A typology of resilience: resistance, and marginal and fundamental change.

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Abstract

Nearly twenty years ago the authors published a three way typology of resilience. Developed originally in a sustainable development context, it has since been drawn on for a variety of purposes. The typology classifies resilience approaches into resistance to change; change at the margins; and openness and adaptation. Uncertainties about processes and outcomes, and institutional flexibility increase dramatically across this typology. Drawing on a range of examples, it was found that most policy and processes to accommodate major change were locked, through established institutional structures and processes, into resistance or marginal change. Fundamental or radical change to institutional structures occurred but was rare. The contemporary challenge remains our sustainability, now set within the context of adaptation to global environmental and human change. Drawing on recent work by the authors and others, this presentation maps the original typology across the theory and practice of climate change adaptation and transformation.

As with the initial assessment where cases were assessed against the resilience typology, there are few examples of radical change, and no shortage of cases characterized by change at the margins, or by resistance to change. The institutions of government may be more constraining than was the case two decades ago. There is some acknowledgment of the problem, but a search for solutions within current policy and institutional arrangements which are dedicated to the status quo. However, this assessment is complicated by the multiple meanings of key terms in the adaptation and resilience literatures, issues of power and scale, a tendency to regard minor changes as fundamental, and a possibility that minor changes reinforce resistance to the major changes that are likely needed to accommodate or shape global change.

Keywords: resilience typology, resistance, transformation

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