Building Community Resilience: Four Case Studies From Post-Katrina Mississippi

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Resilience

- Resiliency is the ability to rebound after a disturbance
- Study set out to examine three related hypotheses:
  - Social networks are important factors for resilience
  - Social networks interact with and are influenced by the physical environment
  - Communities with the strongest resilience include both strong social networks and varied and integrated physical environments
Hurricane Katrina
August 2005
Case Study Approach

- Based on return of pre-Katrina population, 2 high- and 2 low-resilience communities selected for analysis
- Communities selected with similar built environment factors
- Interviews conducted in each location with a cross-section of residents
Background
Background
Results

• 294 networks were identified by 28 interview subjects
• High resilience communities relied on local networks, low resilience communities turned to federal aid and the support of national organizations
Results

- High resilience communities averaged 12.36 sites per person; low resilience communities only 9.64.
- More even distribution and place attachment to community in more resilient communities.
Results

- Weak positive relationship between social networks and significant places identified
- Tendency toward highly socially connected people having a greater connection to the built environment?
According to interviews subjects, factors thought to increase resilience included:

- Relatively small damage to the central business district
- Political will and leadership
- Public participation in rebuilding
- Role of major industries and employers (shipbuilding, casinos)
- Culture and spirit of people
- Strong faith of population and strong faith-based organizations
- Established multi-generational roots in the Mississippi Gulf Coast
- Tradition of coping with hurricanes
Results

According to interviews subjects, factors thought to decrease resilience included:

- Large level of damage to entire community
- Geographic isolation
- Large number of part-time residents
- Cost of rebuilding and insurance
- Depleted property values, foreclosures
- Restrictive regulations that complicate rebuilding
- Emotional impact of storm
- Lack of media attention compared to New Orleans
- Loss of traditions
Summary

• Study highlighted the importance of local, diverse, and redundant social networks
• Attachment to and reliance on the built environment was a general issue for resilience
• Social networks’ reliance on the built environment was traceable to certain types of features
• A community is only as strong as its weakest link – vulnerable populations are a particular concern