

# RESILIENCE THINKING

## Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World

**Brian Walker  
& David Salt, 2006**

“Resilience thinking” aims to understand how landscapes and communities absorb disturbances.

The book is created in response to the mainstream growth models in which environmental management is achieved by simply optimizing the resources in isolated systems, ignoring further effects and feedbacks in the bigger ecosystem.

### A DISCIPLINE

Resilience Thinking is presented as an applicable discipline composed of a theoretic body of major imperatives and uses specific sub-models and vocabulary. It attempts to guide the management of complex socio-ecological systems, avoiding regime shifts into new, potentially undesirable, states. It relates this to the feasibility of achieving sustainability. Even though its origins are within environmentalism, it can be scalable to the management of any other system, and by anyone interested in embracing complexity in the real world, from individuals to communities, businesses and nations.

### THE VOCABULARY

#### Socio-ecological systems;

We are all part of linked systems of human and nature and these systems are complex and conditioned to reciprocal influence.

#### Adaptive cycles;

Most systems proceed through recurring cycles consisting of four phases: rapid growth, conservation, release, and reorganization. Resources are accumulated, and regulations are gradually enhanced in the first two phases, while the latter two phases go along with chaos and resource release and reorganization.

It's worth noting that there is usually a loss of resilience if a system continually stays in the conservation phase because of the loss in flexibility. Just as it's said, a thick forest is more likely to be burnt down by a spark.

#### Thresholds;

If a system changes too much it crosses a threshold and begins behaving differently, with diverse feedbacks and structure. It is said to have undergone a “regime shift.”

Thresholds are all around us, however, we often aren't aware of them until after they've been crossed and we observe that the system starts to behave in a different manner.

### STRENGTHS

The book provides an easy and friendly approach and recognizes that the conceptual framework of the theory is much more complex in real-life situations.

Even though it does not provide concrete recipes of answers, it explains the dangers of using one-fits-all solutions, which is exactly part of the problem in the first place. Nevertheless, the situational applicability of the model is very well exemplified by the use of case studies.

### RESILIENCE VALUES

**Diversity;**

**Variability;**

**Some degree of Modularity;**

**Acknowledging Slow Variables;**

### WEAKNESSES

Although the book recognizes the discipline as being part of the Systems Thinking discipline, it does not seem to recognize the existence of other valid models to approach environmental problems, instead, it seems to describe it as the only valid option.

Moreover, the focus is placed extensively on the environmental aspect. In the future it would be fascinating to see the philosophy of resilience thinking being explored in other fields such as social or technological spheres.

### VISION OF A RESILIENT WORLD

A resilience thinker would operate by moving thresholds, moving the current state of the system away from a threshold or making a threshold more difficult to reach. Sustainability is all about knowing if and where thresholds exist and having the capacity to manage the system with them.

**Innovation;**

**Social Capital;**

**Tight Feedbacks;**

**Ecosystem Services;**

**Overlap in Governance;**

EMBRACE  
CHANGE,  
DON'T RESIST  
IT