

RESPONSE PAPER

Vale & Campanella - "Introduction: The Cities Rise Again"

Defeated in battle and ravaged by bombing in the course of World War II, Germany and Japan nevertheless made postwar recoveries that startled the world. Within ten years these nations were once again considerable economic powers. A decade later, each had not only regained prosperity but had also economically overtaken, in important respects, some of the war's victors.

The surprising swiftness of recovery was also noted in previous eras. What has so often excited wonder, the great rapidity with which countries recover from a state of devastation; the disappearance, in a short time, of all traces of the mischief done by earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and the ravages of war. An enemy lays waste a country by fire and sword, and destroys or carries away nearly all the moveable wealth existing in it: all the inhabitants are ruined, and yet in a few years after, everything is much as it was before. Still, successful recovery is by no means universal. The ancient Cretan civilization may or may not have been destroyed by earthquake and the Mayan civilization by disease, but in any case there was no recovery. Most famously, of course, a centuries-long Dark Ages followed the fall of Rome.

While everyday small-scale tragedies like auto accidents and disabling illnesses are disastrous enough for those personally involved, our concern here is with events of larger magnitude. It is useful to distinguish between community-wide (middle-scale) calamities, such as tornadoes, floods, or bombing raids, and society-wide (large-scale) catastrophes associated with widespread famine, destructive social revolution, or defeat and subjugation after total war. In community-wide disasters the fabric of the larger social order provides a safety net, whereas society-wide catastrophes threaten the very fabric itself. The former may involve hundreds or thousands of deaths; the latter, hundreds of thousands or millions.

Middle-scale, or community-wide, disasters are relatively frequent events, making empirical generalizations possible. In such disasters, it has been observed, individuals and communities adapt. Survivors are not helpless victims. Very soon after the shock they begin to help themselves and one another. In the immediate post impact period community identification is strong, promoting cooperative and unselfish efforts aimed at rescue, relief, and repair. After the San Francisco earthquake of 1989, for example, inhabitants of a poor neighborhood spontaneously helped rescue motorists trapped by a freeway collapse. And after the Anchorage earthquake of 1964, local supermarkets kept the prices of necessities low while consumers generally cooperated by self-rationing.

On the other hand, there have been some serious instances of antisocial behavior. Notably, while goodwill and cooperation predominated in New York City during the 1965 electrical blackout, a second blackout in 1977 brought major violence and looting. Similar bad experiences have occurred more recently, for example after Hurricane Hugo struck the Virgin Islands in 1989. Nevertheless, as Russell Dynes and Thomas E. Drabek have shown, prosocial behavior has historically predominated. Instances to the contrary, while not rare, usually have fairly evident roots—where members of a community have a strong preexisting sense of grievance, for example. As an even more reliable generalization, a crisis almost always triggers a flow of support from outside the immediate impact area, a phenomenon that has become known as "convergence behavior." Surprisingly often, recovering communities even surpass previous rates of progress, owing to the emergence of new leaders, to enhanced social cohesion, and to the abolition of outmoded attitudes and regulations.

For the middle-scale disasters the main problems have been technological and distributive (e.g., localized resource scarcities or the provision of fair compensation). But in large-scale calamities the survival of the social order itself is in question. Widespread famines, pandemics, destructive social revolutions, disastrous

wars, and even severe business depressions and monetary hyperinflations—all of these threaten the network of arrangements supporting the elaborate division of labor that modern economies depend on.

When it comes to the large-scale, or society-wide, disasters, however, private parties can scarcely protect themselves at all, except possibly by emigration. Historical experience suggests that recovery will hinge upon the ability of government to maintain or restore property rights together with a market system that will support the economic division of labor.

Taking a broader view, the subject of disaster and recovery can be regarded as a special case within the general problem of economic development. As recent events have forcefully demonstrated, the doctrines of socialism, or at any rate the practices of socialist governments, have subjected the nations of Eastern Europe to a series of economic disasters from which they are now struggling to recover.

Whenever and wherever societies have flourished and prospered rather than stagnated and decayed, creative and workable cities have been at the core of the phenomenon.... Decaying cities, declining economies, and mounting social troubles travel together. The combination is not coincidental.

Vale & Campanella - “Conclusion: Axioms of Resilience”

This paper examines the near-ubiquity of urban resilience by analyzing the concepts of trauma, recovery, and remembrance. It questions the definition of "resilience," by exploring the relationship between recovery of the built environment and other ways that a "return to normalcy" may be measured. Urban trauma, like urban resilience, takes many forms, and can be categorized in many ways. First, there is the scale of destruction—which may range from a small single precinct to an entire city (or, potentially, an even larger area). Second, one may rank these traumas in terms of their human toll, as measured by deaths and disruption of lives. Third, one may organize these destructive acts according to their presumed cause—some result from the largely-uncontrollable forces of nature, such as earthquakes and floods; others are hybrids of natural forces and human action, such as fires; while still others result more wholly from deliberate human will, whether executed by conquering armies, aerial bombardment, or terrorist strikes. It is not enough to ask general questions about urban recovery; we must ask who recovers which aspects of the city, and by what mechanisms. The process of post-disaster recovery is a window into the power structure of the society that has been stricken. Similarly, to ask about remembrance is to inquire how what is remembered gets constructed, when, and by whom.