



## AESOP Thematic Groups: Resilience and Risk Mitigation Strategies

Richard Sliuzas

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*AESOP Thematic Groups: Resilience and Risk Mitigation Strategies*

Richard Sliuzas

AESOP's thematic group "Resilience and Risk Mitigation Strategies – RRMS" brings together, on the one hand, expertise on policies and practices in spatial planning and development, and Risk Governance and Management on the other. Though its members are primarily academics, its intention is to serve both science and policy – i.e. both theory and practice – reflecting the nature of spatial planning as a field of scientific endeavour with direct societal application. RRMS was established around the AESOP Annual Conference in Naples (2007), which was titled "Planning in the Risk Society". Since that time its activities have revolved primarily around the annual conference programme of AESOP, though individual members have also been working on RRMS issues through their education, research and advisory service activities in various local, national and international settings. The RRMS network therefore provides a platform for knowledge exchange and learning amongst its members. The short description below gives some insight into the background and interests of the RRMS group and its members, as well as some indications of activities that are anticipated in the near future.

Risk manifests itself on various scales as a result of human exposure to a variety of natural and technological hazards, and, indeed, combinations of these. Disasters often incorporate combinations of natural, technological or natural-technological hazards. Earthquakes, for example, are often associated with landslides, which may in turn block river valleys and alter the nature of flood extent and therefore risk. There are also many examples of natural disasters acting as triggers for technological disasters. The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, which was triggered by the tsunami that followed the earthquake on 11 March 2011, is perhaps one of the most striking recent examples of such complex, natural-technological disasters, but it is certainly not unique.

The reduction and avoidance of risk has become an important focus of spatial planning practice and research. In Europe and elsewhere, risk management has become an increasingly important topic in spatial planning, not in a small part due to the increasingly high levels of urbanization, making risk very much an urban issue. In the 1990s the importance of the interactions between spatial planning and risk management was recognized. This occurred in parallel with the change of the prevailing risk management paradigm from the remedial, post-event pattern of protection of victimized communities to the precautionary, preventive (proactive) pattern of disaster avoidance and risk mitigation.

Significant landmarks in this theoretical and policy change were the 1994 Yokohama and the 2005 Kobe International Conferences on disaster reduction. In accordance with the new paradigm the UN has developed new bodies (e.g. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction – UNISDR – which was established in 1999) geared towards mitigation policies and, accordingly, finances have been redirected in this direction. The disaster risk reduction agenda necessitates a systematic integration of spatial development planning with risk mitigation. The Sendai 2015 Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction showed that significant progress has been made to better understand the nature of hazards and disasters, to reduce vulnerability, for example through improved early warning systems and improved regulatory control of building and construction activities.

But more work is required to improve the scientific basis for risk reduction. Spatial planning as a field may contribute to risk reduction through (i) vulnerability reduction, and (ii) reducing the exposure of assets and populations to hazards, but there is also an important role for planning schools around the world to play in terms of advocating risk reduction through planning and engaging in concrete capacity development efforts at all levels. Planning is now being called upon by the UNISDR to tackle the problem of substantially reducing hazard exposure and to develop methods and procedures to build the capacity of local and national governments in designing and managing urban development in ways that will effectively reduce vulnerability and hazard exposure, and thereby further reduce disaster risk. The RRMS thematic group and its members build and share knowledge in these areas, with several contributing directly to the UNISDR's post-Sendai campaign. In this area specific attention is paid to the future orientation of planning and the integrative and collaborative modes of planning, which can create spaces for important risk issues to be considered, alongside other aspects in all development discourses.

Increasing societal resilience through spatial planning is also a focus for the RRMS group. Though the notion of resilience retains an emphasis on risk prevention, some also claim that it shifts a significant amount of the responsibility for safety or security away from the state and towards individuals, the community and other organizations (e.g. NGOs). It has also been envisaged that the resilience paradigm will meet contemporary challenges of complexity and uncertainty in two spheres: environment and society (see various contributions in Davoudi et al. 2012). For some, this paradigm prom-

ises emancipation of scientists and policy-makers from laborious and complex risk analyses and assessments, as it seeks to enhance the capacity of the vulnerable to cope with, adapt to, shape change and learn to live with every aspect of uncertainty, contingency, crisis and surprise. The notion has expanded into an enhanced normative, but somewhat vague and malleable concept, and has in the process been “co-opting” several scientific disciplines including psychology, economics, political science, sociology and planning.

Resilience has proved to be a widely welcome perspective and goal of governance structures dealing with climate change and sustainable development at all levels, from the international to the local. Promoters of the paradigm envisage operational resilience as a path toward autonomous, active, self-securing individuals, communities and institutions. On the contrary, critical perspectives view it as a means of depoliticizing and naturalizing risks, uncertainties and crises, transferring responsibility for safety to the community and the individual, and promoting the ideal of adaptive, rather than resistant subjectivities. There is also an inherent tension in the individualization of risks that contradicts disaster risk reduction policies promoting shared responsibilities, frameworks of participation and collaboration of all stakeholders (public, private and civil society) in risk reduction.

Regardless of the validity of the views of proponents and critics, resilience as a hybrid concept (i.e. both descriptive and normative), accepted by both the planning and disaster risk communities to foster communication between these two communities, as well as with other contiguous fields, is a prominent field of concern for RRMS.

The RRMS group deals with societal discourses about risk, risk management, resilience and planning. Such discourses are not seen as power-free, detached opportunities to talk about risk and risk mitigation, but as complex relationships between forums and arenas that are based on deep assumptions about how to understand and manage risk, and how to relate risk mitigation and planning. More information about the RRMS group can be found at: [http://www.aesop-planning.eu/blogs/en\\_GB/resilience-and-risks-mitigation-strategies](http://www.aesop-planning.eu/blogs/en_GB/resilience-and-risks-mitigation-strategies)

### *Roundtable at the AESOP conference in Prague 2015*

At the 2015 annual AESOP conference in Prague, RRMS facilitated a roundtable on climate change, environmental risks and resilience, and their implications for planning education. The roundtable panel consisted of Jerry Velasquez (Head of UNISDR's Making Cities Resilient Campaign), Dr. Andrea Frank (Cardiff University, AESOP Planning Education and Practice group), Dr. Mendel Giezen (Utrecht University, AESOP Sustainable Cities group) and Richard Sliuzas (RRMS group coordina-

tor), who facilitated the discussion. Jerry Velasquez's presentation highlighted some of the achievements that have been made in reducing vulnerability through improved early warning. But he also highlighted the urgency for spatial planning to contribute more effectively to risk reduction, especially in rapidly urbanising countries. For example planning can contribute through the combined effects of improved planning and building standards, enforcement and by avoiding the development of highly hazardous locations. In Mendel Giezen's view, risk reduction solutions require the effort and insights of many disciplines, including planners, though the latter are perhaps uniquely positioned to work with and between these different disciplines and political contexts: they can translate different ideas and perspectives into integrated spatial visions. Doing this requires substantive knowledge of risk and planning, but perhaps even more importantly, the skills to bring along and integrate different actors and insights. An important question is: How to convince other actors to go along with an integrated vision on sustainability that includes risk reduction? Andrea Frank provided some insights into the attention given to these issues in planning associations and some university curricula, based upon a quick scan of several programmes from the UK, Australia, North America, Botswana and New Zealand. Though she observed an increase in attention to resiliency and risks, including climate change, she also observed that if planning schools do more in these fields, then this implies that they should do less of something else to create the necessary space. This trade-off is likely to be a matter of considerable debate within planning schools. Based upon his experience in less developed countries, Richard Sliuzas also observed that there is a considerable need for different levels of capacity building and curricula development. Planning officers in local government, for example, require training to update their knowledge and skills, while planning schools in universities should focus more on preparing the next generation of planners to handle these issues. In these efforts, AESOP member schools can play various roles, including reaching out to their colleagues in other regions (see [http://www.aesop-planning.eu/en\\_GB/gpean](http://www.aesop-planning.eu/en_GB/gpean)). More information on the 2015 roundtable can be found on the RRMS web pages.

### *Upcoming activities*

AESOP RRMS members will be key speakers at a workshop on “Energy Issues in Regional and Urban Development” at the OPEN DAYS University in Brussels, 12–15 October 2015, as part of the 13th European Week of Regions and Cities. Professor Stefan Greiving (TU Dortmund) and Dr Cheryl de Boer (University of Twente) will represent AESOP at this workshop, which is jointly organized with the European Regional Studies Association (ERSA). The workshop addresses the challenges faced by

and opportunities available to cities and regions to meet the energy objectives of the European plan on climate change and more specifically on energy efficiency. It aims to promote the understanding of how energy issues challenge existing regional, urban and development models. Energy efficiency issues also question risk mitigation strategies in the sense that they help to reduce costs and promote more geographically balanced development. New versions and episodes of risk (natural, technological, climate change risks, socio-economic – such as fuel poverty etc.), their implications for planning and policy-making, and how energy efficiency policies can contribute to the improvement of risk management will also be examined. More information on this workshop and other events can be found at: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/opendays/od2015/index.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/opendays/od2015/index.cfm).

2016 already promises to be a busy year for the RRMS group, with three international events in which RRMS issues are to be discussed in a planning context. The RRMS group is intending to organize a small workshop following the Dortmund Conference on Spatial Planning and Research, which takes place on 22–23 February 2016 at TU Dortmund University. More information on this workshop will be available via the AESOP website in the near future.

RRMS will also be present at two major international conferences taking place in 2016. The Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN) conference will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in July 2016. Richard Sliuzas (University of Twente, Netherlands), Ana Claudia Cardoso (Federal University of Pará, Brazil) and Vivek Shandas (Portland State University, USA) are co-chairs of the track “Climate Change, Resource Management, Sustainability and Environmental Justice”. The conference announcement is now available. In addition to this track, and building on the success of the aforementioned 2015 roundtable, several AESOP members from RRMS and other groups are hoping to organize a side event to further elaborate on capacity building strategies and actions in disaster risk reduction for spatial planners. Contact will soon be established with potentially interested parties and GPEAN member organizations in order to set up the event, for which UNISDR’s Jerry Velasquez has indicated his interest.

The second major international event on urban planning issues is Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, scheduled to take place in Quito, Ecuador, from 17–20 October 2016. This event will establish a new international urban agenda for the next two decades and follows earlier conferences in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1996 and Vancouver, Canada, in 1976. Several RRMS members are playing active roles in the preparatory activities for this event, and the new urban agenda will also give increased attention to spatial planning as a risk reduction instrument. More details of the event can be found at: <https://www.habitat3.org> or [www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org).

For anyone interested in joining any of the above-mentioned activities or engaging with the RRMS group in any way, please contact Richard Sliuzas [r.sliuzas@utwente.nl](mailto:r.sliuzas@utwente.nl) or any other RRMS core group member.

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