

Resilience and Climate Change

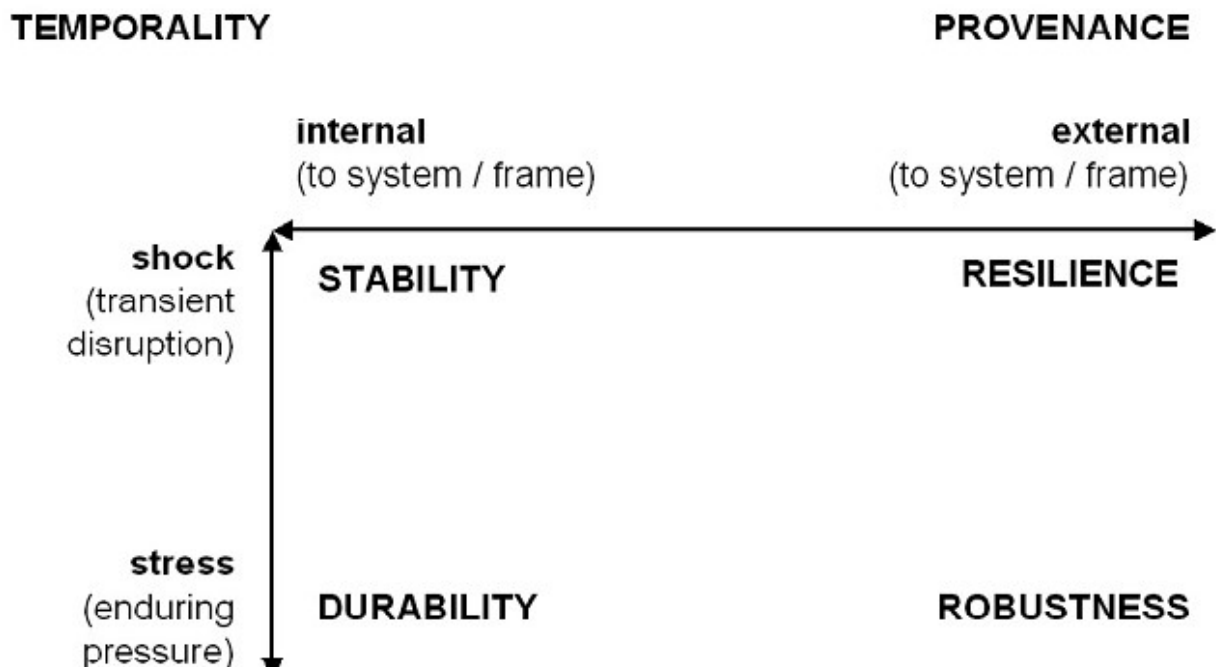
r u t u f e n u f ?

re·sil·ience noun Pronunciation[ri-zil-yuhns, -zil-ee-uhns]

1. the power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched; elasticity.
2. ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyancy.

Mostly we use words like “toughness”, “resilience”, “robustness” and “durability” as if they all meant the same thing. The chart below might help unpick that.

Figure 2: Dynamic system properties – across time (temporality) and origin (provenance)



from Scoones, I., Leach, M., Smith, A., Stagl, S., Stirling, A.D and Thompson, J. (2007) Dynamic Systems and the Challenge of Sustainability. STEPS Working Paper 1. Brighton, STEPS centre

So why does resilience matter?

Because if we think in terms of adaptation, that seems to suggest that we pick a band of likely futures and then design our physical (and political?) infrastructure to match that. But what if we're wrong, or the changes happen faster and then go further? Then we're left with a lot of kit that doesn't match our challenges. Resilience, to this writer, implies that we are humble about our ability to predict specific outcomes, and instead think about how to equip individuals and groups to cope with various shades of shitstorm.

So why might resilience be a *bad* idea?

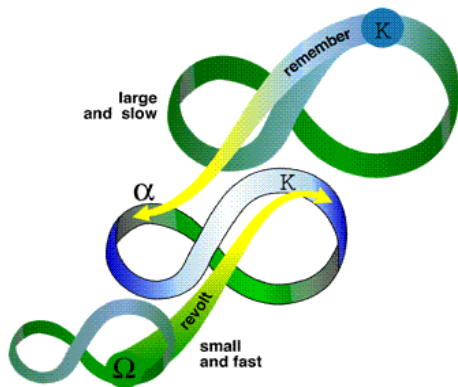
Because we will probably adopt a “devil take the hindmost” approach to the people who are the most vulnerable and least to blame for the mess we are in. Victim-blaming has a long and dishonourable history, after all. Resilience and justice may be very uncomfortable bed fellows... Often the guys writing about “resilience” forget (or never knew?) that one of the key methods of



controlling a population is to design resilience OUT of the pre-existing systems...

"When Sir Stamford Raffles went to Singapore, he went by way of Indonesia and saw how self-reliant people were with the palms that provided them with everything they needed. He said 'These people are ungovernable'. There was nothing the government could give them that they wanted or needed. So what had to be done was clear. Cut the fucking palms down, so they became dependent, and hence governable. You can't govern independent people. They have no need of anything you can bring them."

Bill Mollison (founder of 'permaculture') in Jeremy Seabrook's book 'Pioneers of Change'



“Panarchy is an odd name, but one that is meant to capture the way living systems both persist and yet innovate. It shows how fast and slow, small and big events and processes can transform ecosystems and organisms through evolution, or can transform humans and their societies through learning, or the chance for learning. The central question is what allows rare transformation, not simply change.” **C Buzz Holling**

Further Reading and Surfing

The **Stockholm Resilience Centre** is a new international centre that advances transdisciplinary research for governance of social-ecological systems with a special emphasis on resilience - the ability to deal with change and continue to develop. www.stockholmresilience.org

Resilience Alliance: <http://rs.resalliance.org/>

Adaptation to Environmental Change: Contributions to a Resilience Framework D Nelson, N. Adger and K. Brown Annual Review of Environment and Resources Vol. 32 November 2007

Network Structure, Diversity, and Proactive Resilience Building: a Response to Tompkins and Adger by Lenore Newman and Ann Dale Ecology and Society 10 (1)

Global Dashboard: www.globaldashboard.org/category/resilience/
see esp April 17th 2008 blog on Critical National Infrastructure

Community Resilience www.communityresilience.cc

Civil Contingencies Bureau www.ukresilience.info

“Go Call Fema” Al Baker song from “On the Use of Jackboots” www.albaker.co.uk/

Stuff on “Human Factors” training and “idiot proofing” technical systems (no system is idiot proof to a sufficiently talented and determined idiot...) <http://resilience-engineering.com/sd.html>

Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies
www.rusi.org/events/ref:E47556B3D308AF/

Notes from A Darkening Island by Christopher Priest

Triage by Leonard Lewin

Both these (rare) novels are referenced in Sven Lindqvist's “A History of Bombing,” which is worth a look...

(Life is a shit sandwich- the more bread you have, the less shit you are forced to eat. Money protects, money offers choices. You can't choose not to die, (After Many a Summer by Aldous Huxley) but you can get to the front of the organ-donors queue for the spare parts that may keep you going a bit longer.)