

Peck, Frank and Mulvey, Gail (2010) Regional resilience and collective action: the response of local state actors to the needs of rural enterprise in crisis. In: Regional Studies Association Annual International Conference 2010: Regional Responses and Global Shifts: Actors, Institutions and Organisations, 24-26 May 2010, Pécs, Hungary. (Unpublished)

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**REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2010 –
REGIONAL RESPONSES AND GLOBAL SHIFTS: ACTORS, INSTITUTIONS AND
ORGANISATIONS**

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**Regional resilience and collective action: the response of local state actors to
the needs of rural enterprise in crisis**

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1. Introduction

While the usefulness of the term “regional resilience” is currently being debated widely in academia (Hill, Wial and Wolman, 2008; Swanstrom, 2008; Chapple and Lester 2007, Simmie and Martin, 2010), the term is already very firmly embedded in the local public policy arena. The encroachment of this term into policy territory once occupied by “emergency planning” is quite striking. In this article, we explore the significance of this shift in emphasis which, we would argue, symbolises a different approach to governance associated with responses to disasters at a local level. Whereas emergency planning is commonly interpreted as a justification for centralised control of decision-making and an upward shift in governance, the concept of resilience focuses attention on the capacity of localities and regions to mitigate and when required to respond to crises as they arise with limited external assistance. A key element in our argument concerns the evolution of partnership as the preferred method for government in delivering a wide range of policies in local areas. Partnership working is often a highly complex process with uncertain outcomes that can take long periods of time to negotiate. It is not unreasonable, therefore, for some commentators to suggest that “normal” processes of local development are incompatible with situations where there is a need for rapid executive action to address emergency needs in a disaster.

We develop the argument that increased reference to resilience in local public policy can be interpreted as part of an attempt by central powers to devolve greater responsibility for responding to disasters to local partnerships. We explore these ideas in the context of Cumbria, a rural region of the UK that has experienced a succession of such disasters between 2001 and 2010. The analysis examines the responses of local actors to these periodic crises and the extent to which lessons have been learnt and applied from past experience.

2. Local partnerships and disaster management in the UK

Over the past 20 years, there has been increasing acceptance that inter-organisational partnerships are the preferred method for delivering a wide range of government policies in the UK. The reasons for this have been widely cited. They include the belief that partnerships between organisations within regions and localities responsible for design and delivery of strategies are likely to be more effective. It is also believed that delivery of strategies through local partnerships will reduce silo effects where poor communication between departments and organisations in local areas might otherwise generate unintended negative consequences of policy interventions.

This interpretation of the growth of partnership delivery offers just one of several explanations for the growth of this phenomenon. Valler et al (2000) have offered other explanations including pressures generated by the need for fiscal austerity and the belief that partnerships offer more cost effective delivery. This line of reasoning suggests that partnership is thought to be more efficient in the use of resources through sharing of resources and capacity between public sector partners as well as engagement with organisations in the voluntary and private sectors at a local level. There have been, however, very evident ideological factors at play. In particular, partnership-working was very closely

associated with the consensus-building ideology of New Labour. The widespread adoption of this way of working within regions is therefore also a product of political decisions made at the level of the UK nation government.

While the arguments used to promote partnership working in regions appear compelling, the increased adoption of this mode of delivery across a wide range of policy areas has proved to be problematic in many cases. In the first instance, it has been noted widely how the characteristics of partnerships vary considerably and that this label is commonly applied to a very disparate variety of institutional arrangements within local areas. In a critique of these approaches, Entwistle et al (2007) draw attention to the difficulties presented by the "fragmented landscape of networked and partnering institutions" that can make such arrangements ungovernable. It is also argued that despite the rhetoric of New Labour, partnerships may simply represent a new form of hierarchical control through the forms of regulation that are applied to partnerships by central government.

Empirical analyses of partnerships suggest that tensions remain between the goal of achieving networked communities that share common objectives and ways of working within regions (horizontal networks) and more traditional forms of control exercised through vertical hierarchies that tend to operate within silos created by institutional boundaries or functional areas and professions. It would appear that organisational cultures based on achieving hierarchical solutions to problems in many situations remains very powerful which lead to dysfunctional effects within partnerships (Entwistle et al 2007). This difficulty has been expressed most recently in the debates related to the "leadership of place" (Gibney and Collinge, 2009).

2.1 Partnerships in disaster management

In planning for, and reacting to disasters, there is a heightened tension between pressure for executive action allied to central control and the need to remain engaged with local partnerships and communities. On the one hand, there is a strong expectation from institutions, the media and the public that in emergency situations, some degree of upward transfer of decision-making to regional or national government level will occur. There is a belief that when disasters occur, it is necessary and therefore acceptable to increase central control and to adopt a more "military command and control" approach to decision-making (McConnell 2003). This has been justified not only on the grounds that decisions need to be taken more quickly than can reasonably be negotiated between partners at a local level but because the scale of some emergencies require greater resource and capacity than might be available in local partnerships. Even where capacity exists, therefore, it may be the case that "normal" ways of working in partnerships are deemed to be inappropriate and hence these are, to some extent, "suspended" in favour of an executive approach to decision making that operates through UK Government's Cabinet Office.

However, it is also the case that virtually all disasters occur (or have impacts) at a local level, hence local authorities and ways of working with key partners have inevitably had an increasing influence on the ways in which local partnerships engage with disaster situations. McConnell (2003) also notes that excessive centralisation of decision making in emergency situations can lead to central overload and actually slow responses and lead to inappropriate decisions due to the lack of understanding of local situations. There is an argument that suggests, therefore that it might be expedient to build capacity in local partnerships to enable them to respond rapidly to local disaster situations with some central support. There may also be political expediency in leaving aspects of a crisis to regional and local partnerships to address. This raises intriguing questions about the ways in which partnership-working can be applied extensively to disaster management which deals with events that are, by definition, rare and unpredictable.

In considering the ways in which the partnership ethos has permeated approaches to emergency planning, it is useful to examine recent models of disaster management that have been elaborated in this literature. It is customary for authors to distinguish different phases in the process through time. In an analysis of small business impacts, Runyan (2006) for instance distinguishes between the three phases of *prevention* involving mitigation actions, the *response* in which decisions are taken and actions implemented to address basic needs related to saving lives and securing infrastructure and property. Finally, the model suggest that policy enters the *recovery* phase involving actions designed to restore social, economic and environment conditions to those that prevailed before the disaster. Most commentators adopt this approach but offer variants on the detail. For instance, Col (2007)

adopts a four-phase model by distinguishing between *mitigation* actions designed to reduce the risk of occurrence of disasters, *preparedness* actions involving the development and testing of contingency plans followed by *response* and *recovery* phases. Further refinements have also been developed in the context of specific types of disaster. Faulkner (2001) for example develops a framework for analysing the impacts of tourism disasters involving post-event emergency (rescue activity), intermediate (restoring services), recovery (rebuilding, reinvestment) and resolution stages (re-establishing routines).

There is a critique surrounding these types of models. While experiences following previous disasters can be shown to follow phases of this type, in reality there is considerable blurring particularly between response and recovery phases (Col 2007). More relevant to the aims of this paper, there is also ambiguity as to whether these models are simply used to analyse impacts of previous disasters or as tools to determine how to respond to future disasters. There is evidently a danger that these models become self-fulfilling by encouraging delayed actions that address *recovery* until immediate actions to save lives and property have been implemented. This is significant for our argument in that there appears to be an implicit assumption in these phases that immediate response to emergencies and disasters requires more central control while the recovery phase can be determined more by actions designed and delivered by local partnerships. This suggests an approach to management that involves emergency planning interventions in the early stage which at some point leads to “passing the baton” back to local partnerships to continue work on recovery.

2.2 Governance, partnerships and regional economic resilience

Analysis of the ways in which communities, localities and regions respond to disasters has spawned a debate concerning the processes that influence the ability of regions to absorb periodic shocks. The analogy drawn from disaster management has now been extended to a wide range of situations where environmental crises or other significant events threaten the future of regional economies and communities. Regional economic resilience has been coined to refer not only to the inherent and adaptive response to disasters (Rose 2010) but also the ability of a region to recover successfully from any form of shock to its economy. Attempts have been made to articulate the range of ideas that might underpin this broad concept drawing on theories of economic equilibrium, path-dependency and systems approaches to analysis drawn from ecological literature (Hill, Wial and Wolman, 2008; Swanstrom, 2008; Chapple and Lester 2007). While the intellectual basis of the resilience concept is under scrutiny, the terminology of “resilience” has already had a powerful influence on approaches to policy in dealing with disasters. The policy shift from “emergency planning” to “resilience planning” clearly signals greater emphasis on mitigation and proactive actions to adjust conditions in regions to enable them to withstand, and not just react, to sudden changes.

The processes that influence the “resilience” of regional economies are obviously highly complex and diverse and it is not the intention here to draw on the full range of arguments. One particular contributing factor, however, concerns the capacity of local institutions to respond and the strength of local networks. “Resilient regions”, it has been suggested, are those that have stable institutions that have the capacity to make rapid transitions (Hill, Wal and Welman 2008). This is an argument that resonates with fairly longstanding ideas in the regional development literature related to the significance of “institutional thickness” (Morgan 1993). This implies that local governance arrangements and mutual trust between organisations which determine the pre-existing strength of local partnership can play a significant role in determining the effectiveness of local public policy responses to external and internal shocks to regional economies.

Reversing the causal argument, it is also the case that the stresses induced by disasters can have very different impacts on the strength of local partnership. Besser, et al (2008) suggest that we are living in a “near constant state of economic destruction and restructuring” which can lead to a strengthening of social capital as demands are placed upon local partnership arrangements. On the other hand, other examples show crises have corrosive effects that expose local weaknesses and a lack of openness to change. Indeed, Swanstrom (2008) argues that development models constructed on local consensus are quite likely to be detrimental in disaster situations precisely because consensus is often inherently conservative and status quo.

2.3 Partnership responses to disasters and the rural economy

To summarise our argument so far, we suggest that approaches to managing the impacts of disasters in the UK have become more imbued with the ethos of partnership working. At the very least, we suggest that, in emergency situations, tensions between central and local control over decision-making tend to be heightened. The implication of this is that local partnerships are increasingly expected to anticipate disasters and to negotiate who will play what role prior to any future emergency situation. In one sense, this is the conventional approach to design and test emergency plans. What appears to be different however is a) the increased frequency of occurrence of disasters and b) the expectation that local partnerships should seek to address local problems through greater reliance on local capacity and local solutions than in the past.

Increased occurrence of disaster situations may place greater stress on local partnerships to deliver local solutions, but equally, this also means there is greater familiarity and knowledge of the kinds of responses that tend to work in disaster situations. Local partnerships have more opportunities to learn how best to respond to such situations and can improve the manner in which they respond over time. The remainder of this paper examines these ideas in rural sub-region of NW England. It also focuses on the ways in which local partnerships have been able to respond to the needs of small enterprises in a succession of disaster situations that have affected Cumbria since 2001. Interest focuses on the ways in which partnerships have been able to respond to three specific disasters, the manner in which central-local relations evolved in each case and the responses made, in particular, to the needs of small business in a rural area.

The focus on support for rural business during disasters has a particular significance in the context of this research. Few commentators would deny that rural businesses have a very significant role to play in determining the resilience of rural areas following disasters. Not only do such businesses provide a livelihood for business owners and their employees but they are also providers of vital services to rural communities (rural shops, post-offices, building repairs). Yet the literature indicates that such small businesses are particularly vulnerable to the incidence of disasters. Recent research tends to confirm the view that businesses that engage in some form of business planning tend to cope better with external shocks including those induced by disaster situations. It is the case, however, that most small businesses do not engage in any forms of formal business planning which makes them vulnerable to the “double effect” of disasters which not only impact on business performance but also on the livelihoods of owner managers (Runyan 2006, Flynn 2007).

3. Responses of local State actors to disasters in rural Cumbria; 2001-2010

A succession of crises has been experienced by businesses in Cumbria over the past ten years. These include the impacts of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in 2001; the floods that affected Carlisle, the County's capital, in 2005; and another episode of flooding that seriously affected areas in the west of the county in 2009. This analysis that follows draws on findings of several research projects related to the response of the public and private sectors to these periodic business crises in Cumbria. These include surveys of businesses that have benefited from support interventions put in place as part of the FMD Recovery Plan. The various responses to the most recent flood events will be used to illustrate the lessons learnt from past experience. Particular attention will be given to the issue surrounding assessing the impacts, determining business needs, coordinating the response of public bodies and the effect of public interventions in providing longer term business continuity.

3.1 The Foot-and-Mouth Crisis (2001)

The outbreak of FMD in Britain in February 2001 hit Cumbria the hardest of any area in Britain. During the seven month period Feb. 20th to Sep. 30th 2001, 893 cases (more than half the total) of FMD were confirmed in the County out of a total for Britain of 1,422. Farms adjacent to those where the disease was confirmed were also subject to a complete cull of livestock. No part was left untouched by the disease and the culling of sheep and cattle took place on a massive scale (in addition, other farm livestock such as pigs and goats were affected). A total of 4.2M animals were slaughtered nationwide with 30% of such livestock being farmed in Cumbria.¹ For others in the country, there was a ban on all

¹ Franks et al (2003), page 159.

farm animal movements and also movement restrictions on people, “closing the countryside.”² Entry to farms and across agricultural land was banned or restricted to authorised personnel and further precautions to prevent the spread of the disease such as disinfectant mats on roads and entrances to rural retail outlets were put in place. Media images of Cumbria presented the County as a war zone not least because the Army were brought in by the Government to control operations. General Sir Mike Jackson who had led the British campaign in Iraq was now also in charge of coordinating FMD operations in Cumbria.

The immediate effects on farming were of a crisis of unrivalled proportions in recent memory. The detrimental effects on farms and businesses were both financial and emotional. Mort et al (2005) in their longitudinal qualitative study of people in rural North Cumbria have written of the emotional impacts on the farming community and beyond. The market for sheep and cattle collapsed affecting not only farmers but auctioneers, meat processors and feed suppliers. Other land based industries such as kennels, forestry and nurseries were hit by the movement restrictions. The tourism and recreation industry was hit severely and all of these effects had a negative impact on local spending. An estimate of the costs in March 2002 by the National Audit Office were that the cost to the public sector was over £3bn (including compensation paid to farmers of £1.2bn) and to the private sector of over £5bn (DEFRA/DCMS 2002). Uncompensated losses to the agricultural sector were estimated to be £600M. Tourism was estimated to have suffered the most financially from the outbreak with a loss of £2.7 - £3.2bn and a further impact of £1.8 - £2.2bn on industries and services supported by tourism.³

The short and medium term responses and effects of FMD

The short term response to the outbreak then, was that of animal culling and containment of the spread of the disease in a “command and control” environment. Most actors in this process would probably agree that normal operations of partnerships in the County were brought to a fairly abrupt halt as army personnel, Ministry of Agriculture civil servants and veterinary specialists attempted to contain a crisis of national and international significance. In this process of change, some businesses were able to compensate for the disruption to normal trading through engagement in the clean-up process. There was inflated demand for hauliers, for instance, who were responsible for transporting all the culled livestock to dumping grounds at Great Orton near Carlisle. Veterinary surgeons, many of whom were drafted in from abroad, benefited too. The substantial influx of government employees into the County also boosted parts of the local hotel and restaurant trade.

In the medium term, those farmers who had their animals destroyed, received payments which were considered “fair and, in some cases, generous compensation for their stock losses.” (Haskins Review). Those farmers who had not lost stock suffered financially although some benefited later from being able to sell breeding stock to the stockless farms as the recovery got under way. The agricultural service industries were initially hit hard by the outbreak but found short term work opportunities in clearing up premises.

The timing of events was critical. The disaster hit the County at the start of the tourist season and the County’s visitor economy suffered accordingly. It was, in fact, not until October 2001, some nine months into the crisis, that Government, through the Haskins Review, began to address the issues for economic recovery. The review made a series of recommendations that related to the economic recovery of the areas affected, including the need to reassure businesses and potential visitors that “the countryside will be back in business by April 2002”. There were also proposals for deferral of tax payments for businesses, financial support for advertising the area and setting up of a Business Recovery Fund.

The severity of the problems faced and uncertainty surrounding the spread of the disease undoubtedly contributed to delays and it was not until April 2002, some 14 months into the crises, that Englandsnorthwest Rural Alliance, supported by the North West Development Agency and partners across the NW region, was set up to implement the Regional “Rural Recovery Plan.” At the same time, the “Cumbria Rural Action Zone” involving Cumbria County Council and partners drafted a consultation document entitled “Next Steps Strategy.” Also, in May 2002, the Carlisle and Eden Local Strategic Partnership published its “Looking Ahead” Strategy.

² ditto

³ Franks et al (2003).

The publication of these various recovery plans was symbolic of a shift from the “response” to the “recovery” phase in managing the FMD disaster. It also signalled a return to what might be deemed to be “normal” processes of partnership that prevailed prior to the crisis. It has been stated that one of the consequences of a centralised control exercised during the emergency phase of the crisis was a loss of trust in authority and an undermining of the value of local knowledge.⁴ Many in the farming community have expressed anger at the Ministry of Agriculture’s decision to cull healthy animals rather than implement a vaccination policy to stem the spread of the disease. Others point of conflict included the decision to place movement restrictions on animals which effectively destroyed the livelihoods of many sheep farmers during the lambing season and beyond. Among the recommendations to come out of the study by Mort *et al* (2005) were that firstly there should be joint service reviews of what counts as a disaster; secondly, that there should be regular NHS and voluntary sector sharing of intelligence; thirdly, that there should be debriefing and peer support for front line workers; fourthly, that there should be increased community involvement in disposal site or disaster management; and lastly, that there needed to be more flexible access to regeneration funding and rural health outreach work.

It is interesting to note that the way in which the FMD Crisis unfolded seems to follow the various stages often identified in models of disaster management. There was, for instance, a very clear distinction between the “response” and “recovery” stages. Critiques of this process suggest that issues related to business stability and economic recovery were perhaps not considered soon enough and that uncertainties arising from lack of clarity over response to business needs fuelled by the media added to subsequent economic difficulties. Questions were raised about the management of information and the timing of responses to community needs.

As regards the recovery plans themselves, many of the measures brought together in these documents were not new concepts and some of the ideas were pipeline projects and ideas for programmes to support rural businesses that were already under discussion prior to the outbreak of FMD. One example of this evolved into the Distinctly Cumbrian Programme (DCP) which provided grants and advice to “producers of local products” to help their development and growth and so benefit the local communities in their recovery. A total of 255 grants were eventually awarded to small and medium sized enterprises.⁵ The Programme was characterised by closer cooperation between delivery bodies in the County and the evaluation of this programme noted positive feedback on the mentoring aspects of the programme in meeting business needs (CRED, 2009).

As a backlash and a consequence of FMD, local slaughtering of farm animals was revived and part of the DCP, along with a “Made in Cumbria” scheme was aimed at fostering local production, distribution and marketing of food and drink products. Support from the DCP was given to build and develop a Food Technology Centre in Penrith, Cumbria. This provides six equipped units on a daily or long-term lease basis for small businesses wishing to test out the production of new food and drink products. The aftermath of the crisis therefore brought increased volume of sales of small businesses through farmers markets, farm shop outlets as well as corporate buyers both within and outside the County. The CRED (2009) survey of DCP grant recipients revealed that half the 42 interviewees of businesses that had seen their sales of products increase outside the County said that it was directly related to the purpose of the DCP grant.

Has farming in Cumbria become more resilient as a result of the FMD crisis? Franks *et al* (2003) in their survey of farm households affected by FMD in Cumbria found that only one of the 67 farmers interviewed had decided to cease farming. Most lowland grazing and dairying farmers were intending to return to their previous levels of activity. In contrast, half of those in upland dairying were contemplating scaling down their farmed area. Analysed by FMD status, culled-out farmers were more likely to alter the size of their business with an equal number as likely to expand as contract. 13% of all farmers said that they were going in for more farm diversification with another 27% saying possibly. None of the non-culled-out farmers intended to look for more work off the farm which compared with 25% of culled-out farmers intending to do so and 40% of them looking to increase income from diversification.

⁴ Mort *et al* (2005).

⁵ CRED (2009), p. 5.

These findings suggest that FMD has increased Cumbria's dualistic farm business structure. However, "In deciding on their future farm strategy fewer than half had sought or intended to seek advice. Less had sought advice about their plans to diversify and none about opportunities for earning income in off-farm employment. Farmers who had taken advice turned to traditional sources, most commonly their accountant and from friends/family with specialist knowledge of farming. Few sought advice from the Farm Business Advisory Service or Cumbria Farm Link."⁶ It therefore appears less clear that the farming sector is much more resilient than it was before FMD. Frank et al (2003) claim that the reluctance of farmers not engaged in diversification activities before FMD to do so afterwards may be well founded. They cite the fact that non-agricultural enterprises on farms that were nevertheless quarantined received consequential losses but did not receive compensation payments. They also argue that shifting employment from agriculture to tourism may risk shifting resources from one vulnerable sector to another as both the FMD outbreak and the West Cumbria floods have illustrated.

3.2 The Carlisle Floods (2005)

The events that transpired in January 2005 were very different in scale and significance compared to the FMD outbreak four years earlier but the impact of Carlisle itself was severe. On the 8th January 2005, Cumbria as well as other parts of the UK was hit by what were described in the media as hurricane force storms. The flooding event in Carlisle was the consequence of a combination of rare combination of circumstances. Firstly, in the 24 hour period before the flood, the equivalent of two months rainfall had fallen. Secondly, Carlisle stands on a flood plain at the confluence of three rivers, the Eden, Petteril and Caldew, the first of which drains the whole of the Eastern part of the County. The ground was already saturated due to a prolonged period of rain. This and the rivers' large catchment area and particularly steep gradients of the river Eden in the uppermost reaches led to flooding upstream of Carlisle. Thirdly, there was a simultaneous high tide in the Solway Firth into which the river Eden runs which consequently meant that the City's flood protection barriers were breached.

The immediate consequences of the flood were that 1,925 homes and business were flooded up to a depth of 2 metres, 40,000 addresses were without power and there were 3 deaths. The most widespread impact was on homes, but key business areas were also affected including a major employer, United Biscuits. The City's infrastructure was hit with the police and fire stations being flooded along with the ground floor of the Civic Centre which housed social welfare offices. Schools too were affected. All of these services had therefore to relocate. All of Carlisle's 65 buses had been damaged by water. The Chief Constable of Cumbria warned that the city would be in a "state of emergency" for "at least 3 or 4 days."⁷ There were impacts on small business too, felt by local retailers, garages, services and those businesses unable to trade on the local trading estate (garage repairs, transport services, couriers etc). Official reports at the time suggest that the medium term effects were that 3,000 jobs were put at risk and over 3,000 people were homeless for up to 12 months.⁸ There was also considerable policy debate concerning the potential impact of flooding on the corporate strategies of multinationals.

Organisation of the response to the flooding disaster 2005

The fact that the event, unlike FMD, was a localised one, meant that the organisation of the response was quite different. Although news of the flood went across the world and the national media displayed pictures in the newspapers and on our TV screens, there was significant retention of local control of decision-making in the management of this particular disaster. A Management Team was set up consisting of Carlisle City Council (chair), Cumbria County Council, the Environment Agency, the Government Office for the North West (GONW), the Police and Chairs of various working groups to coordinate the response to the demands of the crisis. It is interesting to note the range of themes covered by these working groups which included not only emergency needs (individual welfare, housing and homelessness, infrastructure) but also themes associated with economic recovery (Business Support) and also media management.⁹

It is apparent from the nature of this response that, despite the very different nature of the disaster, some lessons from the FMD experience had informed the process. Firstly, that there had been a clear

⁶ Franks et al. (2003).

⁷ BBC news website, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4158641.stm> accessed 19.5.10

⁸ http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience/response/recovery_guidance/case_studies/p2_carlisle.aspx accessed 20.5.10.

⁹ Cf. footnote 2 above.

need to establish a business recovery group as apart of recovery. Also, an existing Business Recovery Plan was used and developed. Secondly, schemes were established to assist businesses, including interest free loans, grants and rent for alternative premises. Advice was made available through a call-centre, drop-in centre, website, and leaflets. Thirdly, the Management Team liaised with employers and employees groups and associations including trade unions. Fourthly, in media messages high profile supporters were used as were experts and science to support messages. As a consequence of these approaches, evaluations of the process suggest that there were fewer difficulties generated by the need for “handover” after the emergency phase because the local partnerships had led the response.¹⁰

In July 2005, it was announced by the Environment Minister that DEFRA and its partners at central, regional and local government levels would be taking forward the recommendations of two reports that were written after the flood – a report of the Carlisle floods written by local responders and an Environment Agency report. They would form the basis of a new Flood Emergencies Capabilities Programme. Also, Carlisle would see the building of a comprehensive flood defence system including a new drainage system. Improvements were also to be made regarding early warning systems for the City.

3.3 The West Cumbria Floods (2009)

The third disaster which forms part of this analysis concerns a more recent flooding event that hit communities primarily in the West of the County. At the end of November 2009, the area was hit by an extended period of heavy rain in a 36 hour period affecting the town of Cockermouth. The impacts were compounded by the fact that the surrounding area in the Cumbrian mountains was already saturated from previous rain and so the run-off was greater. This led to severe flooding in the town with more than 2000 properties being flooded, 90 percent of which were residential but which also affected all of the businesses in the main shopping area. Major employers in the town, James Walker and Jennings Brewery were also badly affected.

The River Derwent that flows through Cockermouth became so swollen that bridges were closed and the effects were compounded as it flowed towards Workington on the Cumbrian coast. Bridges became unstable due to the weight of water scouring their foundations and as one policeman who was busy closing one bridge to traffic was swept to his death by the river, the event attracted the attention of the national media. A number of bridges collapsed and left the town divided into two communities on either side of the river. The immediate impact on businesses and people in Workington was then felt by the difficulty in accessing work and vital services. To travel from one side of the town to the other by car now necessitated a considerably lengthy trip. Resulting congestion on alternative roads caused traffic chaos for several weeks and hence had knock-on effects for other businesses and communities in the area. Businesses on the Dunmail Retail Park in Workington reported a 90 percent drop in revenue immediately following the flood event. In addition, businesses in the tourism and hotel sector were adversely affected by negative media messages.

A number of pilot interviews have been conducted by the authors to try to understand how the response of local partners to this latest event has been informed by the experiences gained in previous disasters in the County. The findings presented in this paper are therefore provisional and based on consultations with two organisations involved in responding to business needs at this time. A key point emerging from this investigation concerns the speed with which announcements were made regarding a £1m Flood Recovery Fund to support businesses affected by the flooding and subsequent disruption. It was argued that this early intervention to support rural business was essential to sustain business confidence and exercise a positive influence over decisions that might be taken by banks, creditors, suppliers and customers to businesses involved in the crisis. Reference was made to previous experiences in this regard during the FMD crisis in particular where management of media reporting was considered to be detrimental to economic recovery

Interviewees have also noted that there was less confusion about what assistance was available and how to access it. Consistent guidance on how to respond to the emergency was available on various website along with grant forms and guidance for completion. There appears to have been greater awareness of the need for effective coordination and clarity of roles between the various agencies

¹⁰ Source: Recovery: a Guidance document for Cumbria: First Edition (Cabinet Office website)

involved, including the Chamber of Commerce, the North West Development Agency, Business Link services, enterprise agencies and local authorities. This extended to coordination with other funds for community purposes, for example, the self-employed were referred to the Cumbria Community Foundation. Under the Flood Recovery Grant scheme, Cumbria Community Foundation put donations in to support individuals and communities, not businesses.

4. Disaster management in a rural region: towards a framework of analysis

The experiences of Cumbria since 2001 offer some useful insights into approaches to managing the effects of disasters specifically on rural communities. Arising out of three varied experiences, we can distil (at least) two contrasting approaches to governance arrangements surrounding the management of disasters in general. These two approaches can be viewed as a contrast between what might be described as the conventional “emergency planning” approach to dealing with situations involving significant upward movement of strategic (and in extreme cases, operational) decision-making, as opposed to “resilience” models that seek to embed emergency responses into local partnerships. In the latter case, local partnerships retain greater control (and hence responsibility) for dealing with disaster situations. This shift in policy may reflect, in part, central government pragmatism in response to what appears to be the increased frequency of such disaster events in local areas. It may also reflect greater awareness of the significance of knowledge of local areas held by key partners and local community engagement in solving issues that arise in the short and medium term.

An attempt to portray these contrasting approaches is shown in figures 1 and 2. The conventional “emergency planning” model shows linear progression through a series of stages, as reflected in the literature on disaster management (mitigation, preparedness, emergency, recovery). At point of disaster, emergency planning measures “kick in” and, to varying degrees, local partnership processes are interrupted or even suspended while emergency needs are addressed. In terms of governance, command structure shifts towards local emergency planning arrangements accompanied by some level of upward shift in decision-making to regional or national authorities. This shift in responsibilities can involve strategic decision-making but may also involve central control of operations at local levels. While emergency needs are being addressed, local partnerships consider their response to the medium term when the “baton is returned” for handling the recovery phase. The model also suggests feedback loops in the form of lessons learned for emergency planning as a separate exercise to the evaluation of the way in which recovery plans are implemented. This linear process implies that such events are infrequent and discrete and need to be dealt with through “special measures” that are not necessarily viewed as part of the “normal” operations of local partnerships.

This can be contrasted with an alternative “resilience” model that visualises the process as a continuous cycle of learning that is owned and managed locally by partnerships working with communities. The assumption is that local partners should internalise their responses to disasters and that emergency planning processes should be closely integrated into what might be considered “normal” local development processes. The rhetoric of “resilience” therefore places greater demands on local partnerships to take ownership of managing risk, assessing hazards, considering mitigation and designing recovery plans in anticipation of a range of different circumstances. This arguably requires much greater integration of emergency planning functions into the structure of local partnerships dealing with economic development, local regeneration, business support, social and community development. Future research on the management of disasters offers a useful context within which to explore the extended role and significance of local partnerships in local development processes in an era where environmental as well as economic shocks to local economies are becoming much more frequent.

Fig 1

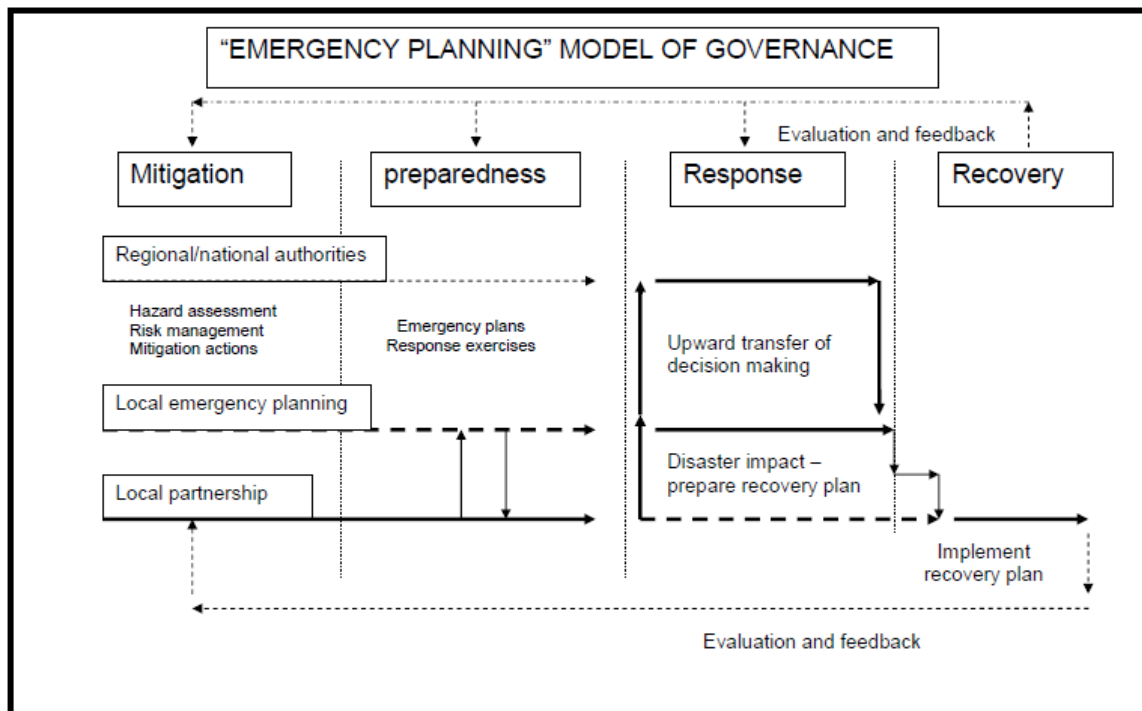
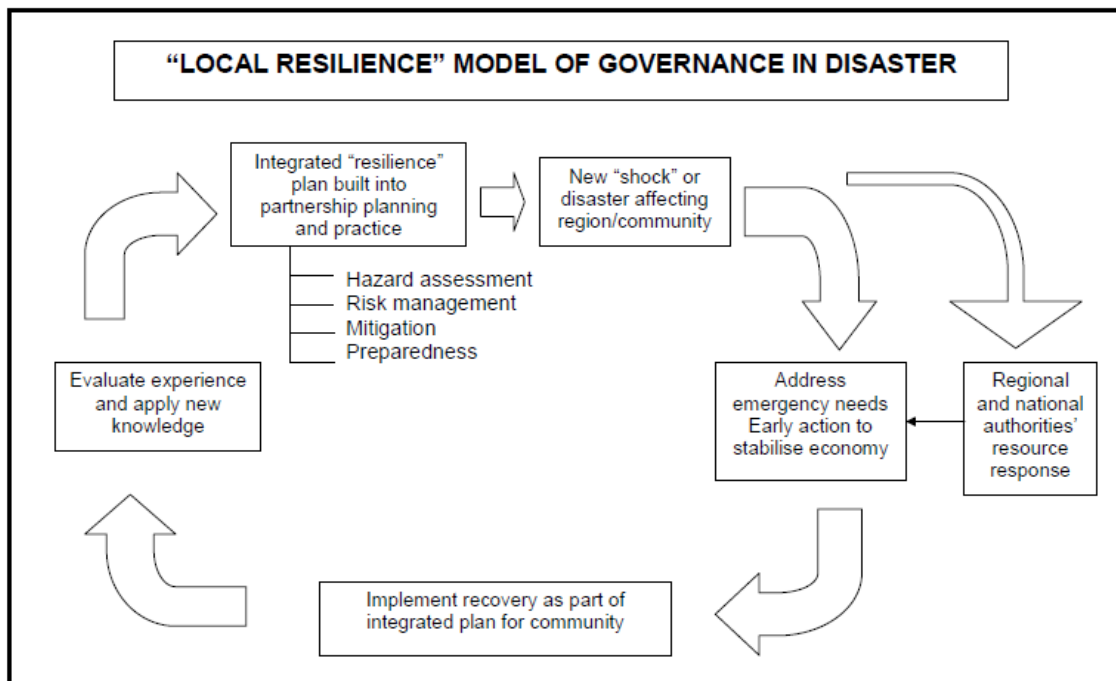


Fig 2



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