i-Rec

dpu
Development
Planning Unit

International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Community Responses to Reconstruction Process of Lac-Mégantic, Canada after the 2013 Derailment: How encouragement of community participation under consultation of McGill University leads to transformation and resilience

Leni Vespaziani, Undergrad student of Urban Studies, McGill University
Email: leni.vespaziani@mail.mcgill.ca

Mahmood Fayazi, PhD candidate affiliated to the IF Research Group (grif): Université de Montréal.
Email: mahmood.fayazi@umontreal.ca

Abstract

In the last decade, hazard related studies have often pointed to the concept of resilience to explore how well societies could deal with changes and disturbances caused by adverse events. In urban planning and disaster management fields, the concept of 'resilience' has been commonly understood as the capacity of socio-ecological systems, towns for instance, to withstand, recover after, and adapt to adverse impacts of potential disasters. The emergent approaches, however, all caste new doubts to this generally accepted notion of resilience and emphasize resilience as the ability to change, adapt, and crucially transform rather than to preserve and return back to normality. This new conception highlights 'transformation' as a critical element of resilience. In theory and practice, however, there is still poor knowledge about 'transformation' and potential movement towards economic, social, environmental, and political changes. This study aims at explaining the concept of resilience and transformation, using the lessons learned from the experience of Lac-Megantic's reconstruction process in Canada after the 2013 train derailment. This case reveals how community participation in decision making process that is promoted and facilitated by an external consultant - McGill University in this case – can eventually open up the idea of taking a novel alternative direction for reconstruction of the town and determination of its future. The results of this study explore the importance of community participation, knowledge distribution, and external consultation in enhancing transformation capacities of the affected societies, facilitating changes, and addressing pre-disaster vulnerabilities and undesirable conditions. This study provides insightful information to help academics and practitioners understand the concept of resilience, embedding the concept of transformation, on both theoretical and practical grounds.
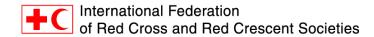
Keywords: Lac-Mégantic, Human-Induced Disaster, Transformation, Resilience, Urban Recovery

Abstract Reference Number: 70

Author's Biography

Leni Vespaziani is an undergraduate student pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies at McGill University in Montréal, Canada. She is experienced in both urban and physical field work, quantitative and qualitative research and geographic information systems. Her honours thesis consists of researching the climate change adaptation strategies of new master-planned cities in the 'global south'. She is currently a volunteer for Trottier Institute for Sustainability in Engineering and Design (TISED) at McGill

Mahmood Fayazi is a Ph.D. candidate affiliated to the IF Research Group at the School of Architecture of Université de Montréal. He has solid experience in research, implementation and management of post-disaster reconstruction projects. He was involved in important projects after several earthquakes in Iran including; Bam, 2003; Zarand, 2004; Lorestan, 2005; and Semnan, 2009. He also worked from 2008 to 2012 at the research department of the Housing Foundation Organization which is responsible for providing affordable houses for low income families and survivors after disasters. He has a Master Degree from the University of Shahid Beheshti and he has taught at Université de Montréal, and the Universities of Azad and Tehran in Iran. He also has given lecturers in Mcgill University and Université de Montréal.