

Book Review

February 2014

The Resilient City. How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster, Vale, Lawrence J. and Thomas J. Campanella, Oxford University Press, 376 pages, 2005.

Implications for the American City

The series of stories and conclusions collected by the author's is inspirational. Cities are built by construction and deconstruction as one of the reviews observed, sometimes due to disaster. As with many things, the question is not about the disaster, but whether or not there is energy and resolve for a recovery. This book documents many such recoveries and provides details about the political and design process as well as many important, unifying design details.

The book, ***The Resilient City***, has coined a term used by the Rockefeller Foundation, Siemens and others, as noted below. With Oklahoma City, 911, New Orleans and Sandy, we do not have to look to the distant past to find examples of disaster; but the Chicago Fire, the San Francisco Earthquake and the British burning of the White House and much of Washington D.C. offer great insights about the character of the societies that quickly replaced the devastation with bigger and better cities. The authors' selection of essays provides a fascinating story with useable information and insights.

Resilience is physical, spiritual and cultural; it reflects community character yet depends on private and person actions. The authors; conclude with twelve axioms of resilience reported at the end of this review.

YouTube: None found; please forward a link should a video interview with the authors be available.

Published Reviews

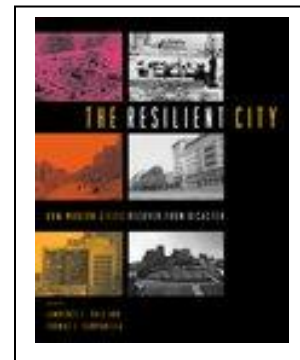
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The Resilient City, How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster

Edited by Lawrence J. Vale and Thomas J. Campanella

Reviews and Awards

- Planetizen, Top Ten Book of 2005
"...through the depth of the essays collected within it, *The Resilient City* far surpasses previous edited volumes on urban reconstruction."--*H-NET*
- "Cities, like people, often show their deepest character under terrifying stress. This book brings together histories of fire, earthquake, terrorism, and war to demonstrate that the most traumatic urban disasters can then become the most dramatic urban recoveries. These horrifying and inspiring analyses reveal the resilient essence of urbanism itself."--Robert Fishman, Taubman College of Architecture and Planning, University of Michigan
- "A fascinating collection."--Sir Peter Hall, author of *Cities in Civilization*



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- "If you are looking for an antidote to the depressing faree typical of the disaster literature, pick up *The Resilient City*... The book is also commendable for its vast geographic reach and long temporal arc, and for drawing from a variety of disciplines..."--Ari Kelman, *Technology and Culture*
<http://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-resilient-city-9780195175837?cc=us&lang=en&>

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[1 of 5 stars](#)[2 of 5 stars](#)[3 of 5 stars](#)[4 of 5 stars](#)[5 of 5 stars](#)***The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster***by [Lawrence J. Vale](#) (Editor), [Thomas J. Campanella](#) (Editor)3.25 of 5 stars 3.25 · [rating details](#) · 12 ratings · 2 [reviews](#)

In 1871, the city of Chicago was almost entirely destroyed by what became known as The Great Fire. Thirty-five years later, San Francisco lay in smoldering ruins after the catastrophic earthquake of 1906. Or consider the case of the Jerusalem, the greatest site of physical destruction and renewal in history, which, over three millennia, has suffered wars, earthquakes, fire...[more](#)

Creating Resilient Cities

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/287339.The_Resilient_City

- **Creating Resilient Cities.**

Arup, Siemens and RPA have explored the role of technology in enhancing the resilience of cities and their critical infrastructure systems. Cities depend on the effective and reliable operation of infrastructure systems to deliver energy, mobility, water, sanitation, shelter, information, emergency response and other critical services. Across the globe, governments, business and communities are seeing an ever-increasing frequency of extreme weather-related events. These events are playing out against a backdrop of global population growth and urbanization.

<http://w3.siemens.com/topics/global/en/sustainable-cities/resilience/pages/home.aspx>

- **Journal of the American Planning Association.**

[Volume 72, Issue 2](#), 2006

Review Roundtable: Is New Orleans a Resilient City? APA used the resilient theme in evaluating efforts in response to Hurricane Katrina.

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- **The Rockefeller Foundation 100 Resilient Cities Centennial Challenge.**

The Rockefeller Foundation launched the 100 Resilient Cities Centennial Challenge to enable 100 cities to better address the increasing shocks and stresses of the 21st century. Out of nearly 400 cities across six continents that have applied, 100 of the world's cities were selected to receive technical support and resources for developing and implementing plans for urban resilience over the next three years. The seven judges offered unique expertise on tools and strategies that make a city better prepared to face natural and manmade disaster.

<http://100resilientcities.rockefellerfoundation.org/cities>

TheAmericanCity.org Commentary

The Resilient City provides a tour of disasters that destroyed cities around the world from Washington D.C. in 1814 to Warsaw, Hiroshima and Berlin in World War II to the many disasters in Japan and the late 20th century earthquakes in Tangshan, China and Mexico City, and more. The experiences are broadly drawn and discussed in depth.

Several excerpts provide a view of the depth of understanding offered by the authors:

- “The process of post-disaster recovery is a window into the power structure of the society that has been stricken”. “Who decides what will be rebuilt where, and which voices carry for the dominant narratives that interpret what transpires?” [p12-13]
- George Harvey, editor of *Harper's*, sat down to write a commentary of the earthquake and fire, it was utterly conventional for him to assure subscribers that the city was ‘certain to arise quickly from its ashes, greater and more beautiful than ever.’” [p31] “Harvey was typical in treating the disaster as an episode in a story rather than as a random event or fleeting spectacle. It was not just any story but one with a dependably happy ending.” [p32] Disasters were not endings, but beginnings of the next chapter of life.
- Memorialization of disaster is important, but tricky. “...the Oklahoma City National Memorial had taken shape too quickly, been rushed into being before the event had taken a stable place in the nation's memory. It was, some critics said, an example of a problematic aspect of the popularity of contemporary memorial expression: events are memorialized before they are assimilated into historic consciousness.” [p58]
 - Society's response, like a person's grief, is a process that needs to be allowed to evolve.
 - “Reconstruction had to happen – and reconstruction, like all action, entails selective remembrance and selective forgetting.” [p131]
- Speed is usually a friend in the reconstruction process. Do something before the paralysis of analysis sets in. Reconstruction of The White House and The Capital Building was quickly commenced before the resurrection of the earlier re-consideration of the wisdom of the capital city's location could be seriously pursued. [Chapter 4]
- “Japan has always rebuilt its cities, and usually with astonishing speed.” Usually reconstruction is from private initiatives based on individual actions. In 1888, Japan instituted the Tokyo Urban Improvement Ordinance; followed by the 1889 Tokyo Urban Improvement Plan and the 1919 Japanese Urban Planning Law all geared to controlling the land and enabling readjustment of land form, lot layouts and land ownership. [p 213 – 222]

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- The post-World War II reconstruction of Berlin shows that design needs to start at the beginning; fundamental questions should be asked at the outset. To prevent that ascension of assumptions. "..., the first postwar planner also saw destruction as an opportunity to break away from the failures of the past. Across the political spectrum, the densely packed tenement city of the nineteenth century – that is most of Berlin – was seen as a mistake. At the time therefore, no one supported reconstruction."
 - "Its basic principles were largely those of international modernism, proposing separation of housing, commerce and industry." Its line of orientation would be not historical, but rather the natural landscape of the Spree River valley." [p 120-121] A clean slate, no matter how painfully created, must be honored.
 - "The official policy of Berlin during the 1990's...took the form of design rules intended to restore the scale, density, visual appeal, and lively public spaces of the early twentieth-century city." [p129]
 - Design guidelines dealt with building heights, the grid of narrow streets, masonry facades, mimicry of scale and diversity, all derived from historic photographs. [p130]
- "...recovery in Gernika [a Basque City devastated during the Spanish Civil War] exhibited a distinct physical, emotional and cultural resilience." [p160] Symbols and traditions are important aspects of reconstruction. In Gernika, the historic muse of arches was honored, enclosed porches was not. [p165]
- The story of three second in Tangsten on July 28, 1976 and the aftermath, found described in Chapter 10, is required reading.

The Authors' Final Word

The concluding chapter [p335], entitled "Axioms of Resilience" provides the following thoughts;

1. "Narratives of Resilience are a Political Necessity
2. "Disasters Reveal the Resilience of Governments
3. "Narratives of Resilience are Always Contested
4. "Local Resilience is Linked to National Renewal
5. "Resilience is Underwritten by Outsiders
6. "Urban Rebuilding Symbolizes Human Resilience
7. "Remembrance Drives Resilience
8. "Resilience Benefits from the Inertia of Prior Investment
9. "Resilience Exploits the Power of Place
10. "Resilience Catches Opportunism as Opportunity
11. "Resilience, Like Disaster, is Site-Specific
12. "Resilience Entails More than Rebuilding"

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