

Conflict, Risk, and Resilience: A two-step process to overcome NIMBY and coordination failures

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Background

Professor of Environmental Psychology and Risk Perception and Management at the University of Lisbon. He specializes in analysis, perception and risk management. In this context developed a model of environmental stress and works actively with communities for two decades and have a 100% record in solving the so-called (erroneously) NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) problems (Portugal, Tunisia, Brasil, etc.)

Skills and expertise: Environment; Ecology; Social and Cultural Anthropology; Risk Management; Renewable Energy; Environmental Engineering; Social Influence; Risk Assessment; Social Psychology; Air Quality.

Abstract

Concepts are often prone to ambiguities driven by metaphorical usage that undermine science endeavors. Resilience, sustainability, risk, and risk communication are prime examples of this, where practitioners within these fields frequently contend with inaccurate or imprecise disciplinary definitions that ultimately lead to logic faults or unclear guidance for customers and stakeholders.

To address such concerns, this talk delves into the core meaning behind the disciplinary use of 'resilience' to advocate for a more operationalized usage of the term in our daily lexicon. Specifically, this talk will discuss resilience components such as (i) its normatively neutral (rather than inherently positive) framing, (ii) its inherent focus upon systemic and multi-temporal risk events, and the occasionally paradoxical relationship between resilience and sustainability in applied resilience scholarship and research. In this vein, this talk will raise a brief overview of the human – environment interaction in order to highlight the systematic entropic action that can simultaneously generate system resilience in some cases while increase system brittleness to the effects of others.

After reviewing a general background of the disciplinary and definitional concerns in the fields of risk and resilience, this talk will review real-world field experiments which serve as some of the key risk-based challenges of our day. Applications from such ideas will be referenced from ongoing difficulties associated with 'not-in-my-backyard' (NIMBY) social dilemmas (described here as an example of the Tragedy of the Anticommons), where local publics can use their individual and collective power to resist project development within their local communities. Using these applied definitions of risk, resilience, and risk communication, this talk will ultimately highlight recent work which sought to address NIMBY coordination failures via a two-step approach that (i) generates trust and cooperation between such publics and project planners, and (ii) uses this trust and coordination to generate shared knowledge of risk within uncertain and potentially adversarial environments which inform future development action.

These field experiments indicate that a rigorous attempt to address public mistrust and perceptions of power imbalances and change the pay-off structure of the given dilemma may help overcome such anticommons problems in specific cases, and may potentially generate enthusiasm and support for such projects by local publics moving forward.