



Re-framing Resilience: Trans-disciplinarity, reflexivity and progressive Sustainability

STEPS Centre Symposium 2008

24 & 25 September, G24/25, The Freeman Centre, Sussex University

Background and aims

Recent years have seen rising academic and policy interest in the complex, open, path-dependent dynamics of coupled social, technological and environmental systems. Building on the seminal work of Holling on resilience and adaptation, the field is notably led by the Resilience Alliance. This vigorous and sophisticated body of work is focusing on interlinkages between social and ecological aspects and the prospect of more integrated and effective policy making for transitions to sustainability.

Involving leading protagonists from diverse disciplinary perspectives, this Symposium will explore some of the wider frontier challenges in this field. What are the implications of constructivist understandings of the role of power in framing knowledge and incertitude – as developed for instance in science and technology studies? How can we integrate insights from the fields of reflexive governance and technological transitions? What are the interlinkages and tensions between dynamic properties of resilience and robustness and more explicitly normative commitments to sustainability – including those particular versions of Sustainability that respond to the goals and values of marginalised people? How can we disentangle conservative pre-occupations with structure from more progressive concerns with promoting people's livelihoods and wellbeing, and reducing vulnerability? What are the implications for grounded engagements in southern settings on practical policy challenges in fields like agricultural innovation, pharmaceutical and seed regulation, dealing with disease epidemics, water management and peri-urban transitions?

The Symposium will complement and build on work at the ESRC STEPS (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) Centre at IDS and SPRU at the University of Sussex. This trans-disciplinary initiative is seeking to weave these themes into a new framework for structuring analysis, informing policy and driving progress for the most vulnerable communities. For more information about the Centre, see www.steps-centre.org.

Taking place over a day and a half from lunchtime on September 24, the Symposium will be built around a series of five key questions, each addressed by an invited keynote speaker and several discussants. By drawing an unusual range of protagonists and perspectives together, we are aiming at a sparky, provocative and forward-looking meeting which makes genuine progress on both intellectual and practical fronts.

In sum, the Symposium aims to engage resilience perspectives constructively with those from other strands of theory and practice around the challenges of progressive Sustainability and development. To this end, outputs will include a briefing paper which summarises the presentations and discussions, together with a one-page popular synthesis for wide communication. We hope that the meeting will also help build an ongoing network of researchers interested in taking forward trans-disciplinary dialogue around these challenges, and identify opportunities for further collaborative research.

Programme

24 September

12.00 Collection from the Old Ship Hotel, Brighton for the Freeman Centre

12.30 *Lunch and registration*

1.30 **Introduction**

Introducing participants; sharing some initial thinking from the STEPS Centre and Stockholm Resilience Centre

Melissa Leach – 10 mins

Carl Folke – 10 mins

2.15 **Session 1: *What are the potentials and tensions in linking resilience thinking with an emphasis on social justice and reducing vulnerability?***

(for instance: resilience of what for whom? conservative structures vs. progressive functions; systems vs. actors; vulnerability and development debates; critical political ecology...)

Keynote presenter: Neil Adger

Discussants: Tom Downing; Christo Fabricius; Ian Scoones

3.30 *Tea and coffee*

4.00 **Session 2: *What insights might constructivist perspectives and the politics of knowledge bring to resilience thinking?***

(for instance: multiple and partial perspectives and framings; positionality, reflexivity, uncertainty...)

Keynote presenter: Wiebe Bijker

Discussants: Emily Boyd; Ravi Prabhu; Andy Stirling

5.15 Collection from the Freeman Centre for the Old Ship Hotel, Brighton

6.30 Drinks reception followed by dinner at 7.00, Terre à Terre, Brighton (see map)

25 September

8.30 Collection from the Old Ship Hotel, Brighton for the Freeman Centre

9.00 **Session 3: *What roles can resilience play in addressing long term structural change and radical transformations?***

(for instance: focus on short-term shocks at the expense of longer-term change; resilience and robustness; unresolved question of whether resilience is persistence or capacity to transform into a new state; situations where radical transformations of systems may be needed e.g. re climate change...)

Keynote presenter: Billie Lee Turner

Discussants: Per Olsson; Kwesi Atta-Krah; John Thompson

10.30 *Tea and coffee*

11.00 **Session 4: *What is the potential for fruitful interchange between work on science and technology governance, and resilience studies?***

(for instance: relationship between momentum/resilience of socio-technical systems and socio-ecological systems; governance strategies for promoting environmentally and socially resilient technologies; science and innovation policy for resilience; rigidities of material and social infrastructures...)

Keynote presenter: Frans Berkhout

Discussants: Victor Galaz; Adrian Smith, Jan-Peter Voss

12.30 *Lunch*

1.30 **Session 5: *What are the broader implications and dangers of resilience discourse?***

(for instance: why resilience now? Historical perspectives; compatibility with discourses of neo-liberal governance or security; tendencies towards blackboxing; terms on which social issues are incorporated...)

Keynote presenter: Sheila Jasanoff

Discussants: Phil McNaghten; Paul Warde; Paul Nightingale

3.00 *Tea and coffee*

3.30 **Round-up and ways forward: Re-jig, reframe, reject?**

Brief reflections from a panel of participants

Next steps

5.00 Collection from the Freeman Centre for the Old Ship Hotel, Brighton