Governing for resilience: responding to the complexities of urban densification

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Abstract

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Research context

My research is focussed on governance for resilience, in particular how urban planning and governance can enable adaptation and transformation in the face of slow urban stresses such as urban densification, and how learning arises from such processes.

Presentation

City-regions are subject to complex social-ecological stresses endogenous to the urban system and open to external influences. I investigate what resilience means for planning and governance in responding to such stresses, specifically in relation to urban densification.

Contrary to disasters and climate change, densification is neither a discrete event in time nor led by external factors. In addition, while it desired by most cities, densification presents a complex set of linked social-ecological stresses (the economic, political and infrastructural being strongly embedded in the social in this case) to be dealt with by urban planning and governance, frequently on a reactive basis. Resilience entails building capacity for adaptive governance in the face of uncertain stresses in social-ecological urban systems.

The focus of this research is on the metropolitan scale, a point of mediation between national and regional policy and local initiatives. It is also potentially an interface where diverse actors and knowledges come together to enable transformative change. While the aim of this transformation may be sustainability or transition, this research does not question how sustainable the outcome will be or what future state is aimed for. Rather, it highlights the processes and structures that enable learning and knowledge to be embedded in governance structures and how such embeddedness may enhance the ability of urban authorities to manage foreseeable but uncertain urban stresses, such as those arising from urban densification. Hence, this short talk provides a perspective on what governing for resilience may mean in urban areas and what building resilience may entail.

Keywords: Adaptive governance, urban resilience, social, ecological systems, densification, urban transformation

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