



Resilience through healthy planning

Susan Thompson FPIA, Professor of Planning and Associate Director (City Wellbeing), City Futures Research Centre, UNSW Australia
Peter McCue, Executive Officer, NSW Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL)

Welcome to our healthy built environments column for 2016 – the seventh year of bringing you news and views about what is happening across Australia and internationally in healthy planning. It is fitting that the first issue of *New Planner* for the year focuses on the theme of resilience.

Towards the close of 2015 world leaders met in Paris and agreed upon a global position for climate change acknowledgment and action. It is now incumbent upon us, particularly professionals such as planners, to embrace this hopeful vision and make it happen. Healthy planning has a key role to play in supporting the evolution of a resilient city with an equally resilient and resourceful population, supported by technically skilled, ethical and informed professionals.

In thinking about resilience, we propose a Model that forges the personal and the professional in the context of healthy planning. We start with a broad conceptualisation of resilience and then unpack our ideas for you to consider.

Defining resilience

While there are many different definitions of resilience upon which we can draw, they generally incorporate two broad themes. First, is the notion of environmental readiness for shifting weather patterns and their accompanying impacts such as sea level rise, floods and wild fire. Second, are people's physical and psychological abilities to bounce back and recover from adversity and in some cases, transform in new and positive ways. 'Resilience is the capacity of individuals, communities and systems to survive, adapt, and grow in the face of stress and shocks, and even transform when conditions require it.'¹ Adaptation occurs at the local level where social capital, community cohesiveness and individual responsibility are best able to be supported.² This speaks to social equity and fairness in a newly constituted localised caring and nurturing urban community, as noted by internationally renowned Australian urbanist Brendan Gleeson.³

These conceptualisations reflect a comprehensive understanding of resilience. This is at the heart of our Model which links resilience with readiness to deal with whatever comes, as well as preventive action and attention to equity. These concepts are central to healthy planning.

The Healthy Planning Model of Resilience

Our Model comprises three segments.

1. Personal Practices

This is about individual attitudes to wellbeing and actions to support our own health, so that we can rise to the challenges presented by adversity. We well know that regular physical activity, a nutritious natural diet and time for socialisation, relaxation and fun are foundations for good physical and mental health. We espouse this for the community, but do we take the message seriously ourselves? How much do we consider our own health as an underpinning for resilience; readiness as community leaders and morally responsible professionals? Are we prepared to build connections with others in the places where we live and work and lead by example? Is this part of a personal ethic of care that we should nurture in ourselves and those around us as together we face unprecedented challenges and unpredictable

changes to our way of life? Our response cannot be quarantined to the professional segment of our lives; resilience is required at all levels.

2. Professional Practices

This part of the Model focuses on the way we work as planning professionals, particularly employing the practices central to healthy planning:

- The use of an interdisciplinary framework – linking planning knowledge with economics and health; and working alongside environmentalists, community advocates, artists, local residents and the like.
- Partnership building across all sectors of government, industry and the not-for-profits – for example, ensuring that the provision of new physical infrastructure is accompanied by behaviour change programs to facilitate desired actions.
- The application of co-benefits – recognising that one policy can have multiple benefits, making it economically sustainable, as well as effective in gaining environmental, health and social benefits.
- The ways in which evidence is used to effectively guide policy development to underpin implementation on the ground.

In addition to these now accepted ways-of-working, planning professionals have a responsibility to question current practices, asking if they are resilient-ready. Moving away from the central provision of energy, food and water, towards more distributed and localised sourcing, is indicative of where this is already happening. The sharing economy is another example. But such practices inevitably challenge traditional orthodoxies, unsettle powerful elites and do not always operate smoothly and without unintended consequences (Airbnb for example – when rowdy holiday makers disturb local residents). Nevertheless, it is mandatory for the contemporary professional to engage with creative and innovative ideas; no less for planners engaged in resilience work. Professional resilience is about recognising opportunity emerging from change and developing a suite of skills that are transferable to other jobs and activities, therefore rendering the planner a resilient professional in a turbulent employment environment.



The Healthy Planning Model of Resilience.



Glovers Community Garden, Leichhardt, inner west of Sydney. Community gardens build resilience, sustainability and good health in different ways – providing fresh food across a neighbourhood, reducing food miles, bringing people together and ensuring good health through physical activity, relaxation and a connection with nature.

3. Application of Healthy Planning

This is where healthy planning is applied with resilience in mind. It does not require new thinking or extra effort. Rather, it is a slight readjustment of context and an appreciation that the central tenets of healthy planning are environmentally sustainable and supportive of resilience. Access to, and use of a well-connected active transport network for

everyone in the community is essential. Car dependence is not healthy, sustainable, nor resilient, especially when petrol supplies have been destroyed or must be heavily rationed. The provision of food security via community gardens, urban orchards and school kitchen gardens could well be the only immediate source of nutrition post disaster. The development of socially inclusive and connected

communities, a key healthy planning principle, will help neighbours face adversity and support each other in its wake. This is an important aspect of mental health helping to build resilience to environmental challenges.⁴

Conclusion

Developing the resilience of our planet, its dependent natural systems and its people is critical in the face of unprecedented global environmental challenges. Planners play a central role in this huge task. We offer our Healthy Planning Model of Resilience as a way to bring personal understandings and insights into alignment with professional expertise and skills in the context of applying healthy planning principles. Healthy planning is increasingly acknowledged as core to good planning. It can also underpin resilience at the local level. The relevance of planning is creating a sustainable, healthy and resilient future for our planet and the life that is dependent upon it ■

Endnotes

- ¹ Smart Growth America 2015, Building resilient states: a framework for agencies, see: smartgrowthamerica.org/resilience
- ² Keim, ME 2008, 'Building human resilience: the role of public health preparedness and response as an adaptation to climate change', *Am J Prev Med*, vol. 35, no. 5.
- ³ Gleeson, B 2010, *Lifeboat cities*, UNSW Press, Sydney.
- ⁴ Curtis, S 2010, *Space, place and mental health*, Ashgate, England.

gsa planning

- environmental planning
- master planning
- urban design
- traffic planning
- expert evidence



Gary A Shiels
Managing Director

M Urb Design, M Eng Sc, M Urb
Stud, LFPIA, CPP, FAPI, FAIM



George Karavanas
Director

BTP, M Eng Sc, FPIA,
CPP, MAITPM

www.gsaplanning.com.au

95 Paddington Street, Paddington 2021

T: (02) 9362 3364

email: info@gsaplanning.com.au

abn: 18003667963

Not a PIA member yet?

Speak with the PIA Team to discuss the different membership options we offer.



It's your professional community...



Planning
Institute
Australia

CONTACT US TO JOIN TODAY

e membership@planning.org.au

t (02) 6262 5933