

# *The Virginia Tech Symposium on Enhancing Resilience To Catastrophic Events Through Communicative Planning*

## **Introduction**

The Institute for Policy and Governance and the School of Public and International Affairs at Virginia Tech invite scholars to consider how collaborative planning can enhance resilience to events that threaten to overcome the social and ecological integrity of communities, states, and societies. Presentations and discussion will be held in Blacksburg, VA on **November 16-18, 2008**, and symposium papers will be edited and revised for journal and/or book publication in early 2009.

## **Description and Call For Papers**

In an essay entitled "The Resilient Community", Virginia Tech Planning Professor Paul Knox (2007) suggested that the widely-admired response of the university to the April 16<sup>th</sup> 2007 campus shootings was grounded in affective bonds and close-knit social networks that instill community spirit. The bedrock of Virginia Tech's common identity and shared purpose, Knox suggested, was collaborative interaction that challenges assumptions, stretches the imagination, and develops self-awareness, as students and faculty interact in ways that remake their inner selves, social selves, and professional selves.

Over the past year, planning scholars at Virginia Tech have been considering how collaboration might enhance resilience not only in intentional communities like universities but also within neighborhoods, states, and societies. We wish to extend this arena of scholarly interest and compelling social need by inviting speakers to Blacksburg to consider how collaboration can enhance resilience to disruptions that can occur across a spectrum of time, space, and organizational complexity, from unforeseen violence to disasters like hurricane Katrina to the biospheric catastrophe of rapid anthropogenic climate change.

Resilience is a potent interdisciplinary systems metaphor whose origins lie in the Latin word "resilire", meaning "to leap back." Hazard planners, security analysts, and others have deployed

the term to describe efforts to restore and maintain an optimal stable condition. A more promising approach for our purposes defines resilience as an interactive product of an unsettling event and a social and biophysical system that can exist in multiple stable states, at scales that may encompass communities, states, or societies. These systems may stabilize, change, or collapse when their integrity is compromised by an event that could be rapid and discrete and irreversible like a terrorist attack, gradual and insidious like climate change, or incremental and spatially heterogeneous like a drought. Resilience is the capacity to withstand loss and recover, to weather disturbance without dramatic loss of identity or structural or functional complexity.

We seek to understand how communicative planning can enhance resilience and how resilience thinking can expand the domain of communicative action. Communicative planners have shown how careful listening and interpretation can accommodate differences in styles of speech, forms of knowledge, and styles of reasoning to promote social learning and yield agreements that are both creative and equitable. Communicative planning scholarship has lately joined in defining emergent forms of collaborative governance, and enlarging its scope from stakeholder-based processes to a diversity of collaborative approaches that can bring to life new discursive frameworks and worldviews that over time can shape institutions, such as regional civic roundtables (Innes and Rongerude 2006) and community reconciliation processes (Sandercock 2003).

We invite interested individuals to submit abstracts that respond to three areas of inquiry:

### **1. What can collaborative processes contribute toward resilience?**

*Do collaborative processes create or enhance awareness of resilience dynamics, such as the presence of regime change thresholds, or the possibility of transformative alternatives? Papers might explore how collaborative processes promote learning and knowing and the rapid diffusion of ideas and innovations, nurture and reproduce expertise and ways of knowing. Papers may also address other capacities beyond knowledge formation, such as how collaborative processes may contribute to passing a threshold into an alternative regime, or help manage a system to withstand shocks and avoid a threshold. Another approach would be to*

*examine how leaders can enhance collaborative capacity to identify mutual interest, forge common identity, or foster shared sense of purpose and will to act.*

## **2. How can we design and conduct collaborative processes to enhance resilience?**

*The principal application of stakeholder-based collaborative planning processes has been to resolve otherwise-intractable disputes. Are similar design and process guidelines appropriate to enhance resilience, or does the new objective call for a different design and approach? In addition, papers might examine how, and under what conditions, collaborative processes might be associated with other forms of networked governance in order to maintain system continuity and integrity, or reorganize in response to changing conditions when existing ways of governing become untenable.*

## **3. When and under what circumstances can collaborative processes contribute to resilience?**

*While it may take years to foster collective identity and action through collaboration, events that threaten to overcome system integrity often cannot be anticipated and opportunities to influence system reorganization may be fleeting. Papers might examine how collaborative processes can be situated to address threats that are rapid and discrete, as well as those that are gradual, insidious, incremental, potentially irreversible, intergenerational, or spatially heterogeneous. In addition, papers might consider the circumstances in which collaboration can enhance generalized resilience capacity, which is associated with diverse organizational forms and ways of knowing, loose connections between self-organizing units, and unimpeded circulation of feedback throughout a system (Walker and Salt 2006).*

### **Key Dates**

Abstract deadline	30 April 2008
Notification of acceptance	15 May 2008
Deadline for full papers	1 October 2008
Symposium	16-18 November 2008
Papers Revised for Publication	May 2009 (tentatively)

## **Abstract Submission**

Proposals for papers or posters are to be sent by e-mail to [resilience@vt.edu](mailto:resilience@vt.edu). The body of the e-mail (no attachments please) should contain:

- Title of the proposed paper
- Abstract of less than 300 words, and
- Complete address and professional affiliation of all (co)-author(s).

The deadline for proposals is **30 April 2008**.

## **Financial Support**

Travel cost reimbursement will be provided for symposium participants, as well as local transportation, food, and lodging.

## **Hosts**

- Institute for Policy and Governance, Virginia Tech
- School of Public and International Affairs, Virginia Tech

## **Conference Chair**

- Bruce Evan Goldstein, Assistant Professor, Virginia Tech

## **Advisory Committee**

- Max Stephenson, Director, Institute for Policy and Governance, Virginia Tech
- John Randolph, Director, School Policy and International Affairs, Virginia Tech
- R. Bruce Hull, Professor of Forestry, Virginia Tech
- Paul Knox, University Distinguished Professor and Senior Fellow for International Advancement, Virginia Tech

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Conference Website: : <http://www.ipg.vt.edu/resilience.html>

## **References**

Innes, Judith and Jane Rongerude. 2006. "Collaborative Regional Initiatives: Civic Entrepreneurs Work to Fill the Governance Gap ." Working Paper 2006-04. Berkeley, CA: Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California at Berkeley.

Knox, Paul. 2007. "The Resilient Community." *Planning*, June issue.

Sandercock, Leonie. 2003. "Out of the Closet: The Importance of Stories and Storytelling in Planning Practice." *Planning Theory and Practice* 4(1):11-28.

Walker, Brian and David Salt. 2006. *Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.