Re-imagining Resilience as Multi-disciplinary, Multi-level, and Interconnected

Across disciplines, the concept of resilience has shaped theories of bouncing back, moving forward better, stability, and change through a range of issues, such as disaster recovery, infrastructure maintenance, and social adversity. While these diverse conceptual strands have grown the resilience literatures through distinct and often disconnected approaches, this essay takes a systems perspective to build on disciplinary insights through a more holistic and integrated framework. We review six separate disciplinary traditions of resilience that pertain to the provision of clean drinking water -- water engineering, social work, urban studies, communication, political science, and public health -- to uncover cross-disciplinary connections and opportunities to explore resilience at the interface of systems. Grounded in real-world examples of water systems resilience, we offer nine specific propositions for an expanded and connected framework applicable to interdependent systems. We argue that resilience is not an attribute or process but rather a dynamic of processes, orientations, and connections that sparks, pushes, carves out, and defines the direction of stability, change, and learning in ongoing cross-systems operations. Showing that systems intersect and depend on each other, we propose a new sub-concept, Resilience at Systems Interfaces (RASI), to understand propensity for systems risks and robustness, and how failures are propagated or resisted through systems interconnections.

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