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Community Resilience for Business Districts

A report produced by London First with support from community partners on how to improve resilience in local (micro-) city communities

'In the 21st Century, building resilience is one of our most urgent social and economic issues because we live in a world defined by disruption.' Judith Rodin, President of the Rockefeller Foundation and Author of 'The Resilience Dividend'.

When it comes to understanding resilience, many people think of it as a way of bouncing back from an incident or disaster, namely a one-off activity that encourages people to 'keep calm and carry on'. While there is an element of this, true resilience goes far beyond single events and short-term recovery. It is about rising to the challenges of change, seizing the opportunities out of apparent chaos, and adapting to the new set of circumstances so that one is better prepared next time – it involves bouncing forward, not back, and emerging stronger. Being better prepared for change means being better prepared for opportunity.[1]

While we are more used to thinking of resilience as belonging to individuals who manage to pull through after a trauma, it also applies to cities and the business districts that make up cities. The term used in this report for local business districts is the micro-city: a micro-city is the product of common interest and shared geography. When the world presents so many challenges and dangers – as well as opportunities – community resilience is about making micro-cities more robust and agile partnerships where there is an optimism to rise above incidents of, for instance, terrorism, flooding or even recession through concerted, collective action.

1 The Resilience Dividend, J Rodin, 2015.

Micro-city Thinking - What's the Value Add?

There are clear benefits of working with colleagues and neighbours to create a working business community that supports one another through testing times. Some of the benefits are:

— Increased Awareness: More eyes and ears generate a greater ability to transfer information to the authorities so as to prevent attacks, crimes, outrages or even radicalisation.

— Enhanced Security: Collective responsibility exerts governance, shares knowledge and, through exercising jointly, enhances the security of the whole business community.

— Stress Reduction: Greater mutual support occurs when all or parts of the community share common difficulties or stresses from new or pre-existing problems.

— Competitive Advantage: Recovery times, both short and long term, will be improved. Rising to opportunities will confer advantage over competitors.

What is Micro-city Community Resilience?

Micro-city Community Resilience is defined as 'the coming together of individuals and organisations before, during and after major shocks or stresses to ensure a sustainable business community for the future'. This capability requires both a proactive and a reactive approach, as well as a strong cultural component. Taken together, they enable a business district to survive and thrive for the long term. Community resilience rises above the nature of the shock or stress or the type of business – it is transformative in general.

The Value Add

Other important benefits are shown in the diagram above.

By way of hard evidence of post-incident benefits, a report on how six countries managed community recovery after significant disasters showed that reconstruction can: offer opportunities to fix long-standing problems; improve construction and design standards, renew infrastructure; create new land use; reinvent economies; and improve governance. If done well, reconstruction can help break the cycle of disaster-related impacts and losses, and hence improve resilience of both a city and a district.[2]

What are the Key Features?

— Decentralised and distributed organisations are in general more resilient than hierarchical and siloed organisations. Multiple partners in a local area create opportunities to specialise and provide redundancy.

— High levels of social vulnerability do not automatically indicate low levels of resilience: even very vulnerable communities can be well organised and can possess significant social and cultural capital, with close community ties, active social support networks, and vibrant institutions such as churches.

— Resilience against one type of hazard does not guarantee resilience against others. The cause of any shock or stress is less important that the collective, joined-up response.

— Community actions should be directed at achieving behavioural change by building trust in a supportive, collegiate culture.

2 After Great Disaster: How Six Countries Managed Community Recovery, Laurie Johnson and Robert Olshansky, 2016. (Available free as pdf.)

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An Example of Rebuilding Trust

After the civil disorder in Croydon (UK) in 2011, Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) were established across the local community. The SNT based in one district became a community contact point during weekday evenings and weekend afternoons. It helped cut crime and disorder and re-offending; it routinely monitored social-media websites to look for pre-emptive intelligence; and it helped with the clean-up operation.

What are the Key Attributes?

Survive and Thrive. There are many attributes that make up good business community resilience. The main ones are:

Anticipation. A resilient community anticipates future shocks by encouraging appropriate planning and preparation. This should be done in terms of thriving for the longer term rather than trying to survive specific disasters which may be too numerous to assess. It can involve new design features in buildings, new indicator and warning mechanisms, new communication channels and supply chains, etc.

Leadership. Resilience must be top down and bottom up. This requires strong leadership coupled to conviction and trust. Co-operation and collaboration from others should be facilitated by encouragement to take steps that otherwise would be avoided. Good leadership maintains hope, engenders motivation and sustains morale. It moves beyond procedure and plans, and embraces people and behaviours.

Adaptability. Adaptability influences that 'sweet spot' between reaction and prediction, providing an inherent ability to respond efficiently to a wider range of challenges and opportunities. Being agile enough to develop new plans, take new actions and modify behaviours is important. However, a resilient community strategy is also being able to adapt to advantages of a situation: it is about thinking and acting in the short term but with the long term in mind.

Diversity. Business districts and neighbourhoods act as communities through social cohesion – the social glue! Diversity in a community can be a strength. Business is more resilient if it avoids single pathways and closed loops, and goes for multiple sources and networks: a modular system is more robust than a rigid structure to disruption, for instance. But all approaches need to have a strong culture as the underpinning force.

Learning. Community resilience requires an emphasis on learning and education rather than training. Education differs from training in that it prepares people by enabling them to distil principles to guide their actions so that they can use an understanding of things to deal with the unexpected. Learning from mistakes and from others is vital for adaptability and to prevent errors occurring in the future. It is about having the right culture in a community.

Andy Revkin of The New York Times wrote on 21 July 2016 of the importance of community resilience and how President Obama was promoting its practice. The President used Twitter on 20 July to urge Americans to check on neighbours as a heat wave built over that weekend. 'This reflected the President's understanding that resilience is only partly about infrastructure, agency funding and the like; it's also about community cohesion. It's vital to have the capacity to recognize threats but the response to a threat depends on connectedness, down to the level of a city block.'

Personable		Institutional
Soft Skills:		**Hard Skills:**
Culture		Policies
Leadership		Protocols
Adaptability	**Community Resilience**	Planning
Empowerment		Crisis Management
Learning		Business Continuity
Neighbourliness		Disaster Recovery
Networking		Standards
Adaptable		**Directional**

Lessons from Others

Resilient New Zealand launched in 2015 a project called 'The Role of Business in Recovery' to improve how the private sector contributes to the economic and social well-being of their communities following a natural disaster. This reflects the view that businesses are an integral part of communities and have an important role to play in any recovery effort. The initiative states that 'Communities need to be linked together from large businesses to the corner store and local sports club, with families, neighbours and colleagues all prepared to help out during a natural disaster.'

What are the Soft and Hard Skills Needed?

Successful business community resilience relies on a careful integration of two components. One is the 'hard' material of plans, protocols and procedures. These are often institutionalised and imposed through documents and handbooks to help with emergency

3 Community Resilience: Understanding the concept and its application, A McAslan, Strathfillan Consultancy Paper, 12 December 2012.

response but may rarely be opened even in an emergency. The other 'soft' component – and perhaps the more important of the two, but certainly the harder to create – is the cultural and human traits of networking, leadership, communication, collaboration, etc. These are sometime referred to collectively as 'social capital'. This is more personable and a reflection of social maturity and adaptability.

It is the combination of the two that makes community resilience work. Some communities – often those centred around larger organisations tend to rely more on the 'hard' skills as compulsion can be enforced. Those communities with smaller, more diverse organisations tend to rely on looser alliances where personal contact and persuasion come the fore. Whatever the size of the community, both 'soft' and 'hard' components are necessary

What are the Enablers?

The 'soft' and 'hard' skills that together constitute community resilience are present in three enablers that lie at the heart of community resilience. First, there are the hard physical enablers (systems and assets) that provide the means to survive and recover. Secondly, there are the hard procedural enablers (policies, plans and processes) that provide the ideas. Thirdly, there are the soft social enablers (leadership, knowledge and motivation) that provide the will. All three enablers are mutually supporting. Enhanced physical security, for instance, will improve a community's confidence and morale.[3]

Physical enablers aim to satisfy the basic human needs of air, food, water and shelter, as well as personal safety. Hence, the local infrastructure must

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ensure the continuance of these needs through the provision of essential utilities, food, transportation, health services, etc. Beyond this, communities need to plan for alternative working spaces and accommodation to cater for the basics and continue operating.

Procedural enablers include continuity and risk strategies, disaster policies and plans, and the proper application of standards, regulations, local knowledge and information. Whereas physical assets provide the means to survive and thrive, improved policies and plans allow the assets to be deployed effectively and efficiently

Social enablers are about getting people in communities prepared and willing to confront and overcome dangerous and difficult circumstances. It requires community cohesion and motivation. Cohesion occurs when individuals want to stay together to provide mutual support to achieve a common outcome. It draws on shared experiences, a common sense of worth and an expressed collective identity which is sustained by shared values and beliefs. Motivation is the product of a common will to survive and

prosper, confidence in the emergency services and effective local leadership to bounce forward.

One person who can apply these enablers at the micro-city level is the Business District Resilience Officer (BDRO). This individual should be able to broker relationships and transactions within the local (micro-) community. His or her roles and responsibilities are shown in the accompanying box.

How do we achieve Behavioural Change for the long term?

No amount of hard or soft skills will deliver the long-term objective of making a micro-city community survive shocks and stresses and go on to thrive. The focus should be on achieving behavioural change and embed this in future activities. In order to enact behavioural change across a diverse collection of individuals and organisations – whether they

be private residents, small businesses or large corporations – it is necessary to build from the ground up a robust and credible community spirit or mind set. This cannot be imposed from above or be measured through broad categories such as health, economy, etc. That community spirit comes through the establishment of partnerships, networks and collectives in micro-cities that together can enact meaningful change through common interest and success. It is a symbiotic relationship of like-minded people who realise that they have more to gain by working together than not. By joining together a myriad of micro-cities, much like ink dots merging on paper, then it is possible to create larger city resilience. In fact, decentralised organisations are the building blocks of micro-cities and can be more effective and adaptable than centralised ones. The natural world has many examples to offer in this regard.[4]

What do you want from community resilience?

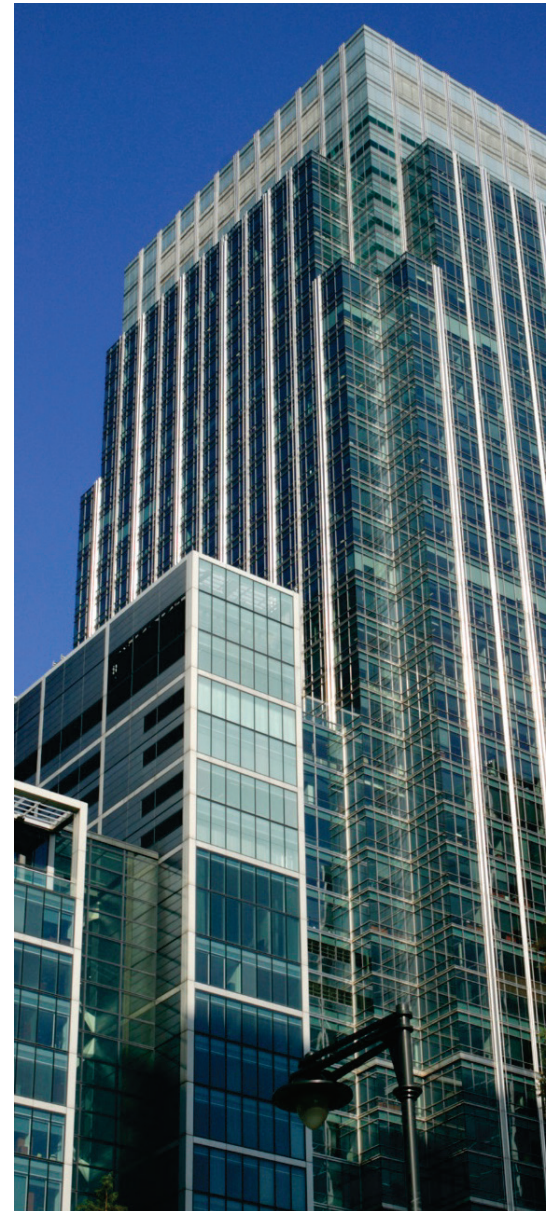| Know the key stakeholders in my community |
| Build effective relationships |
| Share best practice |
| Add value in the community |
| Agree processes for community resilience |

4 Learning from the Octopus: How secrets of nature can help us fight terrorist attacks, natural disasters and disease.
R Sagarin, 2012.

Business District Resilience Officer (BDRO) – Roles & Responsibilities

– Decide on your Area of Responsibility (AoR) and the organisations within. It is useful if the AoR can follow a local government or a police authority boundary as this is likely to have structures already in place that will assist e.g. business crime-reduction partnerships, business improvement districts (BIDs), etc.

– Decide on your Area of Interest (AoI) which should be based on a local risk/situational appreciation - this distinguishes community resilience from other community-based activities.

– Establish a local resilience plan and set of protocols and procedures that align with other local networks and city-wide strategies.

– Provide a challenge to get people in the area engaged in solving a common problem, albeit a small task at first.

– Identify and publicise safe and accessible city community centres and shelter facilities, together with alternatives.

– Provide a communication and warning mechanism that allows messaging both up and down, thereby facilitating scalable feedback.

– Ensure the provision of reserves and sources of key supplies (e.g. food, water, batteries, first-aid kits, etc) are established for long-term recovery and maintenance of supply chains.

– Facilitate best practice (including standards) and examples shared and circulated.

– Ensure collective brand and reputation are maintained – even by simply keeping stores open.

– Foster business-to-business connections to advance readiness and response through current points of contact.

– Ensure a consensual mandate that should include fund-raising and spending powers e.g. a voluntary levy.

– Act as the local district expert by leading regular micro-city meetings.

– Drive changes of behaviour by engaging with immediate neighbours.

– Act as first point of contact to the police or external agencies in an emergency.
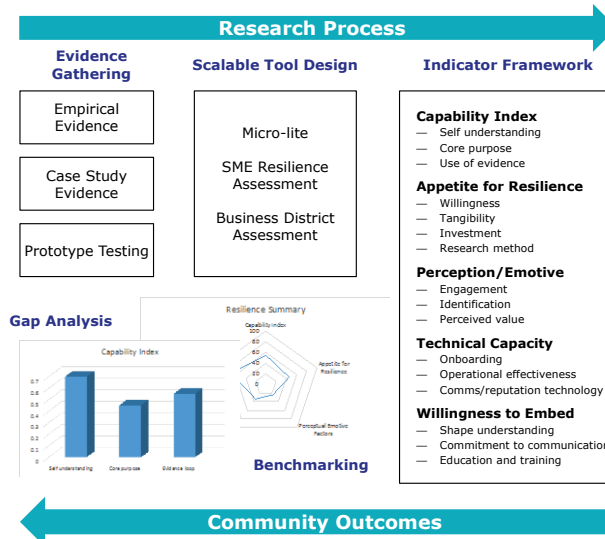

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Developing Tools to support Micro-city Resilience

In nature, organisms don't generally need to benchmark their resilience because nature makes it abundantly clear – survive or succumb. Likewise, extreme circumstances in human societies, such as found in emergency medicine or warfare, demonstrate their own unequivocal results. However, in modern management, the cliché that 'if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it' is as true for resilience as other disciplines.

Metrics can demonstrate progress toward the desired resiliency goal and link improvements with competitiveness. Hence, it is important to consider how best to measure and benchmark resilience. While not easy for an activity that includes behavioural and cultural factors, measurement can be achieved by considering the key characteristics in the proposed definition outlined earlier.

Evidence Base: The research arm of this project combined existing international evidence on community resilience with new data from people and cultures collected from three micro-city case studies in London.[5] The micro-cities chosen were: The Safer London Partnership – an example of small business communities; The Heart of London Business Improvement District (BID) – an example of a

typical mega-city partnership; and The Westfield Corporation – an example of a community of businesses managed from an international perspective.

Of key interest was the scalability question, namely could the same governance, processes and tools be applied across communities of radically differing size and character. This work has resulted in the 'Micro-city Resilience Assessment Tool' designed to measure the interaction between geography, community and experience. Experience seeks to combine the accepted hard factors in mainstream resilience (planning for shocks and stresses) with the psychological performance shaping factors we uncovered (resilience mediators). The tool

allows micro-cities to reflect resilience overall – as either a comparative benchmark or in full detail – on an-indicator-by-indicator level (illustrated by the radar and bar plots shown).

The tool addresses two key challenges:

1. Scalability: the application of the same reasoning system to communities of communities of radically different size and construction.

2. Control Features: the degree to which control could be executed. This ranges from informal measures with consensual agreement to command and control hierarchy with associated policy enforcement.

The tool successfully addresses these and other challenges using a questionnaire based around three levels – the largest consists of 41 questions relating to five key factors.

The results from the research allow micro-cities not only to rate themselves in overall community resilience but also to serve two further key functions.

5   Business Community Resilience, Master's Thesis, M Kaiser, https://figshare.com/s/cab64072519adb81b610

The first is gap analysis: the tool allows the community to see particular strengths and weaknesses, remembering that these are linked to empirical evidence. The second is benchmarking: as the community makes efforts to improve resilience through countermeasures to deal with those gaps, so the tool operates as a success indicator.

Next Steps

This report began with a deep dive into what is at the heart of making communities resilient. It looked at what exists and what is preached. The work discovered that we may sometimes be looking down the telescope from the wrong end. It is not just about top-down direction or grand strategies. While there is clearly a case for hard skills based on plans and assets, there is an equally important one to generate communities that have the right culture and behaviours. When these coalesce, members commit to a set of values that allow those communities not only to strive but also to thrive. This is neither threat specific nor crisis-management focused, or is it harking after a community spirit in say wartime. It is a scientific formulation of both.

The next steps are to build on this report and advance the ideas further. An 'Application for Resilient Communities' (ARC) mobile service has been developed to offer users both the basics and a barometer for assessing their resilience. This is a ground-breaking device based on research and interviews. It will form the foundation for continuing the project further. If you are interested in learning more and becoming involved, then do get in touch.

What can you do to improve Community Resilience?
— Get involved.
— Get to know your business neighbour.
— Get to know your local business and community partnerships e.g. business improvement districts (BIDs).
— Get educated, as well as trained.
— Learn how to access useful information that could help.
— Encourage diversity. The more variety and connections exist, the more likely the system will survive and thrive.
— Act on several fronts. Do not put all your eggs in one basket but explore alternatives.
— Acknowledge limited lifespan of equipment and contacts. There is inherent obsolescence. Think ahead of next versions/models.
— Use the 'Application for Resilient Communities' mobile App.

Good Examples of Community Resilience

— Creating a multi-faith space in a shopping mall. By establishing a faith space in a shopping complex, it has been possible to increase dwell time, and hence revenue, as well as improve local community relations by showing an awareness of needs and interests.

— Creating a list of medics in a marina. After a particularly serious yachting injury, which was attended to by fellow yachtsman who happened to be a combat-qualified medic, it was decided to create a list of such people on site for both existing and new members. It was felt that this would improve the resiliency and reputation of the club in the future.

— Dealing with the aftermath of a bombing. As a core component of the recovery planning for Boston (US) in 2013, the Department for Neighborhood Development (DND) took the lead in refining an assistance plan for businesses. DND worked closely with the Office of Constituent Engagement to develop a contact list of all the businesses in the affected area, then reached out to the owners with information about the plan for reopening the area. Information included actions the businesses would be required to take as part of the re-entry process, such as obtaining required health and occupancy permits, and providing access to the FBI to some locations as their investigation continued. Such activity proved valuable in running the 2014 marathon.

This report is based on the work of numerous participants and organisations based in London. Extensive research, including person-to-person interviews, was conducted as part of the work to establish the status of community resilience, particularly the measurement of the topic through enablers and indicators.

The report summarises the results. Besides the report, an aide memoire and mobile App (Application for Resilient Communities, ARC) have been created.

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