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Editorial

Ingrid Burkett

‘Resilience’ is a concept that is increasingly used to refer to a community’s ability to anticipate, survive, respond and recover in the face of disaster, decline and hardship. Originally the term was used to denote physical properties of materials such as timber or steel, and more recently it has been used by ecologists and environmentalists to refer to the ability of natural systems to recover from disease or destruction. Now policy makers and researchers are referring to ‘community resilience’ as a measure of our local and social ability to reduce risk and vulnerability in the face of adversity. This edition of Practice Insights delves into some key practical and critical issues around how the concept of community resilience is being used and how it can inform community development practice and policy.

A 2011 report on Community Resilience from the Carnegie UK Trust written by Nick Wilding (who is also featured in one of the articles in this edition of PI) suggests that the very notion of community resilience is contested, with no agreed upon definition of the concept. This report argues that perhaps it is about ‘future-proofing’ communities ‘on the basis of agreed values’ (Wilding 2011, p.5). The perspectives shared in this edition of PI illustrate that there are indeed variations in how ‘community resilience’ is viewed but there are threads of community about ‘what works’ when communities face adversity and collectively respond to an uncertain future.

Several of these articles explore community resilience in the face of disaster – both as an aim of disaster preparedness, but also in response to disaster. They demonstrate that community resilience in the face of natural disaster requires both the building of horizontal connections and social capital across communities, and that vertical structures and authorities actually engage with and trust community led actions and community level responses.

Further, it is clear that collective approaches are equally important at a system and structural level, so that responses are integrated rather than siloed and bureaucratic. If resilience is the focus of a programmematic response, an understanding of community needs and strengths within the structures and services that engage with communities is just as critical as growing preparedness at the community level.

The nature of ‘recovery’ is also contested. Physical restoration of infrastructure may happen more quickly than emotional adjustment, particularly if a crisis has resulted in loss of life, not just property or livelihoods. It is important that the emotional response of communities is recognised and incorporated into community development processes, and that community workers are supported to work alongside people in the immediate aftermath.

There are some great examples in this edition of following and harnessing the energy of communities in response to disaster. Sometimes the energy necessarily has to be on immediate needs and on ensuring the safety of people and securing infrastructure. But it is also important to encourage and support community-led action. Communities have a voice and a choice not just in relation to immediate responses but also in planning/designing recovery and rebuilding initiatives.

It is critical to recognize, however, that the things that divide communities do not necessarily disappear in the face of disaster and adversity, and that ‘recovery’ is not necessarily a logical outcome for all communities, nor for all within a community. Though often there is a natural ‘community in adversity’ response to the immediate crisis of natural disaster, structural inequalities, racism, class and cultural divisions can mean that some communities are further disadvantaged in processes of responses. The article by Andy Milne from the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum urges critical reflection in relation to policy initiatives which aim to enhance community resilience.

Another contribution, from Nympheo, a rural community in Greece, points to another kind of crisis for communities, albeit a more insipid and slow-burning one than that presented by natural disaster - that is, community decline. It asks us to consider how we can build cultural and economic resilience in our communities, future-proofing or actually re-imagining our communities into the future. This article, and the piece by Gill Musk and Nick Wilding about the transformation of Scotland’s public services, suggest that ‘resilience’ is not only about awareness raising and responding to adversity, it is also about imagining and adaptively building towards new futures.

This edition of Practice Insights provides much food for thought in the current global environment and in the face of many local struggles. I found myself reflecting on the role of community development in building responses and re-imaginings in the face of not just natural disasters, but to the increasing array of manmade disasters – war, terrorism, industrial disasters or cultural devastation. For me, this issue raised more questions. I asked myself, how do we collectively prepare and respond to catastrophes that are caused by our fellow citizens, or when communities are destroyed or dispersed, or when the very fibre of humanity is threatened within communities? What helps us to tap into responses that build rather than divide communities? And what helps us to begin to reconnect to each other even if recovery seems a very long way off?

Ingrid Burkett is the Managing Director of Knods, a social business, and Social Design Fellow at the Centre for Social Impact at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Ingrid served on the IACD Board of Directors from 2006 to 2014, latterly as President.

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Resilience, inequality and resistance

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Physical restoration of infrastructure may be just as critical as growing preparedness and vulnerability in the face of adversity. It is important that the emotional response of communities is recognised and incorporated into community development processes, and that community workers are supported to work alongside people in the immediate aftermath. There are some great examples in this edition of following and harnessing the energy of communities in response to disaster. Sometimes the energy necessarily has to be on immediate needs and on ensuring the safety of people and securing infrastructure. But it is also important to encourage and support community-led action. Communities have a voice and a choice not just in relation to immediate responses but also in planning/designing recovery and rebuilding initiatives.

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The role of community development in building resilience in response to disasters: the Queensland experience

Lynda Shevellar, Meredith Connor and Peter Westoby

Internationally, understanding and enhancing community resilience in the face of national disasters has emerged as a high priority. This was keenly felt in Australia during the summer of 2010-11 when extreme weather events caused significant and widespread losses.

According to official reports, “more than 320 of Australia’s 5,559 local government areas were disaster declared as a result of flooding, storms, cyclones and fires, with many areas affected by more than one disaster... The 2010-11 disasters were, in financial and economic terms, some of the largest in Australia’s history” (Government of Australia, 2012). In Queensland, more than 99% of the state was disaster declared (Queensland Reconstruction Authority, 2011; ABS, 2012).

In 2011, as part of a comprehensive policy response to these disasters, the Australian and Queensland State Governments injected money into building individual and community resilience and improving effective governance in response to disasters. The Community and Development Engagement Initiative (CDEI) included the largest amount of funding into formal community development (CD) programs in recent years with the funding of 24 community development officers (CDOs) across Queensland for 24 months (from June 2011-June 2013).

As practitioner-academics located in Queensland, we sought to understand how practitioners located in the largest amount of funding into building individual and community resilience, as well as interviews with nine program stakeholders. What emerged were two very different conversations, which we will summarise here.

An appreciative inquiry

The first conversation was a highly appreciative one, reflecting the strengths-based intentions of the program. We heard of the highly constructive and creative community work that occurred. For example, it was evident that the CDOs drew upon communities’ knowledge, expertise and experience to generate community capacity building projects that established and supported community groups and networks. One stakeholder, reflecting on the strengths of this process, commented: “People in our [community development] team are talking to the community groups and building those relationships and helping them in ways they’ve got a direct relationship with the council, with each other, then with their own communities.”

The kinds of initiatives supported by the CDOs were as varied as the communities themselves, and included community gardens, choirs, family fun days, markets, movies in the park, the establishment of Men’s Sheds, youth and seniors events. Numerous practical projects were also developed ranging from brochures and fridge magnets to USBs that provided information about disaster preparedness.

Culturally oriented CD was especially important in the recognition of resilience. Many CDOs worked with communities to produce outstanding arts projects to celebrate resilience and recovery. These included the creation of public art pieces (murals, mosaics, sculptures), facilitating art workshops and exhibitions, musical events, theatre performances, photographic workshops, exhibitions and books, dance performances and workshops, history books and digital storytelling.

Other CDOs took a more social CD approach and focused on strengthening the links between service providers and strengthening local organisations. As one CDO observed, “Other community organisations and agencies have been exceptionally open to the CDEI initiative. They’ve been exceptionally good. Salvation Army, Red Cross, I have working partnerships with a range of organisations and I can say that they’ve been brilliant. Everyone has the same vision for recovery and resilience.”

Other projects were future focussed. For example, advancing social connectivity and networking skills was the driver behind the Fordham Park Alpha Jockey Club Inc. that held its first race meeting since 2002. The race day was seen as an opportunity for remote and rural community members to maintain vital social connections and to become actively involved in the process of sharing their skills, resources and networks to restore the dilapidated race course and facilities.

Importantly, CDOs identified that, “restoring their sense of fun” (P10) was key to restoring community wellbeing. As one CDO commented, “you have to create a sense of community when the community’s been fractured. And how do you do that? You make it fun.”

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Involving communities in processes of sharing and learning was seen as an opportunity for remote areas of Australia mean that the officers employed did not all have experience or training in CD and some were not residents of the locality.

Additionally, there was enormous pressure on CDOs to have clear, measurable outcomes. The program had extremely tight accountability mechanisms that most CDOs described as “onerous” and tools that placed emphasis upon quantity and outputs. Yet as one stakeholder reflected, “you’re asking people to change their attitudes; you’re asking people to break habits and make decisions for themselves, behavioural change – you can’t measure that in the terms that a government bean counter can measure.”

A critical inquiry

The second conversation required a more complex and critical stance and led to the unhappy conclusion that CDOs’ build capacity for future resilience “with great difficulty”, “in spite of the program” and sometimes, at great personal cost.

While CD is often undertaken in diverse environments, its role and practice in a post-disaster context is relatively new and unexplored field that can create particular tensions and challenges (Ife, 2013). For instance, the stakeholders are different (emergency personnel and disaster management personnel embedded within local government).

As infrastructure is being rebuilt, community workers find themselves engaging with a broader range of council programs and professionals (e.g. engineers, environment teams etc). The context is different. Community workers enter when people are raw and in grief and experiencing loss. While this may be true of other communities, the difference is that the impact is across the whole population. In this program, much of the focus was non-metropolitan. Furthermore, the extraordinary difficulty of recruiting people to work in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia meant that the officers employed did not all have experience or training in CD and some were not residents of the locality.

The positioning of the CDOs within a state government framework created an additional challenge. The time constraints and political nature of the program, involving all three layers of government; highly sensitive issues of death, grief, loss, economic fallout, and media attention all placed enormous pressure on CDOs to have highly visible aspects to their work.

“Another community organisation and agencies have been exceptionally open to the CDEI initiative. They’ve been exceptionally good. Salvation Army, Red Cross, I have working partnerships with a range of organisations and I can say that they’ve been brilliant. Everyone has the same vision for recovery and resilience.”
Community resilience

Jim Diers and Mary-Jane Rivers

In the aftermath of a disaster, people discover what is most important – their relationship with one another. That was certainly true with the 2011 Canterbury earthquakes in New Zealand. As one survivor put it, “It was a time when neighbours, family, friends and strangers stopped opening conversations with ‘What school did you go to?’ and replaced it with ‘Are you OK? How can we help? Let’s check on each other.’”

The ingredients of resilience: experiences from New Zealand and the USA

Christchurch is the largest city of New Zealand’s south island, and the main city of Canterbury region. Following the earthquakes, neighbours came together throughout Christchurch to support one another and to create “Gapfiller” projects which transformed the sites of demolished buildings into creative community gathering places (www.gapfiller.org.nz).

One of these, on Colombo Street, consists of a wall painted as a chalkboard inviting visitors to share their poetry. Kirsty Dunn contributed the following poem that was so popular it now appears in permanent paint:

Amidst the shards of glass & twisted steel
Beside the fallen brick & scattered concrete
we began to understand
that there is beauty in the broken
Strangers do no live here anymore

While disasters tend to create an instant sense of community that is more typically built over time, resilience requires that strong communities be in place before a disaster. Too often, people discover the importance of community when it is too late.

In his book ‘Heat Wave’, Eric Klinenberg documents the serious consequences that a social capital deficit had for the health of Chicago’s North Lawndale neighbourhood. North Lawndale is located adjacent to Little Village, a neighbourhood with a similar proportion of low-income seniors living alone. That similarity notwithstanding, Little Village’s busy streets and vibrant businesses fostered social connections, while North Lawndale’s lack of commercial activity and high crime rate caused its residents to live in isolation. Klinenberg cites that isolation as the major reason why North Lawndale experienced a death rate ten times higher than Little Village’s in the heat wave that claimed the lives of over 700 Chicagoans in 1995.

Close to Christchurch, the village of Lyttelton demonstrated the resilience made possible by a well-connected community. Lyttelton has a population of only 5000 but has about 30 community associations including a timebank of 461 members. These residents know one another – their skills as well as their needs. Mutual support is a way of everyday life designed in as part of community systems. So, when the earthquakes struck Lyttelton, the residents were prepared. Even though Civil Defence Lyttelton (a government-managed operation) was deployed to central Christchurch, the community had abundant resources. These included: a Volunteer Fire Brigade to lead the response; an information centre which served as the hub; a volunteer-operated radio station for communication; and the timebank, churches, community house and other networks which provided volunteers and neighbours to check on elderly residents, remove dangerous chimneys, find accommodation, cook meals, handle donated supplies, meet a myriad of other needs, and create heart-shaped brooches to help lift people’s spirits. (See Project Lyttelton: www.lyttelton.net.nz/)

References


Meredith Connor is a social researcher who considers herself fortunate in being able to combine disaster management research with her work as a community development practitioner.

In conclusion

Given current predictions about climate change and the inevitable increase in both the frequency and severity of disasters, we suggest that community work cannot simply be viewed as an add-on to be implemented for political gain in times of crisis. Community development needs to be seen as an essential part of a disaster management response, but needs good thinking and a much longer-term investment if it is to realise its potential in this arena.

Such experiences accord with a global shift in development where practice is being strongly driven by what is being called “the results agenda” (Eyben, 2013). There was little recognition in this space of the less tangible, organic processes of community work. This created a tension for CDOs who were caught between being responsive to the accountability/audit culture of government and the longer-term relational and partnership needs of community work. As one CDO explained “CD is years, it’s lifetimes, it’s not, ‘Here’s a bucket of money for two years’, it doesn’t make an ongoing, sustainable community; it makes a benefit and we’ve been able to do a 2013). There was little recognition in this arena.

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Agencies and their professionals have key roles to play, but they are no substitute for strong communities:

- **neighbours** are typically the first responders, and they will be there for the long run
- **volunteers** can multiply the available resources
- **community initiatives** tend to be more spontaneous, innovative and ‘owned’
- **residents** provide invaluable local knowledge and a more connected and holistic perspective
- a community instills the sense of belonging and spirit of hope that is critical to recovery
- **active communities** have a voice that can’t be ignored if their needs aren’t being addressed or their aspirations aren’t being respected

### What role can agencies play in helping people prepare for and respond to disasters?

1. **Don’t organise people for disaster.**
   - Organise people for disaster.
   - **Agencies and their professionals have key roles to play, but they are no substitute for strong communities:**
     - **neighbours** are typically the first responders, and they will be there for the long run.
     - **volunteers** can multiply the available resources.
     - **community initiatives** tend to be more spontaneous, innovative and ‘owned’.
     - **residents** provide invaluable local knowledge and a more connected and holistic perspective.
     - A community instills the sense of belonging and spirit of hope that is critical to recovery.
     - **active communities** have a voice that can’t be ignored if their needs aren’t being addressed or their aspirations aren’t being respected.

### Case Study

**Jim visited Kobe, Japan after the 1995 earthquake. Residents had organised to oppose redevelopment plans that the local government had drafted with no community consultation. Community members developed their own plans and used them as a way to negotiate with government officials. Residents became invested in their ideas and formed associations to build and maintain projects including a park, community gardens, a community center, and a memorial to local earthquake victims.**

### Case Study

**Tomi Ross lived in a beautiful Victorian house in the Kenwick neighbourhood of Lexington, Kentucky. While she was away, lightning struck and the house burned down. Neighbours salvaged whatever they could of Tomi’s belongings, found her a place to stay nearby, and loaned her their furniture. Local children drew pictures of the old house which they presented to Tomi together with the proceeds from a lemonade stand. Tomi decided to rebuild a house on the site in the same Victorian style that the neighbours loved. When the house was completed, she erected a brass plaque that reads: “This home built with the support of loving neighbors and friends.”**

### Christmas nativity scene for a heavily damaged church for Christmas. Others knitted covers – with fun and heart warming messages – for shipping containers that had been placed to catch falling rocks and boulders. Facebook was the major connector for this organic organising.

#### Factors affecting community resilience

A 2013 study of Christchurch’s Community Resilience found 8 key factors that affected community resilience:

- **community connectedness** (top of the list), then
- the opportunity to get together
- community infrastructure – organisations, groups, meeting places etc.
- access to external support
- responsive, official decision-making processes
- people’s wellbeing
- survival skills
- the extent of the adversity

### What happened next?

Since the earthquakes, many initiatives have become even stronger. Gapfiller has continued to grow and is now seen as an internationally leading edge approach.

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2. Civil Defence and Emergency Management is operated by civil defence government. It carries the government responsibility for New Zealand. [Communities.](http://www.community.govt.nz)
4. [http://www.cyclingcommunityresilience.co.nz](http://www.cyclingcommunityresilience.co.nz)
Learning to live with flood disasters in Miga community, Jigawa State, Nigeria

Muhammad Bello Shitu PhD

Miga Local Government Area of Jigawa State is one of the flood prone areas in Nigeria. It is located in the Sudan Savannah belt of Northern Nigeria, and lies within the Hadeja-Jama’are River Basin region. The people are mainly Hausa/Fulani engaged in farming and animal rearing as the dominant occupation. The area experiences perennial flood disasters whose devastating effects have created extreme deprivations among the population. The 2012 flood disaster destroyed property estimated at over 100 mln Nigerian Naira ($65,000 USD) in Miga community and environs alone. Houses, markets, stores, office buildings, farmlands, crops, animals, schools, clinics were all affected by the floods.

In the past, flood situations forced all economic and social activities to a standstill while residents are waiting for intervention by government agencies at different levels. The Local Government Council also folds its arms in anticipation of some response from the state and Federal Government. A resident of Miga remarked “… waiting for external support has never helped us in the past. Sometimes the waiting is endless and when support comes it does not address the challenges we are facing. Moreover, government is concerned about giving them hand outs of food, mats, blankets; usually in insufficient quantities and distribution bodevilled by favouritism.” Another member of the community Musa Ibrahim said “our livelihoods have been badly affected and, as strong and healthy as we are, we have been pauperised by the disaster and lukewarm attitude of public functionaries”. A mother of 5 children also shared her concerns on the issue, as she is of the view that whenever their community experience flooding which is a recurring phenomenon, women, girls and children suffer the most especially because they are left as refugees without support. She added that some of the youths and adult males migrate to the state capital Dutse town leaving them to cater for the children, the elderly and other people who have specific needs in the community. A teenage divorced woman lamented that it was the floods that caused her husband to abandon her for 14 months because her husband lost everything to the 2011 floods: his farmlands, crops, granary, two rooms and all his goats. Another young pregnant married lady said “It was after the serious flooding two years ago that I had to abandon schooling; we couldn’t go to school because of the floods. I began to hawk Koluts to help my mother and the following year I was married off. I have since realized that one has to prepare for the floods.”

Sometime in May 2012, some youths in the community discussing privately began to raise questions about how something needs to be done collectively to address the untold hardships people faced annually with the floods. A youth leader said “… one day in our ‘majlis’ (rest/discussion arena), a friend named Gorba remarked, ‘we can’t continue like this, the time of flooding is fast approaching, we must start somewhere and do something within our capability to reduce the impact of the flood especially for our younger ones’”. He went further to narrate that another colleague exclaimed, “This is time for action not words, and we shouldn’t wait for government, but seek for alternative solutions especially in relation to our farms and livestock.” This discussion culminated in a consensus on mobilising other youths and all members of the community to prepare for the floods whenever it comes. Tasks were agreed and assigned after the informal meeting and a formal meeting was convened in June 2012 to discuss progress, and the flood disaster management plans. He concluded in Hausa language by saying “gari ya waye mana, mu gane amfanin taimakan juna”, meaning “for us it is a new dawn, we now know the value of self help and mutual support.” The seed of resilience was sown as people of Miga community began to anticipate what may likely happen after the flooding and had initiated some efforts to limit the negative influence of the floods on their livelihoods with the hope of continuing or starting a new life in spite of the imminent challenges.

“gari ya waye mana, mu gane amfanin taimakan juna… for us it is a new dawn, we now know the value of self help and mutual support”

Muhammad Labaran, a nomadic herdsman in Miga, said that they began to experience heavy rainfall around the last week of August 2012 and, by the first week of September, it was clear to all that Miga community would witness another flood. This was corroborated by Malaim Hamasu who said “The bed and basins of the Hadeja-Jama’are River had begun to swell to the brim and the imminent danger of swallowing our hard earned property, our animals and the weak is in sight.” A community development officer with the Miga Local Government Council said the flood attack which used to be piece meal and intermittent in the previous years strike with full force precisely on September 17, 2012. The youth leader said their initial mobilisation efforts in May, June and July on the impending flood gave them some strength to mitigate the effects of the devastating flood. The youths had collected empty sacks/bags, foodstuff, blankets, mats and second hand clothing as gifts from volunteers, which were then put to use to cushion the effects of the September 17th floods. Those whose buildings were affected were promptly rescued and supported. Instead of waiting for tents from government, affected persons were moved into other houses where they were assisted by other families. The materials donated by community members before the floods were distributed equitably to those in difficult circumstances. Men, women, boys and girls all came out to collect sand and fill the empty bags/sacks so as to create protective cover in strategic locations. Several sand bags were produced at no financial costs to the community and were effectively used to avert serious catastrophes that otherwise would have been created by the flood. A primary school teacher commented thus “… the volume of water this time was close to five or six times more than that of 2011 but the impact on our dwelling places and activity centres in the community is not as bad as it was in 2011 because people are aware of their time, resources, energy to support each other in minimising the devastating effect that could have happened in 2012”. He added that the Local Government Council was encouraged by the communal spirit shown by the people and they also came with their assistance, which was not the case in the past. It was reported by many residents that the Local Government Chairperson actively participated in the communal labour of fixing the sand bags as emblematic to prevent water spill into the built up area.

Another unique innovative response by the community has to do with their concern for the children in school. In fact one of the key sectors seriously affected by the perennial flooding in the community is basic education (primary and junior secondary schooling) especially in terms of attendance, completion and quality, with girls being worst off in all situations.

The people knew how floods in the past had kept their children out of school for months leading to drop outs and reduced learning time for the academic session. The youths had vowed to address this challenge. Attention was focused on ensuring safety of the school buildings and the learners. Protective sand bags were placed around the flood prone areas near the school compound which included both Miga Special Primary school and the Government Junior Secondary School. The school pupils were also involved in collecting sand to reinforce the embankments. One of the pupils interviewed said he was not forced to carry the sand but felt it a duty for him to support the community efforts towards safeguarding the school in the face of the flood. A girl in the upper primary class said “I don’t want the school to be closed down because of the flood, so I am giving a helping hand so that we can continue with our studies…”. The youth leader also said they were involved in some form of community counselling initiatives around coping with the stress created by the effects of the floods and encouraging parents to allow their children to go to school, assuring them of their safety. A youth group was mobilised to stay around the school premises to assist learners coming to school while some volunteers went inside homes to ask that pupils be sent to school.

A major challenge the community faced was their inability to simultaneously and collectively address the devastation on their farms. It was not possible to do anything at that time because all the farms were flooded and the security of their lives was threatened with the surge of the water into residential areas. Saving lives first was the overriding concern. The resilience of Miga community in the face of the 2012 flood disaster using their skills, low cost and no cost resources was highly effective in mitigating the effects of the flood. I was told that months later some people received some assistance from the state government but this wouldn’t have saved lives if not for the initial community response.

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Community resilience work in Great Yarmouth: a neighbourhood and community development approach

Holly Nottcutt and Jan Davis, Great Yarmouth Borough Council

Great Yarmouth, on Norfolk’s east coast, England, has its fair share of local emergencies. In recent years these have included major fires, unexploded bombs, chlorine gas release, and severe property damage from high winds. A key concern is the town’s vulnerability to a North Sea tidal surge, which is shared by many low-lying communities along the coast. Specific emergency plans are in place for widespread tidal flooding – this would be a major disaster for the town. There are still people in the town who remember spending wet and cold nights on rooftops during the floods of January 1953 which claimed many lives along the east coast and many more in Holland. In November 2007 another major North Sea tidal surge threatened the town resulting in a major evacuation of residents to stay with friends and family or in rest centres located out of the flood zone. It was a close-run thing, with the water level only centimetres away from flooding large parts of the town, but the wind changed at the last minute and the danger abated.

With such a range of threats, experienced and potential, it is important for residents, businesses, elected members (locally elected politicians) and anyone involved in the town to have an awareness of the threats and an appreciation of how to respond “if the worst happens”. Community resilience has therefore become an integral part of emergency planning in Great Yarmouth, and not considered as “add-on”; rather it is seen as a two-way process of sharing information, views, opinion and guidance between the community and emergency responders, to foster mutual understanding and confidence.

With only one dedicated Emergency Planning Manager, we felt that for community resilience to be more formally developed it had to be understood and supported by those already working within communities.

There are still people in the town who remember spending wet and cold nights on rooftops during the floods of January 1953 which claimed many lives along the east coast and many more in Holland.

In rural areas in England, the focal point for developing ‘community resilience’ is often the Parish Council. They lead on it, create a local emergency plan, and submit the plan to the local authority – job done. In an urban community, without a parish council, we knew the approach had to be different. But importantly, we felt it needed to be different, that there should be a significant emphasis on raising awareness, really building capacity and trust, and going beyond the completion of a plan by a few.

In an urban community, such as Community Resilience.

The Community Development Workers (CDWs) aim to involve local people in making decisions about their street, estate, community, etc. In support of the street level work, a Neighbourhood Manager coordinates and involves relevant service providers along with residents to develop strategic and longer-term plans for the neighbourhood. In order to involve as many people as possible in leading and developing initiatives, significant attention has to be paid to ensuring that sufficient time is set aside for the forming and development of relationships. This is recognised as crucial to effective and meaningful engagement at the local community level.

‘Participating’ is often not an automatic step for some people. This is true particularly amongst those who previously have been less likely to engage with public services and/or social and community development initiatives. Just as it would take some time for a person you meet for the first time to become a good enough acquaintance to invite for dinner regularly, so it also takes time for people to gain enough familiarity or trust to become fully involved or even empowered to participate in developing local initiatives, such as Community Resilience.

As with the majority of communities, we have a hardworking and dedicated core of people who previously have been particularly amongst those who previously have been less likely to engage with public services and/or social and community development initiatives.

Cooking for resilience!

Local mums – creators of ‘The Den’ youth club
Resilience, inequality and resistance

Andy Milne

Resilience certainly seems to be the word of the moment in the UK, and it is an interesting one. Taken alongside ‘austerity’ measures and paranoid propaganda about ‘foreigners’ in all their imaginary forms, it sounds like a distorted echo of those amusingly naïve 1940s public service announcements that English comedian Harry Enfield used to parody: “Keep calm and carry on. Things may get a bit bumpy old chap but don’t mind the destruction all around you. Keep your chin up and your head down. Above all, don’t rock the boat. Just remember, we’re all in this together!”

Spirit of the times

The true spirit of resilience that was distilled in the shared experience of real adversity during World War II was strong enough to spark substantial progress in UK social policy and national reconstruction. It seems ironic that those same constructions of social and economic solidarity are now under attack in the current more home-generated crisis.

Whatever its cause, as with almost any calamity anywhere, it is the people with the least who lose the most. And still, it is the poorest communities that are targeted by the repeated calls for ever more ‘resilience’ are directed at. The current spin is that greater resilience will help create the vital shared spirit that we lost somewhere in the heady excesses of unregulated debt fuelled, consumerist greed over the last three decades. The catch is that the people who are being urged to show the most resilience aren’t even invited to that party.

The current spin is that greater resilience will help recreate the vital shared spirit that we lost somewhere in the heady excesses of unregulated, debt fuelled, consumerist greed over the last three decades. The current spin is that greater resilience will help recreate the vital shared spirit that we lost somewhere in the heady excesses of unregulated, debt fuelled, consumerist greed over the last three decades.

Ironies aside

As Scotland’s independent regeneration network (SURF: Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum) has a strong interest in where the solutions for more sustainable regeneration might be found. Ironies aside, the unique assets of our communities, particularly those in more unequal society in the developed world. It’s not as if the problem is not already well understood. The 2009 SURF Annual Lecture featured Professor Kate Pickett and her widely referenced book ‘The Spirit Level’. It provided exhaustive detail on the ‘inequality and its impact on health and well-being’. It is well understood. The 2009 SURF Annual Lecture featured Professor Kate Pickett and her widely referenced book ‘The Spirit Level’. It provided exhaustive detail on the Spirit of the times. It is well understood. The 2009 SURF Annual Lecture featured Professor Kate Pickett and her widely referenced book ‘The Spirit Level’. It provided exhaustive detail on the

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In an interview with IACD’s Gill Musk, Nick Wilding, Workforce Innovation Programme Manager at the Scottish Social Services Council, describes an initiative called ‘Skilled Workers, Skilled Citizens’, which aims to tackle the need for public service reform from the inside out.

In order for people to feel they are trusted, the traditional cultures and structures of our organisations need to support this change. Otherwise, a pattern of a few extraordinary people bucking the system will remain, with little evidence that entire organisations are being transformed to be in service of shifting power for the design and delivery of services towards citizens. As part of a much wider reform programme of public service reform in Scotland, we are focusing on discovering, celebrating and sharing practical and ideas about changing how learning happens.

The Vibrant Communities team. Photo courtesy of East Ayrshire Council

“[these pioneers] share some clear, common values: developing trusting relationships everywhere, building on the strengths and untapped potential of everyone, and of professionals letting go of power and control in deciding how services develop and run. Ultimately, we are connecting people who share a common purpose in creating the conditions for all of us to play our full part in creating more vibrant, resilient communities.

In our conversation, we talked over some of the significant challenges to building enduring cultural change: decades of institutional history and habits, including a policy environment that continues to perpetuate a ‘targets’ culture which can mitigate against preventative, asset-focused approaches.

Nick has been encouraged, however, by his findings so far: “Now a year into the programme, we have been surprised by how many people have, often under the radar, already been developing what we might call an ‘assets approach’ to workforce development - although they may not be using this language.

“We have found that these people share some clear commonalities: developing trusting relationships everywhere, building on the strengths and untapped potential of everyone, and of professionals letting go of power and control in deciding how services develop and run. Ultimately, we are connecting people who share a common purpose in creating the conditions for all of us to play our full part in creating more vibrant, resilient communities.

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“I’ve been amazed at some of the conversations I’ve had over the last few months... working in this way is showing that there are people with great integrity, courage and passion working in every area of public life in Scotland. They give me hope that this is a movement that might achieve big things.”

In 2011 the Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services made radical proposals for reforming public services in Scotland. In an age of declining resources and escalating need, their report pointed out that services were completely unsustainable if they carried along the same track. Moreover, it highlighted mounting evidence that remaining resources into prevention could both save money and create the conditions where more resilient communities could emerge. It signpost that services should become more integrated, and embed assets approaches in the everyday work. The question was: how to achieve this?

This is how ‘Skilled Workers, Skilled Citizens’ came about. Nick explains the process: “We are supporting pioneers across public services in Scotland who are attempting to transform how their organisations do workforce development. In an age of co-production, where users of services are ever more engaged in designing and running their services – traditional ideas about who the workforce is, and how they can best learn how to do their work well, are being challenged. Alongside this, organisations are talking about trusting workers to take initiative; of bringing ‘our whole selves’ to work, and of supporting us to develop our emotional intelligence alongside the ability to enable people to help themselves. But are these just words? What does it take to create organisations where these things happen as a matter of course?“

The Vibrant Communities team. Photo courtesy of East Ayrshire Council

“...bringing people together to find a strong common voice, by sharing and reflecting together on what works in practice... This is resilience building in action!”

We’re curious to know of how publicly funded organisations have gone on similar journeys, and in particular how their approach to developing their own people to work in assets-based ways. What kinds of mechanisms help people to learn how to do things differently? To contribute your ideas contact Anna Chworow anna.chworow@iacdglobal.org

The Scottish Natural Heritage is tasked to conserve Scotland’s land – and has traditionally focused on the strengths of its staff – often scientists with specialist know-how about protecting wild areas. Increasingly however, SNH staff need to be skilful in relating with community planning partners. As a Skilled Worker, Skilled Citizen pioneer, SNH is asking how it can ‘open up’ and re-skill its workforce to become much, much better at ‘the people stuff’.

Nick comments, “I came to this work having spent 5 years with the Carnegie UK Trust, developing a Community of Practice for rurally-based community resilience pioneers across the UK and Ireland. The Community of Practice (www.fairyspirits.com) in 2011 produced a handbook of some of that community’s knowledge, ‘Exploring Community Resilience’. That work demonstrated for me the power of bringing people together to find a strong common voice, by sharing and reflecting together on what works in practice. This is resilience building in action! With Skilled Workers, Skilled Citizens, there is now an opportunity to take a similar approach towards enabling public sector organisations on the first steps towards transforming themselves.

‘Enabling City’ is a toolkit showcasing pioneering initiatives in urban sustainability and open governance. Written by an Italian researcher Chara Campioneschi, it explores a new way of thinking about urban communities and change. The publication presents cities as alive, dynamic, collaborative spaces where local communities and nascent ‘hoods’ play the role of social innovation and creative problem-solving. The book is available under a Creative Commons 2.0 licence from www.enablingcity.com.

‘Practical Action to Build Community Resilience’ is a report published by Joseph Rowntree Foundation as part of the Climate Change and Social Justice programme. It evaluates the impact of the Good Life Initiative, which aimed to help the residents of the low-income community of New Earswick, UK to engage with issues of environmental sustainability. The report highlights the practical actions undertaken as part of the initiative, and relates lessons learned to theoretical and policy contexts. Both the summary and the full report are available from www.jrf.org.uk/publications/practical-action-build-community-resilience.

Useful Reads

Chworow anna.chworow@iacdglobal.org

The full report are available from www.resilience.org.

resilience.org is an information clearinghouse for resources focused on building community resilience. Supported by the Post Carbon Institute, the website forms a library of news articles, documents, video, and audio resources for community activists and practitioners. To explore more, please visit www.resilience.org.

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Gill Musk and Nick Wilding
Community resilience, cultural identity and heritage: Nympheo, Greece and the HISTCAPE project

Kostas Karamarkos, Rand Eppich, Alexandra Kulmer and Juan Carlos Espada

Rural communities everywhere are often susceptible to long, slow declines. Industries fail, agriculture is no longer economically viable and the younger generations move to cities in search of better opportunities. Such was the case with Nympheo in the remote northwestern mountains of Greece. Originally one of the best known and largest regional centres of silversmith in the 19th century, by the 1980s the village was nearly deserted with fewer than 80 inhabitants. Now Nympheo is a thriving active community that in 2000 won the European Union Renaissance Village Distinction Award.

What has made the difference? How has this community rebounded? What are the secrets of Nympheo’s resilience?

In the early 1990s, the remaining community members along with former residents and surrounding communities banded together and began to take matters into their own hands. They built upon Nympheo’s three major assets: the surrounding natural landscape and wildlife, the historic village and its rich cultural heritage. Most importantly, the community’s intense pride of place. They recognised their rich natural and architectural heritage and had a strong desire to protect and preserve their community. Volunteers groups were organised and began to protect the surrounding forests, streets and repair the roofs, stone walls and windows of the village.

Gradually the community’s effort and vision attracted influential individuals and institutions. Many well-known civil engineers, architects and mechanical engineers donated their time and expertise to continue the projects in Nympheo adding to the volunteer effort. Many large and small businesses companies responded with in-kind contributions. The YMCA of Thessaloniki, which was inaugurated in 2000 and located in an old historic building, Nympheo has been classified as a landscape of outstanding natural beauty and the village is protected by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture to preserve its unique architectural integrity. Several cultural events are held throughout the year associated with local regional and international festivals.

Nympheo in winter image courtesy of ARTICURÓ 2013

Today, Nympheo is doing well and is known throughout Greece for the community’s efforts.

The community rejected the idea of economic growth for its own sake but envisioned a development model based on environmental protection and historic preservation.

The community has undertaken nearly 50 major projects since the late 1990s including the Museum of Gold and Silver, Folklore and History, which was inaugurated in 2000 and located in an historic building. Nympheo has been classified as a landscape of outstanding natural beauty and the village is protected by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture to preserve its unique architectural integrity. Several cultural events are held throughout the year associated with local regional and international festivals.

The example of Nympheo reveals an innovative attempt to balance cultural values by community support and therefore was identified as a good practice by the Region of Western Macedonia within the interregional cooperation project, HISTCAPE (www.histcape.com). The project is part of the INTERREG IV C Programme (www.interreg4c.eu/) financed by the European Union’s Regional Development Fund to help areas of Europe share their knowledge and transfer experience to improve regional policies.

Nympheo Process, their successes and failures, and plans for the future. Team partners from other regions of Europe discussed how the Nympheo example could help them in their communities.

Good community practice in the conservation of urban settlements and their surrounding landscapes, like those of Nympheo, can serve as examples for improving governance, economic development and sustainable tourism management. However, good innovative examples are often difficult to uncover and harder to comprehend. Many occur simply by chance, are the work of dedicated individuals, difficult to transfer or regionally specific. Some of the greatest challenges are uncovering the formulas that make these good practices successful and then adapting them for implementation elsewhere in communities facing similar problems.

HISTCAPE focuses on cultural heritage and historic assets in small rural communities. While most of Europe’s population is concentrated in large settlements, over 80% of its territory is rural in character. These rural landscapes are home to a scattered pattern of smaller historic towns and villages, like the rural community Nympheo. The HISTCAPE project is addressing the challenges and problems of these communities which have traditionally acted as focal points of economic activity and are now under serious threat. The idea of HISTCAPE is to create fresh perspectives geared towards the creation of new tools and policies adapted for the sustainable management, development and protection of smaller communities.

The project is doing this by identifying, investigating and evaluating good practice examples, transferring them to policy recommendations and testing new policy instruments through pilot implementations. The project is following a strict methodology for identifying and evaluating good practice and is now beginning to share preliminary results. A guidebook and articles are currently being written that highlight experiences and successes such as Nympheo. The project team is made up of 12 partners from across Europe, including regional authorities, universities and a research consultancy.

In the winter of 2012 an international conference was held in Nympheo. It brought together community members, project partners and invited experts to conduct exercises and investigate firsthand their success. Local community volunteers and leaders spoke of the ‘bottom-up’ Nympheo Process, their successes and failures, and plans for the future. Team partners from other regions of Europe discussed how the Nympheo example could help them in their communities.

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The International Association for Community Development (IACD) is the only global network for community development workers, researchers and activists. We support development agencies and practitioners to build the capacity of communities, to realise greater social and economic equality, environmental protection and political democracy. We are a non-governmental organisation accredited with the UN.

There are many ways that you can become involved in IACD. If you are a development agency manager, funder, fieldwork practitioner, academic, student or volunteer community activist, IACD can help you through our international practice exchanges, events and publications. If you have a passion for effective community development, then please make contact with us – we welcome your participation!

Join today and become a part of this dynamic network!

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