

Natural Disasters, Chapter 9, Pellon:

Pellon makes an obvious point that there are sociopolitical, economic, and natural factors that make up a disaster. Human vulnerability and natural hazards are related, and he suggests natural disasters are more accurately referred to “humanitarian disasters with a natural trigger”. The conclusion I drew from this article was that it makes more sense to focus on reducing factors that contribute to vulnerability, rather than focusing on changing nature itself.

The Marxist approach he discussed is perhaps most relevant in the coastal areas of developing countries. These areas are often highly sought by developers, looking to make a quick profit. Buildings (hotels, resorts) are constructed sometimes without thorough analysis of underlying geological data and vulnerability assessments. The materials and workmanship are sometimes low quality (combined with relaxed or absent construction standards), in exchange for rapid construction for the tourist trade. Tourism subsequently creates jobs in areas where people may not have otherwise settled en masse. This draws the local population into settlement in areas that may be traditionally exposed to natural events. Greater population density, poverty, and poor construction can increase overall vulnerability to natural disasters. One could argue that local economic stimulation would increase resilience; however, as Pellon states, it’s important to assess the impact development has on social capital.

Along that line, it was also interesting to note that companies specializing in post-disaster cleanup, engineering, and reconstruction have much to gain (in terms of profit). Large corporations have large voices in business and research, and could theoretically stifle progress in vulnerability mitigation.

The Vulnerability of Cities, and Assessing urban vulnerability and social adaptation to risk, Pellon:

Here Pellon also stresses the links between society and nature, each having interaction with the other. He suggests an integrated approach to planning, including indicators of human vulnerability, social factors and adaptability, social capital, in addition to evaluation of physical systems, environment, political and economic issues. He uses the example of the Los Manguitos barrio in Santo Domingo (Hurricane Georges, 1998) to illustrate resilience through good community social cohesion.

UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction, Hyogo Declaration:

Lots of politically correct idealism, but what does it really mean? What is the actual Hyogo Framework? Does it translate the idealism to substance? This declaration largely ignores social capital, but did mention education, which is important. It’s not enough to create early warning systems; there must be a plan of action/response to warnings. Specifically, the public must be shown what actions to take when they receive a warning.