Social resilience

Social, or community, resilience is built upon local knowledge, connections, and values. It involves having a good understanding of risks, being prepared for them, and having access to the assets and resources needed to tolerate or adapt to shocks. It builds upon, rather than being the same as, social cohesion.

What we're seeing

Social resilience becoming more pressing

Sport & recreation are usually thought of as effective ways of building individual resilience. Now though, social, or community, resilience is attracting more attention. This is due to recent natural disasters and shocks like the pandemic, and anticipating climate change impacts.[1]

Social cohesion is just a part of social resilience

Sport is associated with social cohesion, but that is distinct from social resilience. Social cohesion refers to the bonds that bring society together. Social resilience involves community tolerance of, and adaptability to, emergencies and disruptions. Christchurch communities after the earthquakes, and the 2019 terror attack, are examples of social resilience. Not just in how they coped during and immediately after the events, but how they fared later on as well.

The strength of social and cultural connections is key

The extent to which people know each other, and feel a sense of responsibility to each other is an important factor affecting how communities respond to challenges. So to is their ability to be prepared for future shocks, and to be able to access essential assets and resources both before and after such events.[2]

One size doesn't fit all

Improving social resilience works best by focusing on local knowledge and existing strengths, rather than introducing approaches from elsewhere. Local knowledge is essential for identifying local infrastructure and service needs, and solutions. Social resilience is seen as a characteristic that complements institutional services. Local sport and recreation organisations, and other cultural groups, often have the advantage of knowing their community well, and being well connected to other organisations. So, such groups can provide a firm foundation to strengthen social resilience.

Participatory democracy becoming an important factor

Resilience is also generated and sustained by having local communities involved in making key decisions. Participatory decision-making is growing around the world, helping empower communities.[3]

Dis- and misinformation degrades resilience

An accurate understanding about risks, and trust in institutions, matter. Dis- and misinformation, or just lack of knowledge, impact these. Trust can be undermined, and preparation and planning impaired, leading to responses that are dangerous or counter productive.[4] Disinformation is an increasing problem globally. Even in high trust NZ.[5]

Social resilience doesn't replace systemic solutions

Social resilience doesn't replace the need for local and national governments to address systemic issues that undermine resilience. Such as providing safe and healthy environments, and equitable access to essential services.[6]

Potential implications

Create
- **Stronger social and cultural connections within communities**

Relate
- **Resilience requires active building of trust and shared values**

Consume
- **Understand the key products and services the community needs to be resilient**

Degrade
- **Improving social resilience can't be a replacement for institutional neglect**

Connect
- **Building and maintain connections that help provide access to critical resources and information**

Define
- **Social cohesion is a start not an end for resileince**

More information (links)

[1] Community resilience and coronavirus
[2] The social dimensions of resilience
[3] Participatory Democracy: the importance of having a say when times are hard
[4] 'Belonging Is Stronger Than Facts': The Age of Misinformation
[5] NZ's "disinformation dozen" fuel fake news at Parliament protest
[6] Building resilience during Covid-19: lessons learned