



Book Review of “Adaptation to Climate Change: From Resilience to Transformation”

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ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE: FROM RESILIENCE TO TRANSFORMATION, BY: MARK PELLING, ROUTLEDGE, NEW YORK, USA, 204 PAGES, PRICE: 34.99 €, ISBN 978-0-415-47751-2

This book aims to provide “the first comprehensive analysis of the social dimensions of climate change adaptation” (p. 1). It is intentionally written in an engaging and easy reading style, mainly intended for students interested in issues of development, climate change or geography. This is understandable, considering that Pelling is a Professor of Geography at the King’s College London. This book is part of Pelling’s series of books on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) topics, such as *The Vulnerability of Cities: Natural Disasters and Social Resilience* (Pelling, 2003b), *Natural Disaster and Development in a Globalizing World* (Pelling, 2003a), and *Disaster Risk Reduction: Cases from Urban Africa* (Pelling and Wisner, 2008).

The book is divided into four parts by which nine chapters are presented. The first part of the book outlines “the framework and theory”; the second part discusses “the resilience-transition-transformation framework”. The third part outlines propositions on living with climate change, and the last part is a section on adaptation with (vs. to) climate change. The author argues that adaptation pathways are social and political processes which are influenced by the current situations and can also provide opportunities for influencing and shaping the future course of society. Pelling then proposes three choices of adaptations pathways leading to resilience (maintaining status quo), transition (incremental change) and transformation (radical change).

The first part of the book contains two chapters: “The adaptation age” and “Understanding adaptation”. In the first chapter, the author discusses the rationale behind the arguments and provides an overview of climate change policy

processes and conceptual developments. The author also discusses the structures of the book and rationale for the structures. Table 1.1 presented on p. 18 summarises the proposed resilience-transition and transformation framework perfectly. The second chapter provides simple yet clear analyses of adaptation concepts. Pelling discusses various lexicons, terms, concepts of risks, resilience, adaptive management and thresholds, as well as differentiates coping versus adaptation. All of these discussions lend nicely to how they are interrelated within the proposed resilience-transition and transformation framework (Table 2.4).

Pelling then presents and discusses the resilience-transition and transformation framework in Part Two of the book. This part consists of another three chapters which discuss adaptation as resilience, as transition, and as transformation, respectively. Chapter 3 outlines the proposition of social learning and self-organisations as key factors for undertaking adaptation as resilience. Here, the author argues for organisations as sites for resilience, and hence, analyses pathways for organisational adaptation. Risk and governance are proposed as important factors in choosing adaptation as transitional processes. It is further argued regarding the importance of urban risks and governance in undertaking the transitions. Lastly, Pelling discusses adaptation as transformation. This is where issues of risk society, human security and social contract are important as catalysts for transformation. The risk society concepts strongly refer to Ulrich Beck’s work, the human security concept is defined and sourced from GECHS programme, while social contract discussions are based on the liberal political ideologies. It is then argued that disasters can be tipping points for transformation. One other interesting construct within these particular chapters is where the author proposes visions of adaptation for each of the pathways.

The third part of the book focuses on how to operationalise the framework of adaptation to climate change. Consistent with the previous structure, this part is also divided into three chapters of explaining adaptations (a) within organisations (Chapter 6), (b) as urban risk discourse and governance (Chapter 7), and (c) as national political response to disaster (Chapter 8). Several cases are carefully chosen to support and articulate this resilience-transition and transformation framework. These cases are also from collections of the author's previous works. Case study from "The Environment Agency Group" and "Grasshoppers Farmers Group" in the United Kingdoms are selected to demonstrate how adaptation occurs within organisations. Cases of four cities in Mexico (Cancun, Playa del Carmen, Tulum, and Mahahual) illustrate importance of transitioning urban governance as one form of adaptation. Lastly, major historic cases of disasters that occurred in different parts of the world are carefully selected to demonstrate how disasters can be mobilised as political windows of opportunity for long term adaptation to climate change. These cases include the Bhola Cyclone in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) in 1970, Hurricane Mitch (Nicaragua) in 1998, and the more recent 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (USA).

The final part concludes the book with a proposal of adapting "with" climate change instead of adapting "to" it. Pelling proposed four ways to adapt "with" climate change. There needs to be diversity of the subject and object of adaptation research and policy to focus on social thresholds, to create adaptation visions, and to utilise linkages between different drivers of adaptation. Pelling coins these combinations of adaptations actions, done by different actors, through different continuums and scopes, as the "adaptations tapestry". It is indeed nicely argued and presented. Finally, to complement this framework, Pelling reviews and appraises how the world has actually started to put some of the theories into action (Box 9.1).

This book indeed has been successful in providing comprehensive yet easy to understand overviews of important conceptual underpinnings and practical progress of climate change adaptation. The arguments are supported by careful choice of case studies. The conceptual framework provides a systematic yet practical, and without a doubt, achievable choice of adaptation pathways by the current political processes.

References

- Pelling, M.: *Natural Disasters and Development in a Globalizing World*, Routledge, 2003a.
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- Pelling, M. and Wisner, B.: *Disaster Risk Reduction: Cases from Urban Africa*, Routledge, 2008.