

Discussion of Brian Walker and David Salt, *Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World*. (Washington DC, Island Press, 2006)

Mershon Research Network in Cultural Resilience

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"Resilience is the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and still retain its basic function and structure" (Walker and Salt, xiii).

Why look at the ecological concept of resilience if we are interested in threatened languages and cultures?

1. Analogy. The nature-culture analogy is deep in theory (Romantic organicism, evolutionism, structural-functionalism, etc.), method (field collection and archiving, community studies, etc.) and policy (endangered species protection, preservation, conservation, cultural diversity, etc.). Risky but good to think with?

2. Interaction. Cultural precarity, human precarity, and environmental precarity frequently go together, although not always in simple correlation (cf. William Labov, "Unendangered Dialect, Endangered People: the Case of African American Vernacular English," *Transforming Anthropology* 18 (2010): 15-27.) Resilience theory emphasizes open, multiscale, dynamic systems rather than predefined domains.

3. Compatibility with vernacular/traditional practice? "Strictly speaking, resilience thinking is not new--many traditional societies and small-scale rural farmers still give high priority to the need to manage their environment to reduce risks and buffer themselves from droughts or other surprises" (Walker and Salt, xi). See also James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven: Yale, 1998) on the notion of *metis*.

4. Metadiscourse. A new "keyword," already in use in the situations we study, in relation to environmental, economic, and human security issues if not yet cultural ones. An alternative framework to that of heritage, though also to human rights, social justice, etc. What are its affordances and limitations?

WHO'S TALKING ABOUT RESILIENCE

Resilience in new-style environmentalism (communalist rather than statist)

" Resilience.org supports the building of community responses to the many inter-related crises of our time with information, resources and connections."

-- <http://www.resilience.org/>

Resilience Alliance: Research on Resilience in Social-Ecological Systems, A Basis for Sustainability

-- <http://www.resalliance.org/>

Stockholm Resilience Centre: Sustainability Science for Biosphere Stewardship

--<http://www.stockholmresilience.org/>

Resilience in pop psychology (see also Failure, Rejection, Grit, says *Psychology Today*)

Resilience is that ineffable quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever. Rather than letting failure overcome them and drain their resolve, they find a way to rise from the ashes. Psychologists have identified some of the factors that make someone resilient, among them a positive attitude, optimism, the ability to regulate emotions, and the ability to see failure as a form of helpful feedback. Even after a misfortune, blessed with such an outlook, resilient people are able to change course and soldier on.

--Psychology Today.com

Many of us will be struck by one or more major traumas sometime in our lives. Perhaps you have been a victim of sexual abuse, domestic violence or assault. Perhaps you were involved in a serious car accident. Perhaps you are a combat veteran. Maybe you were on the beach in Thailand during a tsunami, or in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. Or maybe, you are among the millions who have suffered a debilitating disease, lost a loved one or lost your job. This inspiring book identifies ten key ways to weather and bounce back from stress and trauma. Incorporating the latest scientific research and dozens of interviews with trauma survivors, it provides a practical guide to building emotional, mental and physical resilience. Written by experts in post-traumatic stress, this book provides a vital and successful roadmap for overcoming the adversities we all face at some point in our lives.

-- Southwick, Steven M. and Dennis S. Charney 2012. [*Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges*](#). Cambridge: CUP. (A Cambridge University Press book with a blurb by Magic Johnson!)

Resilience as a policy paradigm shift

Last week, 5/15/14, there was a daylong symposium at the Byrd Polar Research Center on campus: "[Understanding Climate Change Risks and Identifying Opportunities for Mitigation & Adaptation in Ohio.](#)" Speakers recurrently spoke in doublets:

mitigation and adaptation
prevention and adaptation
hardening and resilience
resistance and resilience

But the emphasis was overwhelmingly on the second term: risk assessment, preparedness, adaptation, resilience, partly because climate change is already happening and partly because speakers agreed that the political climate will not allow government to address the actual climate. Hence -->

Resilience as a political rhetoric

Pro: It opens up a zone of consensibility and potential cooperation

The new buzzword that accompanies all of this — “resiliency” — is intended as a nonpolitically charged way of getting at issues underlying climate change: the need to rebuild in ways that take ecology, economy, infrastructure and weather uncertainty into account. Much of the credit for the change in thinking has to go to Hurricane Sandy itself, which hit in one of the richest, most populous parts of the country and also the center of American media. And it came after a series of catastrophic events — Hurricane Katrina and other storms, but also 9/11 and the banking crisis of 2008 and the subsequent global economic downturn — which, taken together, seemed to solidify the feeling of living in an age of chronic uncertainty.

--Shorto, Russell. "[How to Think Like the Dutch in a Post-Sandy World.](#)" *New York Times* Sunday Magazine, April 19, 2014

Con: We resign ourselves to "Stuff happens."

... The trouble lies with the ubiquity of the word “resilience” itself. Why must so much human endeavor be measured against the ideal of endurance or adaptability?

In its most literal meaning, “resilience” is a scientific term that describes any given substance’s ability to get bent or stretched without breaking and then to resume its former shape. We could all stand to be more resilient. But isn’t that where ambition begins rather than ends?

When did resilience become life’s holy grail? You won’t find resilience among the ancients’ four cardinal virtues – wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation. Perhaps its primacy is a sign of our economically depressed times—five years into the recovery median income still stands 4 percentage points lower than it did when the Great Recession formally ended in 2009. Or perhaps it reflects the country’s cynicism about whether its democratic institutions can, or even should, make life better for all. If you lack opportunities to be wise, just, or courageous, why not consider resilient?

--Noah, Timothy, "[Welcome to the New Cult of Resilience.](#)" MSNBC 5/17/14