

Gathering Space after Disaster: Understanding the Communicative and Collective Dimensions of Resilience through Field Research across Time in Hurricane Impacted Regions of the United States

Authors : Jack L. Harris, Marya L. Doerfel, Hyunsook Youn, Minkyung Kim, Kautuki Sunil Jariwala

Abstract : Organizational resilience refers to the ability to sustain business or general work functioning despite wide-scale interruptions. We focus on organization and businesses as a pillar of their communities and how they attempt to sustain work when a natural disaster impacts their surrounding regions and economies. While it may be more common to think of resilience as a trait possessed by an organization, an emerging area of research recognizes that for organizations and businesses, resilience is a set of processes that are constituted through communication, social networks, and organizing. Indeed, five processes, robustness, rapidity, resourcefulness, redundancy, and external availability through social media have been identified as critical to organizational resilience. These organizing mechanisms involve multi-level coordination, where individuals intersect with groups, organizations, and communities. Because the nature of such interactions are often networks of people and organizations coordinating material resources, information, and support, they necessarily require some way to coordinate despite being displaced. Little is known, however, if physical and digital spaces can substitute one for the other. We thus are guided by the question, is digital space sufficient when disaster creates a scarcity of physical space? This study presents a cross-case comparison based on field research from four different regions of the United States that were impacted by Hurricanes Katrina (2005), Sandy (2012), Maria (2017), and Harvey (2017). These four cases are used to extend the science of resilience by examining multi-level processes enacted by individuals, communities, and organizations that together, contribute to the resilience of disaster-struck organizations, businesses, and their communities. Using field research about organizations and businesses impacted by the four hurricanes, we code data from interviews, participant observations, field notes, and document analysis drawn from New Orleans (post-Katrina), coastal New Jersey (post-Sandy), Houston Texas (post-Harvey), and the lower keys of Florida (post-Maria). This paper identifies an additional organizing mechanism, networked gathering spaces, where citizens and organizations, alike, coordinate and facilitate information sharing, material resource distribution, and social support. Findings show that digital space, alone, is not a sufficient substitute to effectively sustain organizational resilience during a disaster. Because the data are qualitative, we expand on this finding with specific ways in which organizations and the people who lead them worked around the problem of scarce space. We propose that gatherings after disaster are a sixth mechanism that contributes to organizational resilience.

Keywords : communication, coordination, disaster management, information and communication technologies, interorganizational relationships, resilience, work

Conference Title : ICDEM 2018 : International Conference on Disaster and Emergency Management

Conference Location : New York, United States

Conference Dates : April 19-20, 2018