

How Do Communities Recover from Disaster?

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Recovery consists of several overlapping issues

- Process and timing issues
- Physical and economic issues
- Financing issues

Perspectives of recovery researchers vary

- social (community or family scale)
- economic
- management
- design
- planning
- finance

I summarize several consensus findings from this literature.

Process

- ❑ The **first goal of recovery** is to return to the previous level of economic function and to replace the quantity of lost housing units.
- ❑ **Additional goals** depend on social, political, and economic context, as well as local and national politics.
- ❑ In general, **speed and quality** are the measures of a successful recovery process.
- ❑ **Recovery is a process**, with no clear endpoint.

Process (continued)

- ❑ Because **bureaucracies lack sufficient flexibility**, new community-based organizations emerge.
- ❑ **Local organizations are crucial** to a successful recovery process.
- ❑ Government can help by **supporting local organizations** and not tie their hands with excessive requirements.

Urban Systems

- ❑ **Negative trends** from before the disaster usually worsen during recovery. These include declining economies, social problems, and out-migration.
- ❑ **Cities usually rebuild in the same place**, and with the same general urban form, in all but the most catastrophic of disasters.
- ❑ **Economic and social networks** are more resilient than buildings.
- ❑ The **economic functions of the city usually continue** after the disaster, and residents usually try to locate their homes so as to maintain their pre-disaster social networks.

Physical Change

- **Citizens resist relocation** of residential areas, and relocations without citizen support and participation are likely to fail.
- Cities see **physical improvements after disasters**.
 - **Focused redevelopment efforts** are common and have been quite successful.

Equity

- Those with the **fewest resources get less attention** from aid organizations, and get it later in time.
- Those who are better **integrated into economic and social networks** will recover faster.

Money and Other Outside Resources

- Money comes from many sources:
 - local and national governments
 - insurers
 - foundations
 - investors
 - victims' savings
 - international aid organizations
- The money is always insufficient to meet all needs.
- Setting priorities for use of limited funds is a challenge, and the process is not usually a rational one.
- There are winners and losers after disasters.

Money/Resources (continued)

- ❑ **Outside resources** are vital. But **local decision making** is also important.
- ❑ The **national political context** often is a crucial factor in delivery of resources.
- ❑ Financial resources often are in the form of **loans, which eventually need to be repaid**. This can create problems many years after the disaster.

Planning Strategies

- **Speed is important** in rebuilding, to:
 - to keep businesses alive,
 - rebuild infrastructure, and
 - provide temporary and permanent housing for disaster victims.

- **Taking the time to plan the post-disaster reconstruction is also important.** Planning can:
 - coordinate land uses and infrastructure
 - ensure safety
 - promote design to improve the quality of residents' lives
 - account for the concerns of all citizens
 - seek cost-effective solutions

Planning Strategies (continued)

- **Previously existing plans** can help to improve both the speed and quality of post-disaster decisions.
- “Existing plans” means that the community has an **active planning process**, including
 - well-established community organizations,
 - lines of communication,
 - Information and data resources,
 - a variety of planning documents and tools, and
 - some degree of community consensus.

Planning Needs for Gulf Coast

- **Planning processes** using existing institutions, well-supported by
 - Data
 - Staff
 - Technical materials and training programs.
- A range of **communication media**, to ensure participation by all stakeholders, including displaced residents.
- Public funding for neighborhood and **community planners**,
 - to assist residents in planning and financing reconstruction,
 - to provide an opportunity to develop creative strategies for neighborhood improvement and diaspora community building, and
 - to provide a communication link between local government and residents.
- Sufficient **federal funding** to support all of the above.