Personal Resilience, Transition and Behaviour Change: a Salutogenetic Approach

Gesa Maschkowski∗¹

¹Institute for Food and Resource Economics (University of Bonn) – Institute for Food and Resource Economics Department of Agricultural and Food Market Research Nussallee 21 (Building 2) 53115 Bonn, Germany

Abstract

This presentation contributes to the conference’s knowledge theme. It is part of a proposed session titled "Resilience, Community Action and Social Transformation," organised by Transition Research Network and ENLACC.

Research on human resilience in its origins has been motivated by the question ‘why do some people recover from set backs while others don’t?’ This question has evoked a shift in intellectual orientation from looking at risk factors to the identification of the strengths of an individual, the so called salutogenetic approach (origins of health), developed by Aaron Antonovsky[1]. The concept of human resilience is strongly linked to that of health and well-being. Health, as defined by Antonovsky, is not a steady state. It is presented as a continuum model, "which sees each of us, at a given point in time, somewhere along a 'healthy/dis-ease continuum, depending on our capacity to adapt". Founders of the Transition Towns movement have chosen a comparable positive approach of transition by refraining from negative environmental campaigning. The movement aims to build resilience and happiness and create a healthy human culture. Both fields work on similar questions, such as ‘what kind of qualities, processes and energies do people need to activate the forces for adaptation and change?’

The presentation outlines links between human resilience, behaviour change and societal transformation in two steps i) It analyses the ‘head, heart and hand’ approach developed by the Transition Town Movement in the light of Salutogenesis and illustrates the findings with results from a qualitative survey among participants of the 3rd German Transition Town Conference in 2012. ii) It will use the example of the Finnish initiative “Health in all policies” to explore the interplay of relevant theoretical frameworks and joint actions by different sectors, which, in this case, successfully changed dietary habits of the Finnish society.

The discussion will address i) the potential and limits of the concept of resilience for behaviour change ii) the potentials and limits of grassroots movements for creating a culture of sustainability.


∗Speaker
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