

Resilience from a lived-experience perspective in the regional context of Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland



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ABSTRACT

Within the UK, academics and practitioners' understanding of resilience have been increasingly nuanced, particularly after the introduction of the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004. However, there remain debates and variations in how resilience is conceptualized that creates confusion in how resilience building is operationalised in practice by stakeholders. To address this concern, this study explores the meaning of resilience from the perspectives of people with a lived experience of flooding, through the lens of adaptive capacity, which is a key dimension of resilience as identified in Scottish policy frameworks. Insight from a literature review combined with empirical data collected from forty-three participants, suggests that resilience to natural hazards is a function of two inter-related aspects: 'information' and 'response' mechanisms. Further analysis suggests that resilience enhancement begins following receipt of risk information from either experience or other sources that shapes the understanding of a hazard and what protective steps to take. This *understanding* prompts behavioral responses influenced by 'risk attitude', 'skills' and 'access to resources' to enhance the adaptive capacity of the receiver. The paper engages in the complex debate about how resilience is conceptualized from the social sciences perspective. It presents a simplified account of what resilience means and sets out policy and practical implications of this.

1. The contested nature of resilience: Practical and policy challenges

The construct of resilience has emerged as a popular term used in many policy areas [36,6] including disaster risk reduction at the international, national and local levels [2,9]. However, some have criticized the fact that policy practitioners are incorporating resilience as a central element of policy without a grounded theoretical and empirical understanding of the term [6]. Resilience is often used as an umbrella term covering many aspects of bouncing back and adapting to the environment [27] such that the 'resilience' has become an ambiguous term with no specific meaning.

Some see the ambiguity around resilience as an opportunity where resilience can be tailored within its local context of use [40]. On the contrary, this has raised some concerns amongst critics who caution the use of resilience as a 'guiding framework' [40]. For example, conceptualizing societal issues through the lens of resilience has been blamed for reframing issues in a way that makes a vulnerable population responsible for protecting themselves. Using this lens, reduces the importance of the role that authorities can play in fostering or undermining resilience. In fact, earlier research by Methmann and Oels [29] in their study of 'climate refugees' claims that resilience shifts

responsibility to a vulnerable population, deprives them of their (human) rights and inhibits a more comprehensive engagement with the structural issues that drive the very (societal) problem by normalizing them. Furthermore, resilience as a lens undermines the powerful interplay between multiple variables on different temporal and spatial scales that can make even those perceived to be the most resilient, vulnerable to harm.

This paper approaches resilience from the social science perspective and engages in the complex debate around how resilience is conceptualized. The paper begins by looking at how resilience is conceptualized within Scotland's policy context. It also sort to understand attributes of resilience and its relationship to adaptive capacity within existing literature through a systematic literature review. Through primary research conducted in the regional context of Dumfries and Galloway, the paper then examines resilience attributes from a lived experienced perspective. Thus, the paper contributes to the understanding resilience as a broad concept and examines its practical application.

2. Policy framing of resilience as 'Adaptation'

In United Kingdom (UK), resilience development is underpinned by

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the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 translated in Scotland as the contingency planning Scotland regulation in (2005) [17]. This Act re-defined ‘roles and responsibilities’ for emergency planning, shifting responsibility from the central/national government to local authorities and communities [10,45]. The policy framing of resilience both in Scotland and at the UK-wide level, is one and the same where resilience is seen as “the capacity of an individual, community or system to adapt in order to sustain an acceptable level of function, structure and identity” (Building Community Resilience Report, 2016 p.3). This definition emphasizes ‘adaptation’ and focuses on the outcome rather than the process by which the adaptation occurs. The definition also stresses the ‘sustainability’ of function, structure and identity in a way that highlights ‘maintaining way of life’ following an emergency.

Given UK’s Government policy framing of resilience, this paper will address the adaptive dimension of resilience; other resilience dimensions are - absorptive and transformative capacities, see (Bene et al., 2013). Moreover, this study, which aims to understand the lived experiences of people who have suffered flooding, is more inclined towards an adaptive capacity framing of resilience. This is because learning is key but it takes time to incorporate new lessons into planning – which corresponds more to a timescale of delayed adaptation as opposed to coping.

3. The relationship between adaptive capacity and resilience attributes

Adaptive capacity is the capacity to manage or mitigate the threat to harm through interaction with the environmental and social system [44]. Adaptive capacity facilitates transitions into a new state, i.e. transformation [15] especially where resilience is seen as a process instead of an outcome. Engle [11] identifies two types of adaptations: anticipatory and reactive adaptations that are linked and complementary. Anticipatory adaptation, also known as ‘planned adaptation’ [14], happens by anticipating future disturbances and making adequate plans to reduce exposure to potential harm. Reactive adaptation, on the other hand, occurs when responding to stress that has already occurred. There is also the danger of maladaptation [37], where mitigating steps do not reduce but instead amplify the effect of harm. For this reason, adaptation is seen as a complex process [4] that may occur at different scales and within competing social contexts (e.g. risk culture, values and knowledge) [1].

Numerous factors including financial resources, information, knowledge, skills, infrastructure, and systems (institutions, governance or management) are identified as attributes of adaptive capacity, see for example, [12,20,30]. At the community level, social capital, trust, and organizing processes are additional factors that shape adaptive capacities for communities to act collectively [35]. These factors contribute to how we learn and take adaptive steps to reduce the threats from potential harm. The study therefore makes an attempt to categorise adaptive capacity attributes, as identified in extant literature, into three broad categories (see Fig. 1). These are: the ‘information and knowledge’ of potential risk and what protective steps to take, and ‘skills and resources’ (which may be financial, materials/infrastructure, skills, social capital, or management processes). A third category is what Mortreux and Barnett [33] term as psycho-social variables: risk attitude, trust and expectations in authorities, place attachment, household compositions and competing concerns - that translate the capacity in the first two categories into actions or outcomes. The sixth psychosocial variable, ‘personal experience’ as identified by Mortreux and Barnett [33], is classified under ‘information and knowledge’ in this study.

Information and knowledge, skills and resources and psycho-social factors are further divided into two broad themes: the ‘information’ and ‘response’ mechanisms. This categorization is further strengthened through a systematic review of extant literature conducted as part of this study (see Supplementary Material (SM) Table 1). The aim of the systematic review is to identify attributes of resilience and its

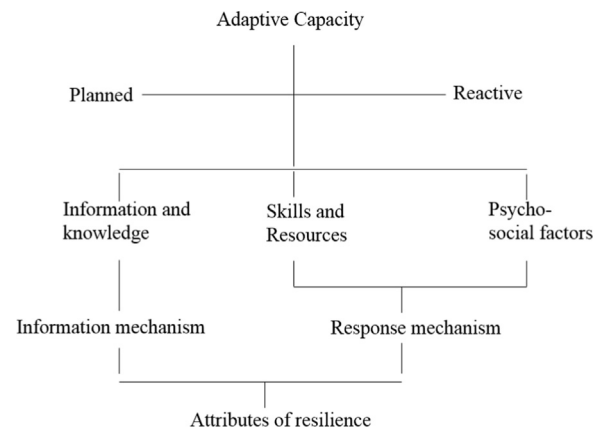


Fig. 1. The relationship between resilience and adaptive capacity attributes.

relationship to adaptive capacity within existing literature base. The review was carried out by searching several combinations of relevant criteria using Scopus Database; some of which includes resilience, adaptive capacity, information, knowledge, skills, resources and natural hazards. A further selection criteria included articles published peer reviewed articles between 2013 and 2018. Attributes of resilience as identified in see SM Table 1 are then, further categorized under the information and response mechanism SM Table 2.

This study proposes that enhancing the resilience of people or communities consists of these two broad aspects that are linked and which influence each other; a process that contributes to what this study term as ‘Resilience Enhancement’ (RE). Resilience enhancement signifies a phenomenon where individuals or communities have the capacity to act upon received resilience information to effectively reduce the threat from potential harm. The structural description of resilience, modelled after the social amplification of risk framework [22], helps simplify the ways in which we talk and view resilience from the social science perspective and act as a significant first step towards developing a practical understanding of resilience. The idea of resilience as a function of ‘information’ and ‘response’ mechanism is worth testing out to see if this framework could ultimately be used in the future as a more coherent resilience theory.

4. Research question

The study therefore makes a first attempt to test the idea of resilience as a function of the ‘information’ and ‘response’ mechanisms. The research questions are objectively designed after the Gibbs reflective model [16]. This model allows for description, analysis and evaluation of the experience of the participants, helping them to make sense of their experiences and examine their actions [16]. It also allows participants to think about how to put their experience to good use if similar situations arose again. Using Gibbs’ model reduces the degree of researcher’s influence on the nature of questions and thus, data that will be asked of participants. Participants were asked to describe their experience of the flooding event, including their feelings, and analysis of events identifying enablers, barriers and challenges in preparing for and recovering from the flooding. Participants were also asked to give recommendations for practical steps to help them feel better prepared for and informed about future occurrences. Ultimately, the study seeks to answer

What does resilience mean from the lived experience perspective of flooding and how can this be enhanced?

5. Context of study

This study investigates public experiences of the December 2015

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