

# Making sense of risk and resilience in the face of global change

James Arnott & Susanne Moser

February 11, 2016  
#SocialCoast16

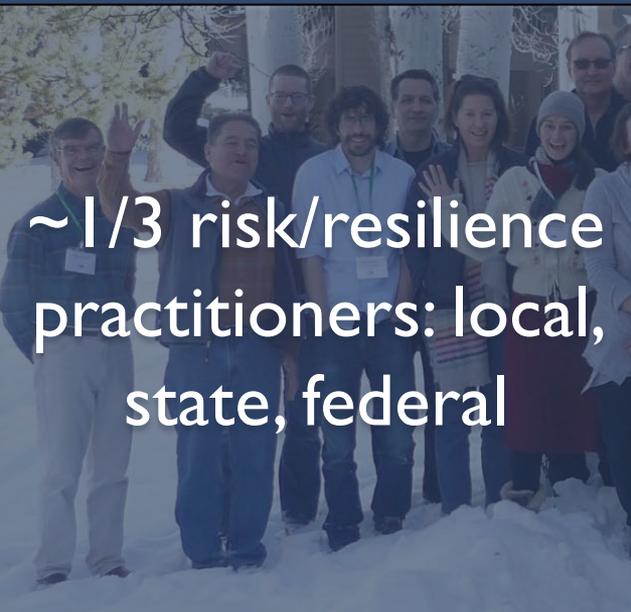
# Quick Poll



# Workshop: *Risk and resilience in the face of global change*

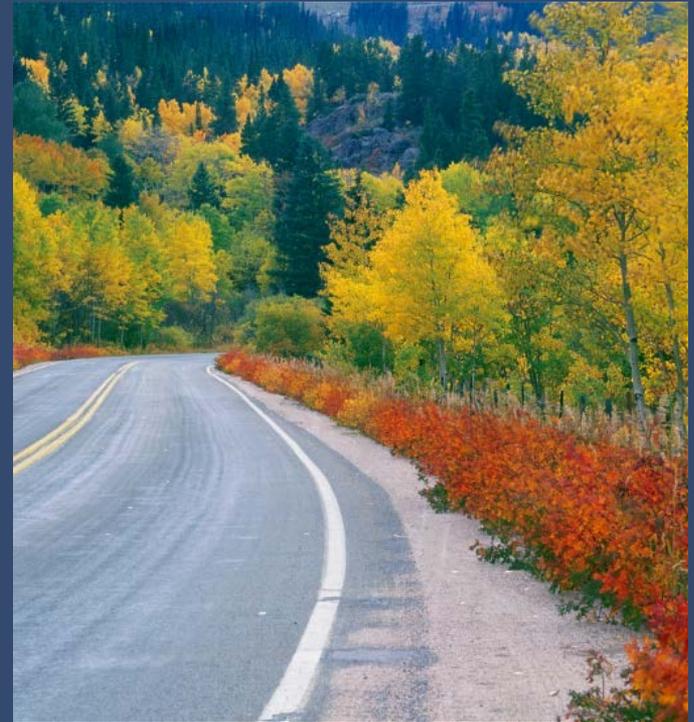
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- Is resilience trying to do the same thing as risk management?
- Is resilience better suited for problems like climate change?
- If so, is it possible to better define and operationalize resilience?



# Roadmap

1. Tackling wicked problems
2. Distinguishing meanings of resilience
3. Implications for communication & engagement



# Acknowledgments

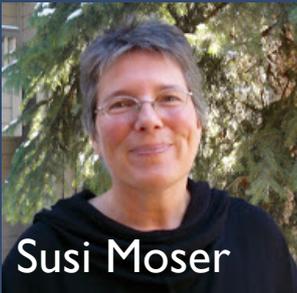
My sponsors:



Project sponsors:



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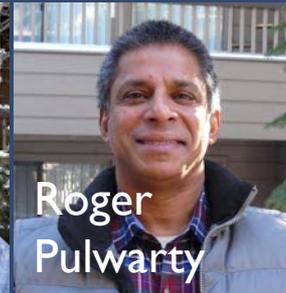
Susi Moser



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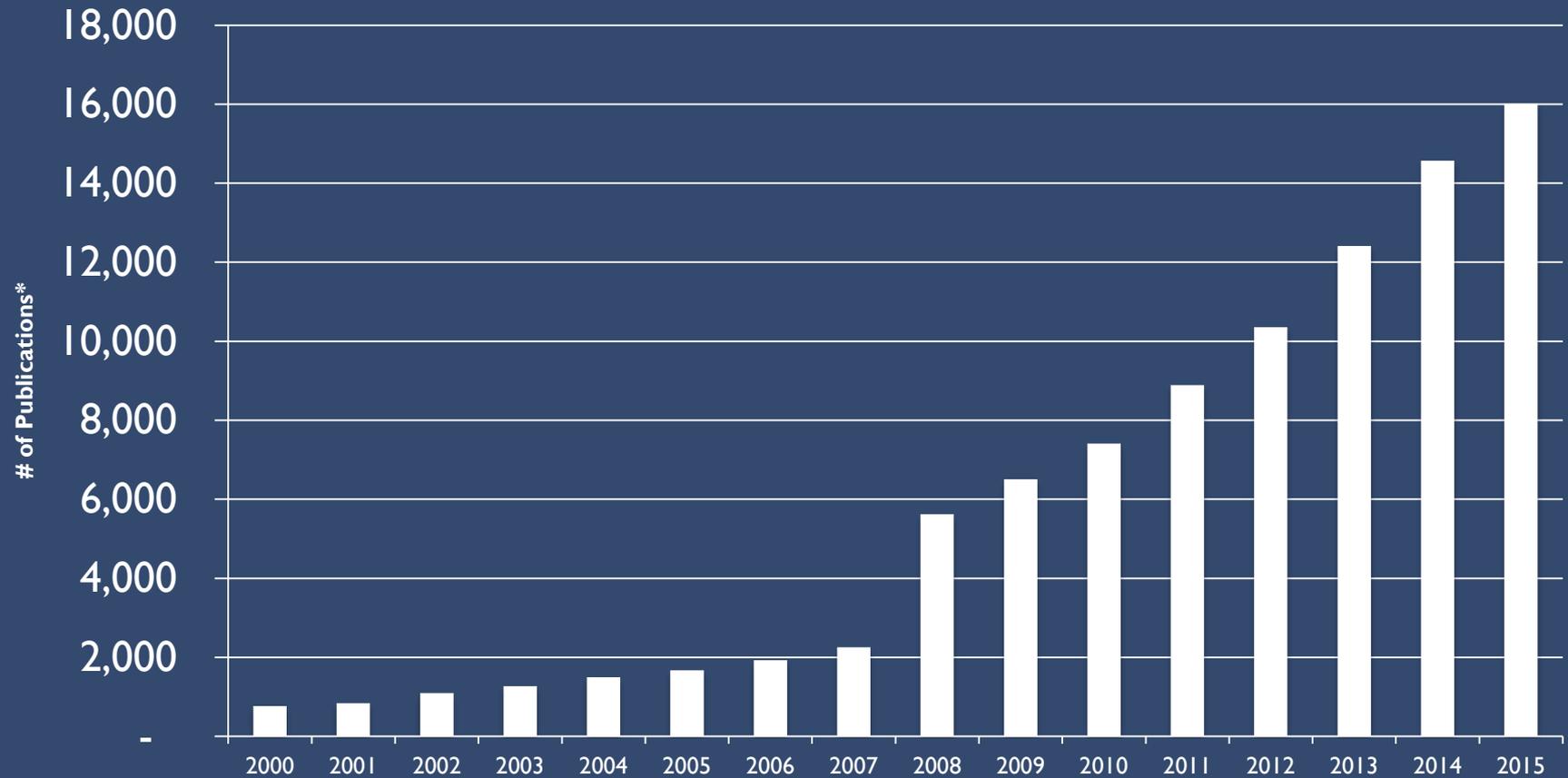
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# Peak resilience?

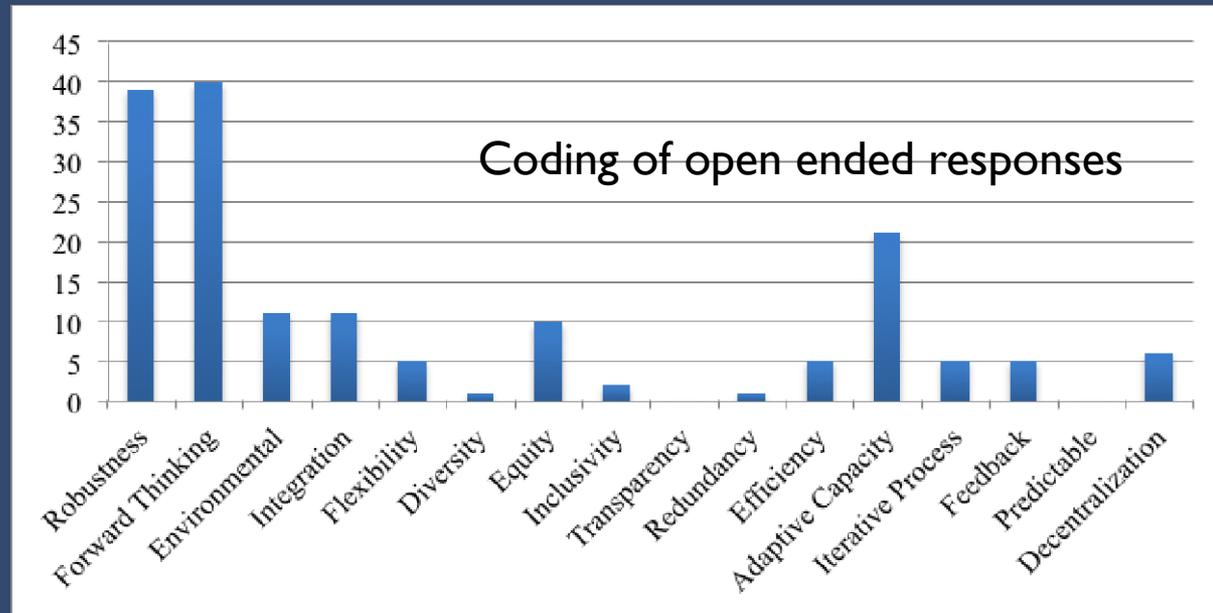


\*Publications with "resilience" in Title, Abstract, Keywords, and KeywordsPlus®,  
Web of Science 9 Feb 2016



# Resilience in theory vs. practice

- 16 primary characteristics of resilience from literature since 1973
- Survey of 291 local government representatives
- When given the option, practitioners generally agree with characteristics of resilience found in academic literature
- When pressed to define on their own, more variation emerges



# Resilience is a *wicked problem*

“...complex issue that **defies complete definition** and for which there can be **no final solution** since any resolution generates further issues, and where **solutions are not true or false** or good or bad, but the best that can be done at the time.”



# Big takeaway #1

*We all want to reduce the transaction costs of these dialogues, but let's caution against it.*

*It is not a semantic rabbit hole;  
it's the work we must do!*

*-Thomas Seager*

# And so this involves confronting...

- ...the fact that the world is more complex than can fit in one framework
- ...we're not here to meld into one way of thinking
- ...the question: are we doing anything useful?



It's often what art teaches us, after all



**But sometimes, in practice, it can look like this.**

**13 Sessions and 23 PPTs later...**

# Big Takeaway #2

We found three main uses of resilience.

Resilience as...

System trait or  
condition



Process



Outcome



**Resilience**  
as...

**SYSTEM**  
**TRAIT** or  
**CONDITIO**  
**N**

**PROCESS**  
(or set of  
processes)

**OUTCOME**  
(or set of  
outcomes)

<b>Resilience as...</b>	<b>Focus is on...</b>
<b>SYSTEM TRAIT or CONDITION</b>	System as a whole, or its parts
<b>PROCESS (or set of processes)</b>	Actions or decisions
<b>OUTCOME (or set of outcomes)</b>	Products or results

<b>Resilience as...</b>	<b>Focus is on...</b>	<b>What we care about</b>
<b>SYSTEM TRAIT or CONDITION</b>	System as a whole, or its parts	System functions & services (e.g., diversity)
<b>PROCESS (or set of processes)</b>	Actions or decisions	System management & response
<b>OUTCOME (or set of outcomes)</b>	Products or results	System improvement or persistence (e.g., well-being, thriving)

<b>Resilience as...</b>	<b>Focus is on...</b>	<b>What we care about</b>	<b>What we ask about</b>
<b>SYSTEM TRAIT or CONDITION</b>	System as a whole, or its parts	System functions & services (e.g., diversity)	What makes a system resilient?
<b>PROCESS (or set of processes)</b>	Actions or decisions	System management & response	What do we need to do and how?
<b>OUTCOME (or set of outcomes)</b>	Products or results	System improvement or persistence (e.g., well-being, thriving)	What system/ community do we want to build or keep (despite shocks and stresses)?

<b>Resilience as...</b>	<b>Focus is on...</b>	<b>What we care about</b>	<b>What we ask about</b>	<b>What we search for</b>
<b>SYSTEM TRAIT or CONDITION</b>	System as a whole, or its parts	System functions & services (e.g., diversity)	What makes a system resilient?	Leverage points to nudge the system to more desirable states
<b>PROCESS (or set of processes)</b>	Actions or decisions	System management & response	What do we need to do and how?	DS tools and actions that help to plan, prepare, absorb, recover, adapt
<b>OUTCOME (or set of outcomes)</b>	Products or results	System improvement or persistence (e.g., well-being, thriving)	What system/ community do we want to build or keep (despite shocks and stresses)?	Tools, resources, governance mechanisms, coalitions, to assess, plan, implement actions

<b>(Cont.)</b>	<b>Link to sustainability</b>	<b>Politics</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Social resilience definition (components)</b>
<b>SYSTEM TRAIT or CONDITION</b>	Resilience may or may not at all support sustainability	Supposedly apolitical	Simplistic application of ecological theory to social systems	Ability to self-organize so as to maintain functioning; system properties to withstand or avoid disaster
<b>PROCESS (or set of processes)</b>	Resilience is requirement for sustainability	Implicitly political (does not question, but still aims to perpetuate a particular system)	Neglect of the larger context beyond the immediate system of concern	Ability to cope, absorb, recover and adapt
<b>OUTCOME (or set of outcomes)</b>	Resilience = sustainability	Explicitly and inherently political	Risk of neglecting history, change, cross-scale, social and ecological impacts, complexity	Ability to thrive, maintain or increase well-being, be safe, sustain livelihoods etc.

# Big Takeaway #3

Move away from messaging/slogans and to the hard work of dialogue to unpack the meanings of resilience.



# Going beyond communication, per se

- Don't assume; instead, be curious
- Identify areas shared understanding
- When differences emerge, don't reduce to the lowest common denominator



# Making hard work easier?



# Conclusion

- Collective thinking and acting is fundamentally the work we must do in face of wicked problems
- Gaining facility with oftentimes divergent perspectives
- Clear communication is fostered by each of us becoming clearer what we mean when we say something like resilience. And then having the curiosity to understand what the other means.

# Thank you!



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# Prior commitments

We all have them.

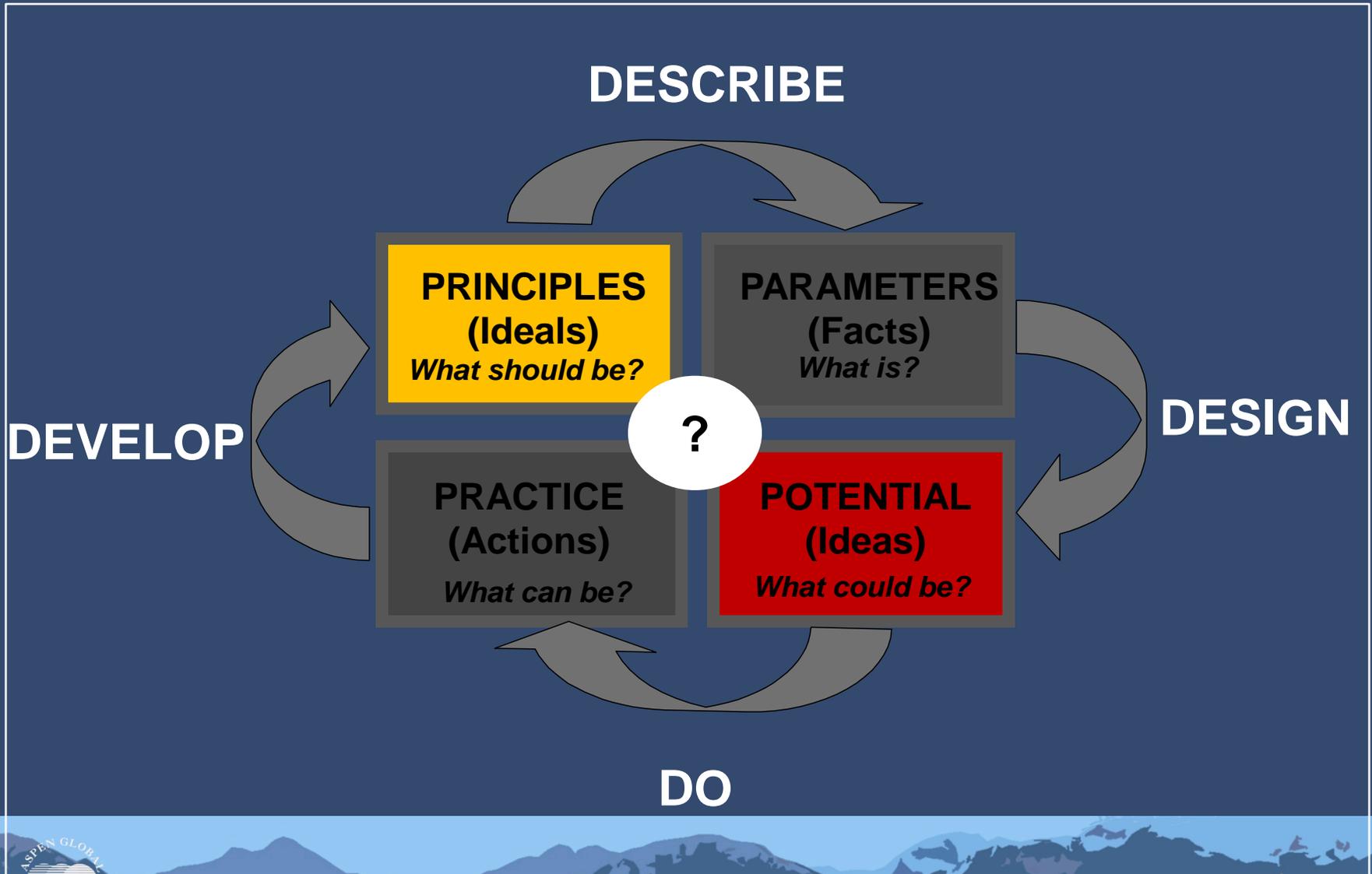
Are we talking about  
YOUR resilience or MY  
resilience?

So, how do you go about  
talking about “resilience”?



Coming to a rally near you...

# Collective Learning Spiral



# Case Example: Baltimore

- Disaster preparedness planning
- Resilience through the lens of equity
- Prioritizing neighborhoods with highest poverty & disinvestment
- Transforming process > greater inclusion



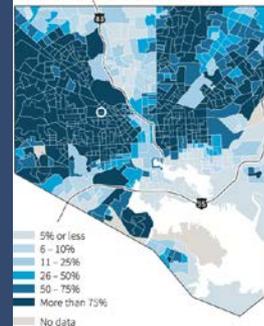
## Socioeconomics in Baltimore

Following the funeral of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man who died after he was injured in police custody, disturbances broke out a few blocks from the site of the service. Demonstrations turned violent and spread through parts of Baltimore on Monday.

○ New Shiloh Baptist Church (location of Gray's funeral)

### BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION

As a percentage of total population



Sources: 2013 American Community Survey estimates, U.S. Census Bureau  
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