also used as the rationale for demolishing all the public housing in the city, leaving poor residents with even fewer options than formerly. Rather than top-down expert-imposed strategies determining the shape of rebuilding, a combination of participation and market forces produced a result as favorable to the well-off as the green-dot map. A few poor neighborhoods were able to muster sufficient organisation and political resources to rebuild; most never recovered. The result shows that participation without financial resources is an empty promise.

Arnstein's (1969) famous ladder of participation puts real power for citizens at the top. She considers that control by the public over decision making is the criterion, but she does not specify clearly who is in the public. The model differentiates between 'citizens' and elected officials; the latter allocate funds and the citizens spend them. The citizen participation model tends to assume an undifferentiated mass of citizens with shared interests who, when granted decision-making power, will produce just outcomes. A weakness of this formulation lies in its expectation of the capability of citizen groups. Even, however, if we grant that citizens groups are well-meaning, possess sufficient expertise, are genuinely inclusive, and can reach agreement, we can raise the question of whether they are genuinely effective. Real power requires capture of elected positions and the capacity to determine allocations. The success of the Tea Party in the United States results from their seizure of political office, starting at the bottom with state legislatures and working up to members of Congress. It is control over budgetary distributions that constitutes real power, and this cannot (and should not) be achieved without the legitimacy of holding office.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I will illustrate my argument with the case of New York City. New York has been at the epicenter of three recent crises: the World Trade Center attack of 9/11/01; the implosion of financial markets in 2007-8; and Hurricane Sandy in 2012. A book published in 2005 that analysed the impact of the first of these events on the city's economy was entitled *Resilient City* (Chernick 2005). Mayor Bloomberg's recently released plan for dealing with future storm threats is entitled 'A Stronger, More Resilient New York.' In truth, New York has proved resilient in particular ways, but these ways have strongly benefited financial sector executives and real estate owners and developers. Reacting to 9/11 the federal government poured money into the city in a fashion quite different from after the 1975 fiscal crisis, when it was begrudging in its response; in fairness a substantial sum gave recompense to the families of those killed in the towers, and although the amount was calibrated according to the individuals' earnings, even low-paid workers received fairly generous sums. The big winner, however, was the developer Larry Silverstein, who was protected from any financial loss and given the right to rebuild on the site (Sagalyn 2005). After the collapse of the secondary mortgage market in 2007, the federal government stepped in with the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP), to the benefit of the financial institutions headquartered in New York (Gladstone and Fainstein 2013). Since then New York's rich have become richer, and everyone else has become poorer (US Bureau of the Census 2013).

The Mayor's proposal for a more resilient New York involves the construction of a giant new real-estate development on the East River adjacent to the downtown financial district. Allegedly this megaproject will simultaneously act as a buffer against rising waters and be an economic driver which supposedly will pay for itself (New York City 2013). A more just approach would focus on the areas of the city, primarily the barrier islands off of Queens and the Brooklyn waterfront, with large numbers of low-income households in fragile housing, retrofit that housing to the extent possible, or move the inhabitants to new construction on higher ground.

A proposal more sensitive to issues of justice, in both New York and elsewhere, would start with examining the situation of the most vulnerable populations and develop alternatives that would best protect them in the event of a major storm. In terms of financial crisis it would begin with figuring out how to make whole those who have lost their homes and jobs. I commented earlier that Marxian analysis offered important theoretical insights into the causes of crisis but not much in terms of how to plan for it in the here and now. Marxist terminology is very unstylish; it sounds too radical and is unacceptable to the dispensers of social science grant money. It points, however, to important facts about how issues of disaster recovery are normally addressed - that without radical questioning they devolve into a consensual agreement to value growth over equity and to encourage growth by directly benefiting

those who already are most advantaged. If, instead of starting with the question of how to bring the situation back to normal and assuming that there are not underlying conflicts of interest in terms of a desirable post-disaster situation, we started with the question of how best to make the lives better of the most vulnerable, we would move toward different policies.

Local planners have limited capacity to force the redistribution of resources since the national level is the principal source of revenues. Nevertheless, the planning of capital budget priorities, mapping of transportation systems, and zoning are within their purview. A city that is more just would respond to rising water levels by moving low-income residents to higher ground or else investing in either raising their buildings or creating buffers to protect against inundation. If it is determined that poor households need to move and that the likeliest location is a distance from the center, then transit systems to improve access, social services, and local amenities have to be developed along with housing.

The Rockefeller Foundation recently put out an RFP to city governments that stated: "public and private sector leaders are expressing an increasing desire to build greater resilience, yet many have neither the technical expertise nor the financial resources to create and execute resilience strategies on a city-wide scale, in a way that addresses the need of the poor or vulnerable people" (Rockefeller Foundation 2013).

It is doubtful, however, that technical expertise or financial resources are the primary explanation for the failure to address the need of poor or vulnerable people. Rather it is their lack of political power that explains why building a real-estate megaproject would be a priority for developing resilience.

Proposals that require spending a great deal of money on poor people are generally regarded as politically impossible and therefore are evaded. The discourse of evolutionary resilience and the apparent scientific precision of risk analysis allow conversations that fail to confront the real issue of which groups of the population will actually benefit from the expenditure of public resources. These conversations avoid divisiveness by assuming that everyone will benefit if resilience is enhanced, and the allusion to the great complexity involved in achieving resilience creates a cloud of obfuscation around the question of who is getting what. Planners can contribute to a more just city by using the information at their disposal to show clearly what are the stakes in any particular decision regarding environmental protection or economic development and advocate for policies that are more equitable. They may not succeed in overcoming the obstacles to more just outcomes, but by challenging the feel-good rhetoric characteristic of discussions of sustainability and resilience, they can help provide the basis for mobilisation that can ultimately change the boundaries of the politically possible.

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About MSSI:

The Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute (MSSI) is an inter-disciplinary research institute that aims to progress sustainability as a societal goal. MSSI provides a portal to all sustainability-related research at the University of Melbourne and forms a platform for multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional research projects.