



GLOBAL URBAN RESILIENCE CONFERENCE REPORT

20th - 22nd February 2024

ABOUT THE GLOBAL URBAN RESILIENCE PROJECT

The ISRM and CSWP launched the new Global Urban Resilience project as the first major global initiative of the centre. The project is intended to tackle major global problems regarding the stability and prosperity of urban conglomerations, focussing on how to better manage complex risks and improve urban resilience as we move into the second quarter of the 21st century. The project's vision is to promote proactive measures that enhance long-term preparedness and adaptive capacity, enabling cities to have the embedded resilience to function more efficiently, as well as to anticipate, mitigate and recover from shocks more effectively.

Through multi-disciplinary collaboration and knowledge sharing on effective solutions to the myriad current and emergent wicked problems we face in our communities, we aim to identify outcome-oriented solutions and innovative resilience strategies that can be applicable across urban landscapes. As part of this, we envision a future where cities can effectively prioritise sustainability, equity and social cohesion alongside increasing both short- and long-term urban resilience via delivery of solutions which promote wellness and well-being, and are accessible to all residents, regardless of their status or socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Idea behind the CSWP is to create a framework and a platform within which useful discussions will take place, bringing together academics, policymakers and practitioners in an attempt to produce knowledge that would help tackle the major problems of the day. Academic work gives a structural framework for practitioners and planning leaders that allows them to model and engage with issues involving complexity, unprecedentedness and non-recoverability, all of which are central to an understanding of the challenges that are facing urban centres today.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

The inaugural Global Urban Resilience Conference brought together leading global experts and thought leaders to hold a series of wide-ranging discussions exploring the opportunities and challenges that we face in 2024 and beyond. It served as a platform for discussion on tackling modern wicked problems and the evolving nature of urban resilience in the 21st century.

We are excited to have begun work on our Global Urban Resilience Project, which will offer a framework for academic research and policy-development that can help stakeholders from around the world model, prepare for and engage with the critical challenges that we will be facing in the coming years, and provide a more serious response to the many crises our cities are facing globally.

The conference was held to allow for a meaningful discussion around the challenges we're facing today on both the global and the local level, in order to create safety and security in our urban environments. Urban resilience is a problem that should be at the top of the list for everybody involved in any aspect of city planning and management, and the simple truth is that we are not paying enough attention to it. The CSWP has committed itself over the next 18 months to this project, in the hope that through cooperation and dialogue we can establish a framework that can support the development of a range of innovative solution that will have relevance, value and applicability to the full range of challenges that we are currently facing.

FIRST SESSION **SETTING THE SCENE: CONCEPT AND REALITY**



Tuesday 20th February, 10:00 – 11:30 /GMT/



Lord Toby Harris

Chair of the UK National Preparedness Commission, President of the ISRM



Jaroslav Romanchuk

Chief Economist (Pravoliberalni Rukh), President of the Scientific Research Mises Center, Presidential Candidate in Belarus



Sheela Patel

Director of the Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres



Xavier Castellanos

Under Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The opening session focused on the important aspects of resilience and the challenges cities face globally, and outlined the vision and concept of the Global Urban Resilience project.

The discussion agreed that having strong and inclusive communities is essential for social resilience, as well as having decentralised and autonomous city governments that could adapt their strategies to new trends. The experts agreed that due to the complexity of contemporary cities, action must be taken sooner rather than later in order to prevent our cities from outgrowing their capabilities and becoming outdated and fragile, and that they can do so by including local experience, considering local needs and coming up with innovative approaches that can then be offered to other cities.

The concepts of social and structural resilience were discussed, touching on the needs of modern cities and the challenges of adapting old cities to new challenges and making them resilient in the face of future crises. The panellists discussed social and environmental challenges, the need for social solidarity and community strength that would lower the vulnerabilities of cities. A major problem noted was poverty and the lack of supporting infrastructure, noting the interdependence of societies in cities and the complex network of services that were highly reliant on each other. The panellists agreed that while there is no one solution to every problem, there were concepts and ideas that could be applied and followed in all cases, and that solutions that had been implemented in one city could be offered and attempted in another.

The panellists agreed that it was necessary to take a bottom-up approach and engage with local communities, giving them ownership over local issues and helping them solve these problems in accordance with their own needs. Climate change-related crises were pointed out as being major wicked problems that cities need to learn to prepare for, especially through the creation of resilient institutions that can cooperate at a local level and provide both immediate and long-term support as required. Ultimately, it was agreed that only a strong, equitable and inclusive society that leaves no one behind can develop the resilience needed to stand up to upcoming crises, which will undoubtedly impact us in increasingly challenging and disruptive ways.



SECOND SESSION **CITIES UNDERWATER, CITIES ON FIRE**



Tuesday 20th February, 16:00 – 17:30 /GMT/



Andrew Blades

Principal Advisor for Emergency Resilience, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Region, Victoria State Government, Australia



Avgoustinos Chatziagiannis

Fire Manager with British Forces Cyprus, Defence Fire & Rescue Operations & Training Manager, FIRELINE - AMBILINE



Sherrod James

Director, National Office of Disaster Services Antigua & Barbuda

The second session focused on urban resilience in relation to natural disasters and climate change, including rising sea levels, supply chain issues, food production, pollution and adaptation, and a facilitated discussion on the various ways of managing cities in crisis.

The panellists discussed what we mean by saying “We are ready” for a crisis, and the need to manage the consequences of a disaster through a systematic approach and through the building of resilient infrastructure that can withstand both traditional and new risks. They discussed the unprecedented level of disasters occurring currently, especially in the Mediterranean, and the need for engagement with local communities and for the proper communication with decision makers about risk. They focused on both crisis response and disaster management and the need for practitioners to learn from each other’s experiences. The conversation continued with the concept of comprehensive disaster management, the difference between them and proper management of limited resources, including the use of communities as a resource for long-term preparedness and cooperation.

The conversation continued with the concept of comprehensive disaster management and proper management of limited resources, including the use of communities as a resource for long-term preparedness and cooperation. This extended to a discussion of supply chain resilience, proper operating procedures and of the expectations that risk management organisations are expected to meet. The panellists considered the proper use of language which would enable practitioners to communicate effectively when managing risk and crises, in order to encourage critical thinking and problem-solving. They discussed the concept of “black swan events” and other concepts, mentioning also the added complication of climate change for city resilience. They also noted that the systems we depended on for decades are starting to fail us, and the need for academics to communicate and cooperate with practitioners, with the goal being making local communities resilient, referencing also the need to allow those communities to be engaged in crisis management and to take ownership of the process.

Another important topic discussed was city resilience in the face of flooding, water management and snowstorms, and the need for multi-disciplinary approaches in the face of the problem of a lack of a recognized common body of knowledge in risk management. The conversations then turned to the need to make crisis management organisations more open to new ideas and concepts so that they could achieve influence, impact and legacy. The last part of the discussion focused on the need to reconceptualize elements of resilience and risk management, and for agencies and organisations to work together and cooperate towards overall resilience. The panellists agreed that the focus has to be on lessons learned from previous challenges and the incorporation of the new knowledge into planning for the future in order to find new solutions for regular and emerging problems.

THIRD SESSION **LESSONS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH**



Wednesday 21st February, 10:00 – 11:30 /GMT/



Nadine Sulkowski

Senior Lecturer in Systemic Resilience Management at the University of Gloucestershire, Programme Lead for Erasmus+ Building Universities for Leading in Disaster Resilience Project (Indonesia)



Zoran Kekovic

Professor at the Faculty of Security Studies of the University of Belgrade

The third session focused on the lessons on resilience that could be learned from the experiences of cities in the Global South. The fastest growing urban centres of today are in the global south, and we can learn much from the challenges they are facing and the range of solutions that they have developed.

The session began with a discussion of the knowledge and experience gained from disaster and crisis management in Indonesia, the need to make local communities more resilient and able to grapple with disaster, as well as the importance of university programmes that engage students in resilience studies. The panellists touched on the role of universities in society, which should work with practitioners and local communities to build resilience, and help to build institutional resilience and governance through research and engagement. The experts pointed out the importance of training as an effective solution for disaster preparedness, and that this was something the universities could do for communities in disaster-prone areas. The conversation moved to the questions of critical infrastructure and the protection of the population in an increasingly chaotic world, and touched on the problems of climate change and the opportunities and challenges created by technology.

The experts noted the problems of infrastructure in contemporary urban centres and the reduction in green spaces, stressing the need to have long term strategies for resilience that would have a direct positive impact on the wellbeing of the citizens, especially the low income ones who are at greater risk. They pointed out the need to build smart and more functional cities in face of the pressures we are facing at a global level with cities growing exponentially. One of the points raised was the ability of technology to bring rapid and transformational development through innovation, and that the global south has a different way of functioning through compromise and negotiation in a city, but it was argued that to truly learn lessons we have to engage with different cultures deeply instead of doing research from a distance.

Other questions raised were about the standardisation of crisis management, and the need to invest in the local communities and a healthy living environment that would improve the availability of resources for all citizens. The discussion touched on strategic visions for cities of the future that would eliminate dysfunction, keeping in mind the different challenges cities face globally but also the similar problems that all cities face, such as transportation and digitization, and the need to create robust institutions with established protocols that deal with urban challenges and have interoperability between systems.

FOURTH SESSION **DISASTER-PROOFING CITY MANAGEMENT**



Wednesday 21st February, 16:00 – 17:30 /GMT/



Richard Smith-Bingham

Executive Director, Marsh McLennan



Sherrod James

Director, National Office of Disaster Services Antigua & Barbuda



Peter Willis

Facilitator of Strategic Dialogue,
Trainer of Facilitators and Advisor on
Leadership for Sustainability and
Resilience



Douglas Gray

Strategic Advisor, ISRM

The fourth session focused on the preparation of cities to anticipate and effectively manage complex disasters of all kinds, in order to ensure resilience even in emergency situations.

The discussion started by asking if the cities we live in nowadays are resilient or fragile, and if we are perhaps one small accident away from collapse, as the landscape of risk is evolving and posing new challenges from multiple directions. Questions were raised on whether the general arrangements cities have at the moment are adequate for the challenges of the future, such as climate change, and if the communities in those cities have the capacity to absorb potential shocks. The panellists considered resilience as the ability to absorb, adapt and recover, but also learning from past experience and having properly prepared leadership. They pointed out the importance of city leadership as major crises can best be tackled from a higher level, but require a leadership that the citizens trust and can rely on. From this perspective, the bi-directional relationship between city leadership and the local communities is the anchoring point of city resilience.

The conversation moved towards the need to build the organisational capacities necessary to grapple with crisis situations, and to have the right crisis management frameworks embedded in those organisations while understanding the strategic objectives that need to be reached. It was pointed out that leadership depends on the team the leader has around them, on the information available, and on having clear goals and protocols in mind. They touched on the need for proper inter and intra organisational communication, including flexibility and lateral communication, with the ability to bypass a rigid hierarchy in the event that an actual crisis event was to arise. They pointed out the importance of trust within teams and between decision makers and communities, putting people first in terms of capacity building and being open to changing operational paradigms to adjust to changing circumstances.

The discussion moved to useful guidelines and frameworks that can improve the effectiveness of teams and leaders in a crisis, supporting the need for clear standards and the promulgation of best practices in crisis management, but keeping in mind that every problem is unique and that there is no one solution for all problems. Another important point raised was that of effective civil preparedness and civil defence organisations, giving citizens a sense of purpose and a role in crisis management, but having the right organisation behind to manage their efforts.



FIFTH SESSION **KEEPING IT GOING: PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF CITY INFRASTRUCTURE**



Thursday 22nd February, 10:00 – 11:30 /GMT/



David Horobin

Head of Crisis Management, Geneva
Centre for Security Policy



Sheela Patel

Director of the Society for Promotion
of Area Resource Centres



Andrew Blades

Principal Advisor for Emergency
Resilience, Department of Jobs,
Skills, Industry and Region, Victoria
State Government, Australia



Jaroslav Romanchuk

Chief Economist (Pravoliberalni
Rukh), President of the Scientific
Research Mises Center, Presidential
Candidate in Belarus

The fifth session focused on the questions of planning, risk management and urban resilience, as well as the challenges to be faced by cities of the future that need to be addressed so that we can keep cities going.

At the start of the session it was argued that crisis management, risk mitigation and general preparedness are critical challenges that are not getting any easier, but that responses are becoming better through experience and the use of technology. The panellists noted a general increase in anxiety in the population which contributed to a lack of resilience, and the difficulty with comprehending complex and unprecedented crises. As a solution they considered the issues concerning the creation of more sophisticated models and forecasting into the future, and the democratisation of knowledge that would become more widely available, but they lamented the political fragmentation of the world that made global responses to major crises more difficult.

The conversation moved towards the ideas of cosmopolitanism and increased trust, in sharing knowledge so that everyone can be properly prepared for crises, touching on the need for sustainable global supply chains and solidarity in moderating the desire for growth and profit. A point was raised that local solutions and community ownership and empowerment can benefit overall resilience, with self-sufficiency and locally produced resources, connecting these issues with the issues of inequality and poverty which are an obstacle to social resilience. It was noted that the world is becoming less predictable and that structural changes need to be made to ensure sustainability and greater equality.

The panellists pointed out the value of multidisciplinary cooperation and thought, and the importance of putting sustainability and solidarity ahead of profit, focusing on the strengthening of communities in order to make societies more resilient. They stressed the need for cooperation between citizens and leaders as self-interested leaders and corporations erode trust within a community and break the social contract. An important point was also raised about the importance of experts, of cross-discipline academic cooperation, and the need for policy makers and leaders to listen to expert advice. The final and fundamentally optimistic thought of the conference was that there was a need for more global cooperation and discussion, as there are problems that countries all over the world were facing that are similar, allowing us to learn from each other.

ABOUT

THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT

The Institute of Strategic Risk Management (ISRM) is a leading global centre for the promotion and sharing of best-practice strategic risk and crisis management capabilities and thought leadership amongst practitioners, academics, and policy makers. Across the Institute's global chapter network, our members and fellows help progress and promote the underlying understanding and capabilities associated with strategic risk and crisis management, alongside developing their own personal and professional networks.

The ISRM provides best-practice training, hosts leading events across its global and local networks, and provides strategic advice to support organisations' management of complex risks.

🌐 www.theismr.org

✉ info@theismr.org

ABOUT

THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF WICKED PROBLEMS

The Centre for the Study of Wicked Problems (CSWP) is an international think-tank dedicated to facilitating effective research, analysis and solutions to the wicked problems faced by our organisations, governments and communities. The Centre brings together stakeholders, academics, policymakers and practitioners with one common platform to develop effective frameworks and strategies to address multifaceted challenges.

In creating a common global platform, the CSWP is a committed to facilitating a multidisciplinary approach, recognizing that the complexity of wicked problems requires bringing multiple different perspectives and expertise to the table.

🌐 www.cswp.theismr.org

✉ info@cswp.theismr.org

