

Aspen Global Change Institute
“Risk & Resilience in the Face of Global Change”

Social Dimension of Resilience

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Reflections on How We Use “Resilience”

Resilience as...	Focus is on...	What we care about	What we ask about	What we search for	Locating our Values
SYSTEM TRAIT or CONDITION	System as a whole	System functions & services (e.g., diversity)	What makes a system resilient?	Leverage points to nudge the system to more desirable states	A priori neutral on outcome(s) (theory)
PROCESS (or set of processes)	Actions or decisions	System functionality/performance (e.g., flood system acts as advertised)	What can we do to reduce impact/losses and speed up recovery?	DS tools and actions that help to plan, prepare, absorb, recover, adapt	Normative about “best practices”, assumed to lead to desirable outcomes
OUTCOME (or set of outcomes)	Actors	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	Normative about outcomes; explicitly or implicitly value-driven

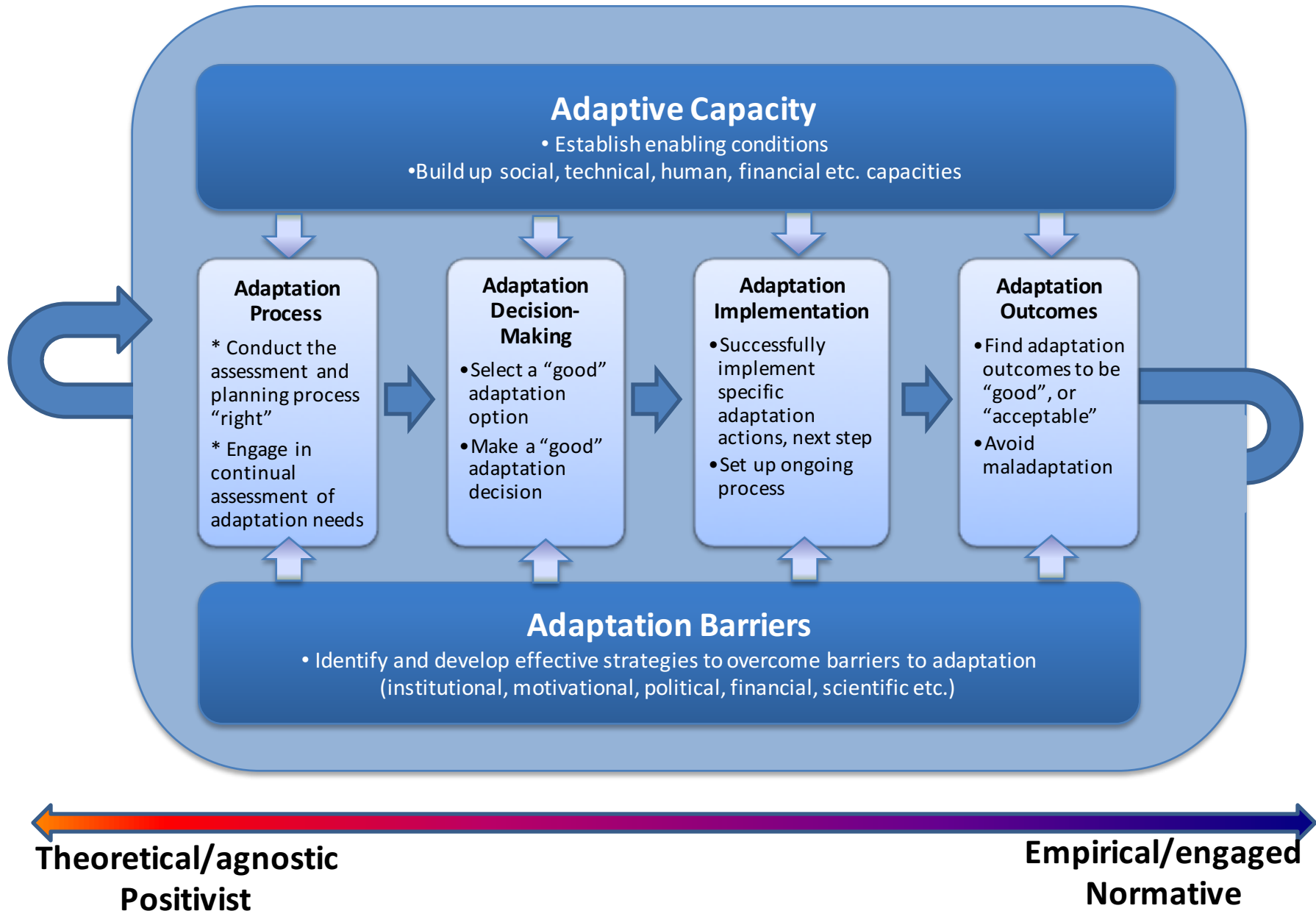
Reflections on How We Use “Resilience”

(Cont.)	Link to sustainability	Link to risk management	Politics	Challenges	Progress underway
SYSTEM TRAIT or CONDITION	Resilience may or may not at all support sustainability	Informational input to risk management	Supposedly apolitical	Simplistic application of ecological theory to social systems	From isolated to interlinked systems
PROCESS (or set of processes)	Resilience is requirement for sustainability	Part or extension of risk management	Implicitly political (does not question, but still aims to perpetuate a particular system)	Neglect of the larger context beyond the immediate system of concern	From command-and-control to adaptive approaches
OUTCOME (or set of outcomes)	Resilience = sustainability	Goal of risk management (and other efforts)	Explicitly and inherently political	Risk of neglecting history, change, cross-scale, social and ecological impacts, complexity	From siloed to whole-system approaches

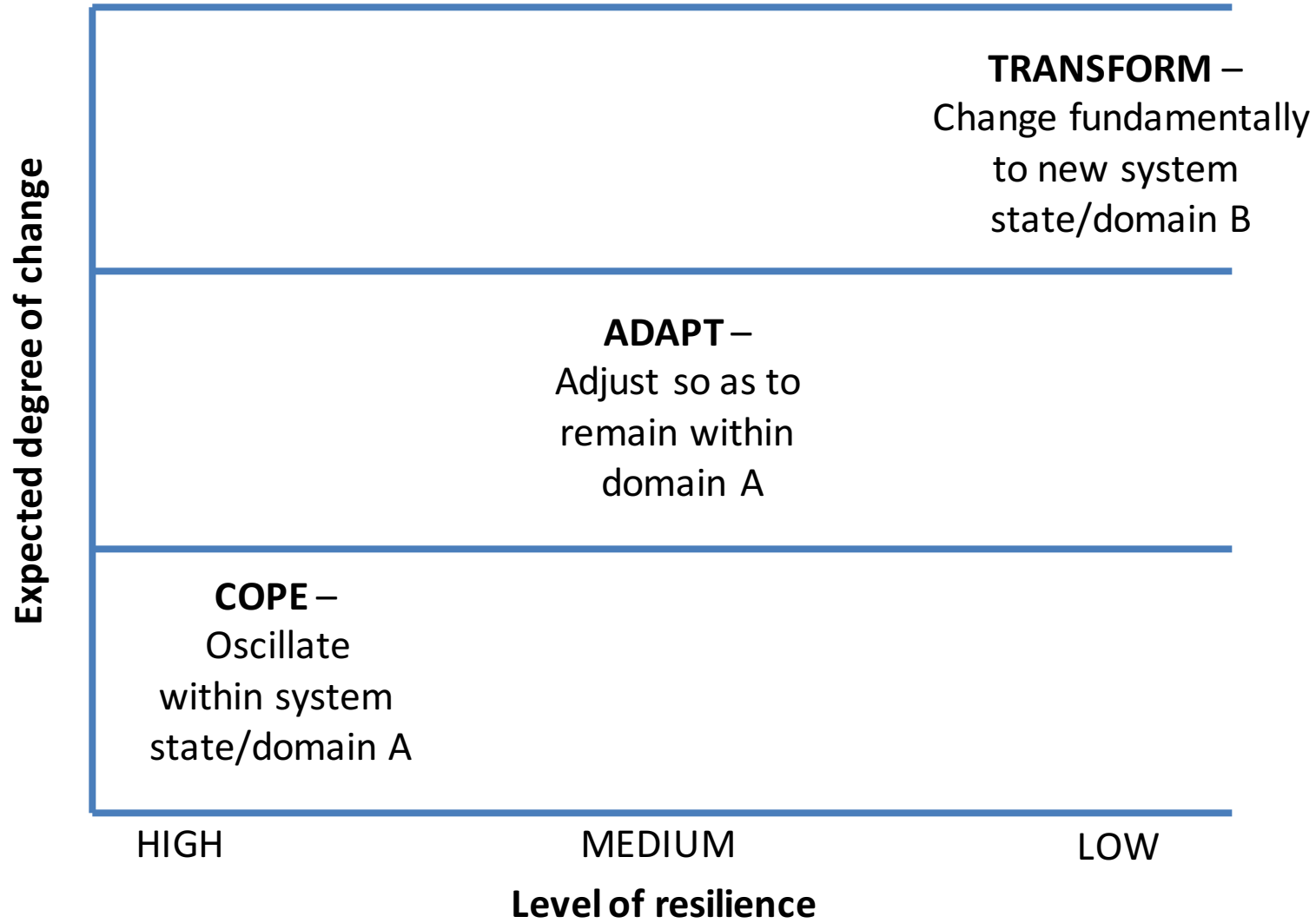
Mirrored in Definitions of “Social” Resilience

(Cont.)	Social resilience definition (components)	Overlaps & Blends	Talk about adaptation	Talk about transformation	Search for indicators /metrics
SYSTEM TRAIT or CONDITION	Ability to self-organize so as to maintain functioning; system properties to withstand or avoid disaster	Resilience as capacity to stay the same/come back to same Resilience as the capacity to stay functional by way of/but adapt Resilience as a mechanism to address socio-economic problems			
PROCESS (or set of processes)	Ability to cope, absorb, recover and adapt				
OUTCOME (or set of outcomes)	Ability to thrive, maintain or increase well-being, be safe, sustain livelihoods etc.				

Six Key Dimensions of Adaptation Success



Resilience & System Change: Can we have it all at once?



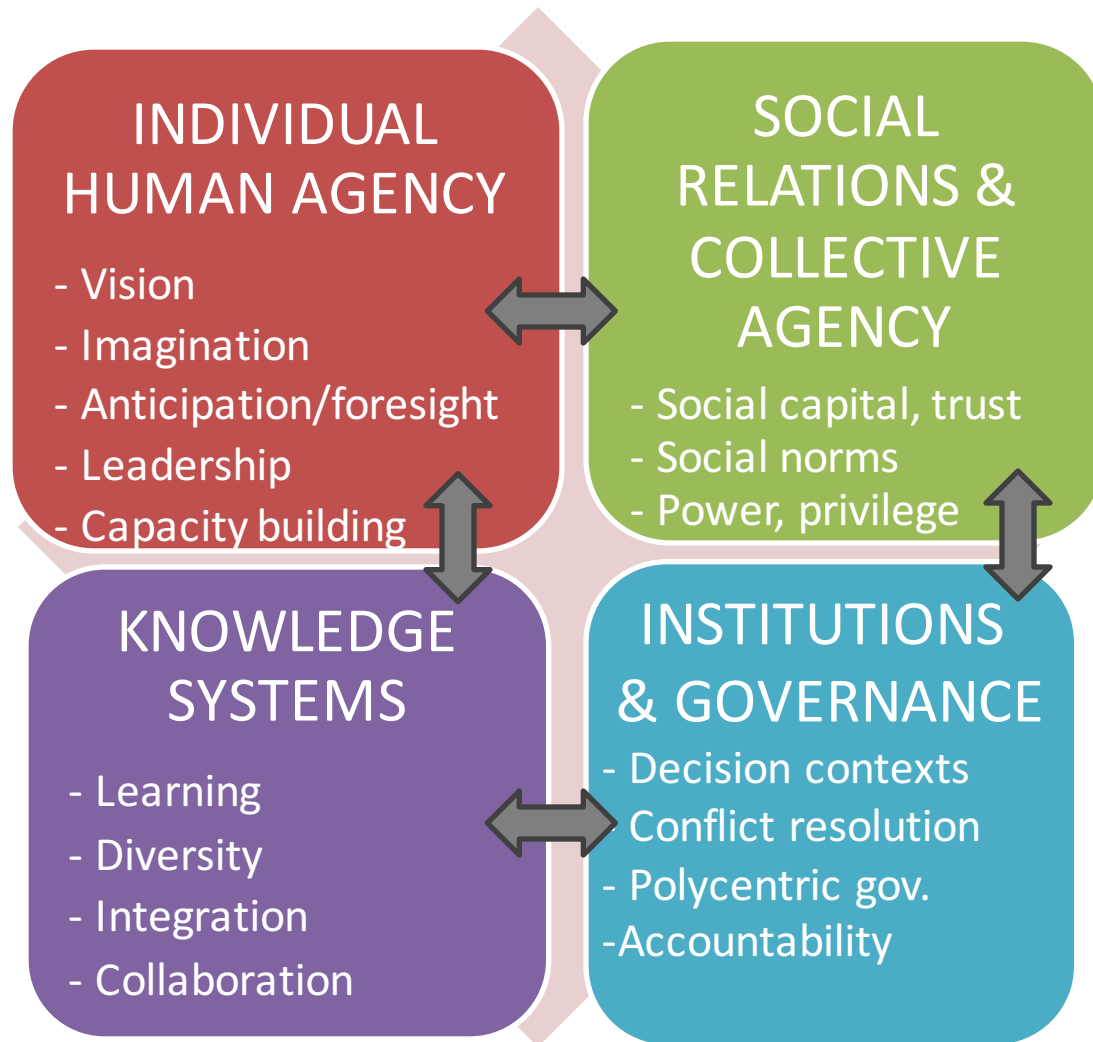
Whole-System Resilience in the Face of External Change & Internal “Disturbance”

Social Resilience	Coping capacities	Keep things the same in the face of disturbance and change
	Adaptive capacities	Keep up with change to basically keep things the same
	Transformative capacities	Make fundamental change to make a better future

- What is required socially, politically, psychologically, financially, institutionally, in terms of human capital, information etc. to COPE vs. to ADAPT vs. to TRANSFORM?
- Do these “capacities” build on each other logically, cumulatively, seamlessly or might they look fundamentally different?
- Do certain qualities dominate within different capacities?
- Are there trade-offs among these capacities and if so, how do we balance them?

Source: Keck & Sakdapolrak (2013)

Need to Get Smarter About Each and Relationship Among Them



Tip-of-the-iceberg Research Challenges

- Disentangle the “social”
 - What unit of “people” (individual, family, neighborhood, etc.)?
 - What aspect of the social do we care about vis-à-vis resilience (e.g., social relations, psychological states, political roles, responsibilities, transfers, burdens)?
- Remedy the sad state of social science research on resilience (Downes et al. 2013)
 - Need more studies of communities, sectors, systems, not just individuals
 - Need more long-term and beyond-local studies (legacies, delays, synergies, cumulative effects, cross-scale interactions)
 - Need a greater variety of methods and foci (historical, spatial transects, in-depth analysis of cause-and-effect between interventions and outcomes)
- Clarify differences and interactions between coping, adaptive, transformative capacities
- Study ‘critical thresholds of adaptability and resilience’—the human tipping points

Thank you!

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