Re-configuring Resilience for Environmental Change: politics, practice and the role of scale

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Abstract

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This paper examines how the notion of resilience is framed and governed through the politics of scale within communities dealing with the consequences of environmental processes and change. Conventional modes of governing the environment and the impacts of these processes have focused on the role of the local state and government agencies in framing a range of ‘resilience architectures’ through which individuals and households prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters such as flooding or wildfires. In this mode of community resilience, narrow, hierarchical and prescribed ways of performing resilience are governed through the choice architectures surrounding individuals and households and reflect a Neo-liberal framing of state-citizen relationships that emphasises the role of individual agency. Yet the changing relationships between the local state and citizens (largely as a result of government austerity measures) is creating a pragmatic and intellectual space for exploring the role of (re)collectivising community resilience that draws on notions of ‘resourcefulness’ (MacKinnen and Derickson, 2012). Indeed, the opening of this space also affords opportunities to re-position expert and lay knowledges surrounding ‘hazard’ and ‘risk’ through the development of new modes of social learning about natural hazards and their impacts in an age of anthropogenic climate change and growing levels of resource scarcity. Using illustrations from flooding research in the UK, the paper will demonstrate how a scaled understanding of resilience can provide a new conceptual framework for promoting greater integration of responses at the community level, which highlight greater opportunities for understanding the scaled politics of community resilience and knowledge production about natural hazards.

Keywords: Community resilience, governance, scale, climate change

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