MIT Reading Response
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Vale and Campanella's reading introduces the question, "How do modern cities recover from disaster?" Such examples of resilient cities include Atlanta, Columbia, and Richmond from the American Civil War; Chicago from the 1871 fire; San Francisco from the earthquake and fires of 1906; Hiroshima and Nagaski; and most dramatically, Tangshan, China, whose 1976 earthquake killed at least 240,000 ppl. He states, even "lost cities" are recovered as tourist, education, remembrance or mythical sites.

The authors next categorize disasters—from natural and human disasters, and note the differences in scale and source. These differences can include widespread disasters that incur little loss of life, or large-scale urban disasters with much loss of life. Vale and Campanella note that trauma in individuals persists long after physical impacts of a disaster have been repaired. Moreover, they believe that it is possible to regard cities as traumatized. In measuring trauma post-disaster, simply measuring the death toll or the extent of destruction may not be truly indicative (e.g. Sept. 11 attacks).

The question of recovery is also difficult to define. They ask, what does a "return to normalcy" entail, or is it a question of searching for the "new normal?" The authors state that recovery is also driven by notions of equity, or value-laden decisions. In addition, memorializing the disaster may be a way in which the disaster is interpreted and commemorated. In short, Vale and Campanella run through three themes: narratives of resilience, symbolic dimensions of disaster and recovery, and the politics of reconstruction.

Vale and Campanella's conclusion begins by a discussion of urban resilience, which implies a physical capacity to "bounce back" from a disaster. One model for recovery classified the recovery process in four stages: 1. Emergency response; 2. Restoration of the restorable; 3. Reconstruction of the destroyed for functional replacement; 4. Reconstruction for commemoration, betterment, and development. This pattern of recovery is marked by variations.

The authors tease out 12 themes from stories of urban resilience. They include:
1. Narratives of Resilience are a Political Necessity: Resilience is a rhetorical device for the existing government; government faces challenges to its authority and competence in the face of disasters; it must not only reconstruct the physical environment but also enable psychological, emotional, and symbolic recoveries
2. Disasters Reveal the Resilience of Governments: Citizens may observe how leaders react to crisis, which may be a spur political change.
3. Narratives of Resilience are Always Contested: Rhetoric is always manipulated by media, politicians, and others. Key figures claim authorship, while marginalized groups are ignored.
4. Local Resilience is Linked to National Renewal: An event focused on one city can extend to the national arena. Recovery is linked to national prestige.
5. Resilience is Underwritten by Outsiders: Resilience of cities is dependent on political and financial influences outside city limits. Examples include the recovery efforts that are funded by foreign aid, and of the insurance industry post-9/11.
6. Urban Rebuilding Symbolizes Human Resilience: Rebuilding can convey the sense of renewal and well-being
7. Remembrance Drives Resilience: Through symbolic acts, memorials, etc. can assist the psychological recovery process
8. Resilience Benefits from the Inertia of Prior Investment: Even if there has been a major disaster in an urban area, this does not necessarily lead to the immediate correction of vulnerabilities or limiting the risk of future destruction. Inertia of urban resilience stems from a "combination of geographic advantages, long-term investment in infrastructure, and place-dependent business networks."
9. Resilience Exploits the Power of Place: Rebuilding entails reconnecting severed connections (familial, social, and religious networks).
10. Resilience Casts Opportunism as Opportunity: There is a balance between using a traumatic incident to pursue upgrading infrastructure versus using the event for an opportunistic agenda.
11. Resilience, Like Disaster, Is Site-Specific: There are epicenters to disasters, and those who are affected by disaster experience resilience differently in relation to the epicenter.
12. Resilience Entails More than Rebuilding: Rebuilding is not enough to enable recovery and resilience.

Personal Reaction:
These readings were useful, because they explored the concept of resilience in ways that I had not previously thought about. One of the most insightful concepts I found was the symbolic attachment given to

memorializing a disaster, as part of the recovery process. I remember reading articles post-9/11, regarding the competing visions of rebuilding the WTC. Such idea that were suggested was to create two smaller towers, or a park area, etc. The competition between architects was fierce, the NY Times article suggested, and I thought that was a bit sad, to be jockeying over what kind of building should built and why one plan was better than the other.

I especially appreciate point number 12: that rebuilding in and of itself does not automatically entail recovery and resilience. I would like to read more about are how networks are reconnected and how communities deal with disaster (how they help in the process of "bouncing back"). Because we only read the intro and the conclusion, however, I found the readings to be a bit disconnected. I am sure that the rich examples, which were only briefly mentioned in the two readings, are further explained in the book.

Finally, in thinking about the politics of reconstruction, and how certain voices and issues are pushed on the agenda, I still have trouble in reconciling how "opportunistic" agendas may further exclude the marginalized. I look forward to hopefully hearing more about this topic.