Chapter 2 – Key Concepts, Definitions and Perspectives

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Chapter Objectives

- Define the concepts used for disaster and grasp the similarities and differences among them.
- Understand and distinguish the differences among hazards, disaster, and risk.
- Explain the importance of a Comprehensive Emergency Management.
- Know key theoretical perspectives for understanding disaster behavior.
- Understand current political and social definitions of disaster.
- Explain the emergence and importance of using a multidisciplinary approach to emergency management.
Defining Disasters

- Multiple definitions exist
- **Textbook Focus** – Disasters are social events
- **Classic Definition** for disaster is an: "...actual or threatened accidental or uncontrollable events that are concentrated in time and space, in which a society, or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of society undergoes severe danger, and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of the society, or its subdivision, is prevented.” (Fritz 1961, p. 655)
Types of Events

- Emergency
  - Predictable day to day events

- Disaster
  - Events that disrupt day to day activities within a community

- Catastrophe
  - Events that disrupt day to day activities region wide. Resources are difficult to obtain and aid beyond political boundaries is necessary
A Continuum of Disaster

- **Emergency**
  - Routine
  - Predictable
  - Handled Locally

- **Disaster**
  - Community Disruption
  - Local Capacity Overwhelmed
  - Outside Help Needed

- **Catastrophe**
  - Regional Impact
  - Infrastructure Compromised
  - Aid Slow to Arrive
Comprehensive Emergency Management

The Four Phases of Emergency Management

- **Preparedness** – getting ready for a disaster
- **Response** – dealing with the impact of a disaster
- **Recovery** – getting life back to normal
- **Mitigation** – activities to decrease a disaster impact
Comprehensive Emergency Management
The National Incident Management System (NIMS) defines preparedness as a continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, and taking corrective action to improve upon the process. This preparedness cycle is one element of a broader National Preparedness System (NRF) to prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate natural disasters, acts of terrorism and other man-made disasters.

All Hazards Approach

- One major planning document
- More similarities than differences among social dimensions of disaster
- Use across all four phases of disaster
- Exceptions dealt with in planning annex
- Much more efficient for preparedness and planning
Fema hazards approach from nrf?? Not good?

- All Hazards
The Hazards Tradition

- Geographer Gilbert White
- Initial focus on hazard mitigation efforts
- Multidiscipline approach toward hazards
- Formed Natural Hazards Research and Application Information Center in the mid-1970’s at the University of Colorado-Center
- Tradition continues strong today
Disaster Research Center Tradition

- Charles Fritz, E. L. Quarantelli and Russell R. Dynes – all sociologists
- Initial focus human behavior during war and “response time” activities
- DRC formed 1963 at The Ohio State University
  - Quarantelli, Dynes, Haas
- Tradition Continues today at University of Delaware
  - Studies all phases today
  - Draws upon interdisciplinary work
  - Over 600 field trips to disaster sites
Risk and Risk Perception

- Originated after Three Mile Island nuclear accident in 1979
- Focus on
  - How people see risk (probability of an event taking place
  - How risk influences people’s behavior
- Primarily the work of (social) psychologists
- All perspectives can be used simultaneously to understand events
Broader Perspectives

- Emergent norm
- Systems theory
- Sociopolitical ecology perspective
- All three provide different views to understand hazards, disasters and risk
Emergent Norm

- Foundation for “quick response” research
- Key Characteristics
- New norms
  - altruistic behavior
  - decrease of crime
- New Structure
  - altruistic behavior
  - decrease of crime
  - And new norms: emergent search and rescue group
- Spontaneous Behavior
  - *Ad hoc* neighborhood search and rescue groups
Systems Theory

- How the built environment, physical environment and people interact together
- Foundation for initial Hazards approach
- Key question: How do people live next to and adjust living next to such events as:
  - Earthquakes
  - Floods
  - Tornadoes
  - Hurricanes
Systems Theory
(Based on Milieti 1999)

Physical Environment

Human Environment — Built Environment

Source: Phillips 2009, with permission.
Sociopolitical Ecology Perspective

- Foundation from Systems Theory
- Looks at
  - Competition for resources in a community
  - Patterns of disaster victimization
- Highlights that certain groups are more likely to be disaster victims, such as:
  - The poor
  - Ethnic minorities
  - The elderly
Key Issues Today

- Political Dimension
  - Power influences political and governmental definitions of disaster
  - Presidentially Declared disasters have little political influence

- Slow Moving Disasters
  - Events harder to define
  - Challenges many conventional notions of disaster
Key Issues Today (Cont.)

- **Non-Traditional Events**
  - Emergency Operating Centers and Professional Managers provide expertise for other events
  - Large crowd gatherings or even riots
  - Space Shuttle Columbia recovery

- **Multidisciplinary Perspectives**
  - Different social sciences provide key perspectives on individual, group, organizational and political behavior
  - Engineering and hard sciences assist with issues, such as building standards, geology and meteorology
  - Emergency managers must know about many different fields for their jobs