

Summary paper to

Is the Concept of 'Resilience' Useful within Cities Facing both Conflict & Disaster Risk? Using Beirut as a Case Study.

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Context

It is now widely recognised that disasters are not exogenous extreme events which cause catastrophe but the structural failure of political, economic and social systems. It has been all too easy to demonise hazards as the cause of vulnerability but hazards only become catastrophic disasters when people in power fail. Thus international bodies such as UNISDR have sought to create treaties that encourage governments to mobilise against these threats, such as HFA and its upcoming incarnation HFA2. However, responses have been sluggish, with only half of the governments which agreed to implement the recommendations returning progress updates. Progress has been made however with the concept of 'resilience' gaining traction and commentators calling for more 'radical action' to be taken against vulnerability creation, particularly with regards to its more progressive approaches. Using a social constructivist approach, the researcher investigates these progressive approaches of 'resilience' which have been applied to contexts of both conflict and disaster. Using Beirut as a case study, the researcher discovers that it is people, power and politics that indeed pose more of a threat to vulnerability than the hazards the country holds.

Aims

- To understand the nature of fragile and conflict affected cities will be investigated and current attempts to apply the concept of resilience to them will be assessed for compatibility.
- To gain further insights into the current operationalisation of resilience within both conflict and disaster scenarios and applying those to the complex context of Beirut.

Findings

- Findings suggest that a third of participants agreed and believed that urbanisation exacerbates the effect of disasters, that cities tend to confine and hold large numbers of people without vital infrastructure the chances of escaping disaster is less.
- Analysis of documents and confirmation from a number of interviews stressed that there is a clear link between climate and conflict with particular regard to how climate causes conflict.
- In the case of Beirut the main risks are earthquakes, unplanned urbanisation, refugee crises and local and regional conflicts. However, the risk of earthquake was not pre-empted as there is a sense of preoccupation with the refugee crises.
- Analysis from the research and interviews show that the biggest and overriding threat to Beirut and Lebanon is the large influx of Syria refugees, the sheer number and the size of Lebanon creates social tensions in the context of limited resources and opportunities.
- This study revealed some concern over the understanding and theoretical usage of the term 'resilience' as majority of interview participants had previous knowledge of this theoretical term, however a number of participants expressed that this word was nothing more than just a hollow buzzword.

- This study also revealed some limitations to the cross-disciplinary action towards resilience. It was highlighted that natural and conflict disaster vary greatly, in that, natural disasters had a unifying effect whereas conflict would do the opposite.

For access to the complete paper, please contact Research & Development at Humanitarian Academy for Development (HAD) at: research@had-int.org