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The Importance and Challenges of Anticipation for Community Resilience

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Human activity is constantly changing our risk landscape, and there are a number of macro-level processes adding to this creeping change. Without ability to anticipate these changes, it is difficult to know what threats to monitor, what risks to mitigate as our communities develop, as well as what potential events to prepare for in the future. Ability to assess the risk of potential disruptive or destructive events is thus vital for community resilience. Assessing risk for community resilience is however fraught with particular challenges, which must be incorporated in new risk assessment methodologies.

The Importance and Challenges of Anticipation for Community Resilience

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Resilience is a debated concept with numerous definitions. If focusing on describing a community under stress of a particular disruptive event, its more traditional etymological meaning of ability to spring back after deformation, or its more applied meaning of ability to cope with and recover from the event, are sufficient. However, if focusing on building and maintaining resilient communities over time, more abilities are necessary. Hollnagel¹ suggests four requisites for resilient socio-technical systems; the ability to anticipate, monitor, respond to and learn from disruptive or destructive events. This approach to resilience is also applicable to communities and societies, although this context entails further challenges. This study is focused on the importance of anticipation, in the sense of creating foresight for guiding human decisions and activities to promote safety and sustainability, and on the particular challenges for such anticipation in our complex and dynamic world. Human activity is constantly changing our risk landscape, and there are a number of macro-level processes adding to this creeping change, such as climate change, urbanisation, increasing complexity, etc. Without ability to anticipate these changes, it is difficult to know what threats to monitor, what risks to mitigate as our communities develop, as well as what potential events to prepare for in the future. Risk assessment is in other words a requisite for guiding decisions today that will determine our tomorrow. Assessing risk for community resilience is however fraught with particular challenges. Risk assessment methodologies for community resilience must be able to accommodate different stakeholder values (multi-value), incorporate a wide range of events that may impact what stakeholders value (multi-hazard), integrate a multitude of factors and processes contributing to the susceptibility of what stakeholders' value to the impact of the events (multi-susceptive), involve various stakeholders across functional, administrative and geographical borders (multi-stakeholder), integrate several risk assessments performed by different groups of stakeholders (multi-analysis), and integrate phenomena on various spatial and temporal scales, as well as structural and functional complexity (systemic).

¹ Hollnagel, E. (2009). 'The four cornerstones of resilience engineering'. In C. P. Nemeth, E. Hollnagel, & S. Dekker (Eds.), *Preparation and restoration*. (pp. 117-33). Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate.

Dr. Per Becker is Associate Professor in Risk Management with focus on Community Resilience at Lund University Centre for Risk Assessment and Management (LUCRAM), and Acting Research Manager at Training Regions Research Center. He has combined research with a career in humanitarian assistance and international development cooperation focused on disaster risk reduction, recovery and conflict management. The early part of his career, Per worked in the private sector and in the fire and rescue services in Sweden. Eleven years ago he started to work for the SRSA, a Swedish governmental humanitarian and development aid organisation. After various positions within the SRSA, he was appointed Head of Capacity Development and Recovery Section, which he held until finally coming back to academia four years ago. He is still involved with the governmental organisation, now called MSB, and he works frequently with the Red Cross/Crescent Movement around the world. Per's research interests include the connections between sustainable development and the management of risk (including adaptation to climate change); capacity development for community resilience; the relationships between risk, vulnerability, armed conflict and disaster; and how to approach these complex issues in a holistic and systematic manner using systems approaches.

