

REACTION PAPER 2

Peacock and Ragsdale - "Social Systems, Ecological Networks and Disasters"

While disaster agents, such as hurricanes, may appear to be simple physical events, in order to understand their impact, including how communities respond and are ultimately affected, we must understand the nature of the community itself. Applying an ecological perspective to the study of disaster brings to the forefront socio-political issues such as the extent to which social inequality, heterogeneity and complexity, competition and conflict, and coordination exist within the network of social systems.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew, thousands of poor households lacked sufficient resources. Recognizing their desperate situation, the non profit organizations wanted to provide for them. However their efforts were thwarted as they were seen as competitors. A clearer understanding of these issues, which occur over and over again when non profits enter new communities, is needed and policies developed to address the problem. While researchers have long recognized the critical effects of material culture, Hurricane Andrew reminded us that to understand these mitigation failures we must appreciate the socio-political ecology that led to their production.

Blocker, Rochford, and Sherkat "Political Responses to Natural Hazards"

Many human factors influence the severity of the impact of natural hazards including population density, level of development, degree of preparedness, and the speed and effectiveness of relief and reconstruction services. Human activities of various kinds (e.g. overstocking, deforestation, dam construction) can intensify the onset and effect of 'natural' hazards.

Human perceptions and social, cultural, economic and political structures interact to determine how individuals and communities will interpret and respond to the threat, the occurrence, and the effects of natural hazards.

The levels of economic damage caused by natural hazards tend to be worse in economically developed countries whereas the levels of loss of human life tend to be more severe in less economically developed countries. Action is necessary on local, national and international scales to plan ways of predicting the onset of natural hazards, preventing them or mitigating their effects, and developing places for relief and reconstruction.

Anderson - "Vulnerability to Disaster and Sustainable Development"

Communities will always face natural hazards, but today's disasters are often generated by, or at least exacerbated by, human activities. At the most dramatic level, human activities are changing the natural balance of the earth, interfering as never before with the atmosphere, the oceans, the polar ice caps, the forest cover and the natural pillars that make our world a livable home. But we are also putting ourselves in harm's way in less visible ways. At no time in human history have so many people lived in cities clustered around seismically active areas. Destitution and demographic pressure have led more people than ever before to live in flood plains or in areas prone to landslides. Poor land-use planning; environmental mismanagement; and a lack of regulatory mechanisms both increase the risk and exacerbate the effects of disasters.

Can sustainable development, along with the international strategies and instruments aiming at poverty reduction and environmental protection, be successful without taking into account the risk of natural hazards and their impacts? Can the planet afford the increasing costs and losses due to so-called natural disasters?

Disaster reduction policies and measures need to be implemented to build disaster resilient societies and communities, with a two-fold aim: to reduce the level of risk in societies, while ensuring, on the other hand, that development efforts do not increase the vulnerability to hazards but instead consciously reduce such vulnerability. Disaster and risk reduction is therefore emerging as an important requisite for sustainable development.

I also believe that we need to be better prepared for natural disasters and incorporate disaster risk management into our poverty reduction, development and environmental strategies.