

Natural Hazards Center

University of Colorado Boulder

Dimensions and Domains of Disaster Recovery

Kathleen Tierney, Director

Liesel A. Ritchie, Assistant Director for Research



February 2012

- Disaster recovery remains the least researched and least understood aspect of emergency management
- Studies tend to focus on early stages of recovery rather than long-term
- “The research and knowledge base in the realm of long-term recovery is seriously inadequate to the needs we face today.” ~ Rubin 2009



There are many definitions of recovery...

- The term is used inconsistently among policy makers, practitioners, academicians, researchers, and survivors
- The meaning of recovery creates expectations among different stakeholder groups about recovery processes and what recovery looks like

There are many definitions of recovery...

- Basic definitions describe returning to pre-event status or “normal” functioning following a disaster—focused on physical aspects of recovery
- More comprehensive definitions suggest something beyond the *status quo ante*—disaster recovery as an opportunity for community transformation



What is Recovery?

U.S. Department of Homeland Security Definition

"... the sustained commitment to return an impacted population and geographic area to a sustainable standard of living following an incident. This supports the goal of creating resilient populations and communities. Whereas response is focused primarily on minimizing immediate impacts, minimizing immediate consequences, and setting the conditions for long-term success, recovery is focused on restoring societies."

We prefer a definition that integrates the various activities associated with different phases of disasters ...

"... the differential process of restoring, rebuilding, and reshaping the physical, social, economic, and natural environment through pre-event planning and post-event actions." ~ Smith & Wenger 2006

It can be useful to think of disasters in stages or phases...

- Stage (or phase) models are a traditional way of looking at disasters—a chronologically phased approach
- Widely used by practitioners, academicians, and researchers

Stage models have limitations...

- Care must be taken to ensure that phases are not oversimplified
- Disaster processes do not happen on an exact timeline
- There is substantial overlap in the activities that occur during each phase



Phases of Disaster Recovery

- Short-term – typically 1-7 days following a disaster
- Intermediate or Mid-term – typically 6 months or less following a disaster
- Long-term – typically 6 months or longer following a disaster



Disaster Recovery "Domains"

Housing

- Temporary shelter
- Temporary housing
- Permanent housing





Disaster Recovery "Domains"

Economic Activity

- Local businesses
- Regional economy
- National economy



Infrastructure

- Transportation
- Utilities
- Other elements of critical infrastructure





Disaster Recovery "Domains"

Public buildings and facilities





Disaster Recovery "Domains"

Mental health and psychosocial well-being



Social “connectedness”

- Social capital
- Community attachment
- Quality of life



Cultural

- Culturally meaningful sites
- Activities
- Resources



Natural environment

- Physical environment
- Ecosystems
- Natural resources



Recovery at what level(s)?

- Households vs. neighborhoods vs. communities
- Jobs vs. businesses vs. supply chains vs. regional economic recovery



Domain and Scale Interdependencies

Looking at the big picture:

- Which recovery domains are most fundamental? Why?
- Interdependencies across domains must be considered to improve recovery outcomes

Critical considerations:

- 'Typical' disasters vs. catastrophes – level of complexity
- Protracted disaster impacts – environmental hazards, toxic contamination, nuclear hazards
- Cascading long-term effects and massive recovery challenges
- Therapeutic vs. corrosive community processes

Critical considerations:

- 'Building back' vs. 'building better' – Recovery as opportunity
- Financing disaster recovery – Do financing activities facilitate or disrupt recovery processes across domains and scales?
- Addressing inequalities and vulnerabilities; reaching marginalized groups

Critical considerations:

- When the disaster is also a crime – Liability, blame, and psychosocial recovery
- Who determines recovery success? – Multiple perspectives

Keep in mind:

- There are no sharp distinctions: Recovery begins as soon as disaster impact ends
- Recovery occurs in social contexts: Community specific
- Differential recovery experiences and outcomes

Keep in mind:

- Using post-disaster recovery processes to mitigate the effects of future disasters
- Equity as a recovery goal—in access to assistance and treatment throughout the recovery process
- The value of pre-disaster planning for post-disaster recovery

Discussion



Nationale ramp in Nederland 1 Februari 1953