

Notes from contributions as discussant to parallel session 'Urban Transformations', Resilience 2014, Montpellier, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2014.  
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My view reflects my role as a practitioner in community-scale efforts at resilience building, notably the Transition movement of local responses to peak oil, climate change and economic instability referred to by many previous speakers at this conference, and permaculture, the design philosophy and movement from which Transition emerged. From this perspective, the apparent tension between resilience and transformation is largely a product of how we choose to define and characterise our system. In particular, this depends on what we identify as its core functions.

The generally conservative notion of resilience that has become prominent in much policy discourse often frames resilience in terms of maintaining specific social-technical configurations that fulfil basic needs. For example, seeking to eliminate the carbon emissions and (in some cases) dependencies on non-renewable primary fuels associated with electricity-generating infrastructure by substituting generation technologies, without addressing underlying issues of ownership and governance. This is perhaps a product of the rather short timescales on which political processes oblige many decision-makers to operate. It also reflects vested interests in the power relations embodied in incumbent regimes.

Transition and permaculture tend to take a needs-based approach, often influenced by the distinction between needs and satisfiers in the work of Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef. The focus is on building resilience in our ability to fulfil these needs. In many cases this will involve replacement of infrastructure, or satisfiers, that are no longer viable, and that the more conservative approach will seek to maintain – which in that framing might appear transformative.

The more radical approach to resilience may also indicate a different relationship with sustainability from that in, for example, the Stirling framework, in which resilience is one of four potential dynamics of sustainability. When infrastructures can no longer rely for their operation on externalising environmental and social damage associated with their operations – either because this is recognised as morally unacceptable or because there is simply nowhere left to go – they must operate within the limits of the resource base available to them. In other words, resilience necessarily implies sustainability: in immediate terms when either defined in ways that exclude the possibility that resilience in one system can be reliant on systematically undermining social-ecological resilience elsewhere, or when sufficiently long time horizons are considered.

For me a big theme at this conference has been increased attention to how power influences both rhetoric and action on resilience. Much of the prominent mainstream discussion on resilience, although framed in more conservative respects, explicitly cites Transition and other community-based movements; much related action seeks to build upon or emulate their work. In some ways this appears to be a welcome mainstreaming and potential upscaling of community action, of the kind necessary to challenge and overcome some of the main barriers to transformations to resilience. However, if not accompanied by a shift in existing power relations, it risks in actuality being an appropriation of this work in the service of a very different agenda. When we talk about resilience, we need to consider not only of what, and to what, but on whose terms and for whose benefit.