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The Manchester Briefing COVID-19

International lessons for local and national government recovery and renewal

What is 'The Manchester Briefing on COVID-19'?

The Manchester Briefing on COVID-19 is aimed at those who plan and implement Recovery and Renewal from COVID-19, including government, emergency planners, resilience officers, the voluntary sector, and communities.

Over the last 18 months we have shared +600 lessons on Recovery and Renewal which you can find on our [Database](#).

Watch: 31/01/2022

Presenting the Chilean Ministry for Youth (INJUV):
Spontaneous Volunteer Programme

<https://tinyurl.com/3jvnjwe9>

Watch: 25/11/2021

Canada: Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada
(SARVAC)

<https://tinyurl.com/5en2ebez>



Our focus for 2022 will centre around blogs that explore how we can progress towards building Resilience across the whole-of-society.

The National Consortium for Societal Resilience UK+ (NCSR+) are running a series of webinars exploring how whole-of-society resilience is developed and delivered internationally, **watch**:

Watch: 15/12/2021

New Zealand: Wellington Region's Community Emergency Hub

<https://tinyurl.com/3e4567rj>

Watch: 04/11/2021

USA: FEMA's Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)
programme

<https://tinyurl.com/4uw2bka5>

Defining whole-of-society resilience

Introduction

*The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (The IR)*¹ used the term ‘whole-of-society resilience’ which challenged the resilience community to take an integrated approach to build national resilience as the product of multiple factors. The IR outlined the need for effective and trusted governance, government capabilities, social cohesion, and individual and business resilience, among other needs. In the 10 months since The IR was published, there has been much discussion of what its call to action on whole-of-society resilience could mean and how this could be operationalised by the resilience community. One activity that grew out of this discussion is the *National Consortium for Societal Resilience [UK+]*, abbreviated to *NCSR+*, which was initiated to pursue and amplify the local ambitions on whole-of-society resilience.

In this article we explain what *NCSR+* in the context of whole-of-society resilience, and outline an initial definition of what whole-of-society resilience could mean for *NCSR+* members.

Background of *NCSR+*

In [TMB 43](#) we explained the work of *NCSR+* (www.ambs.ac.uk/ncsr). We detailed how “*NCSR+* members want to work together on [whole-of-society resilience] as part of a national endeavour, with their communities, strengthening inclusivity and diversity, knowing each have different starting points on how they **understand their risks, pinpoint vulnerabilities, enhance preparedness, and leverage agency**. *NCSR+* is a **multi-year initiative to raise the ability of whole-of-society to anticipate, prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from risks**.”

NCSR+ members believe that whole-of-society resilience must be built from **inside communities**, utilising available partnerships [and establishing new ones, to offer] ... important support, facilitation, and intervention within a national framework of guidance and good practices. This explains why building whole-of-society resilience is not top-down from national or local government, because society is not controlled by them. However, resilience building cannot only be bottom-up by society, because then those communities that lack agency can be further left behind as they fail to mobilise around this challenge.”

[TMB 43](#) explained how this means that whole-of-society resilience has to be co-produced as a collaboration across:

- **Resilience partnerships** – those multi-agency collaborations which focus on preparedness, response and resilience
- **Sector partners** – those organisations from the voluntary sector, business sectors, higher education sector, and non-resilience government that support the creation of local resilience through collaboration with resilience partnerships
- **Community** – those individuals, neighbourhoods, businesses and organisations that share a characteristic such as being co-located or are inter-dependent

The vision of *NCSR+* is “To enhance the UK’s whole-of-society approach to resilience, so that individuals, community groups, businesses and organisations can all play a meaningful part in building the resilience of our society”.

This raises questions around the meaning of whole-of-society resilience, and how it can be communicated, developed, and operationalised locally.

Defining whole-of-society resilience

This TMB aims to open up discussions on what is meant by the term *whole-of-society resilience*. We expect that one definition will not satisfy different actors because different parties will want to accentuate the aspects that they prioritise and attenuate those that sit elsewhere. The University of Manchester, working with the collection of 61 other partners in *NCSR+*, has been exploring what whole-of-society resilience could mean for members of *NCSR+*.

To produce a working definition, an initial literature review identified how the term is used in a variety of contexts. We also conducted a number of interviews with resilience professionals to understand what the term could mean for them. We ran and attended workshops and seminars on the topic. Using all the information we captured, we developed a draft definition which was presented to *NCSR+* and revised in alignment with the feedback received. We then ran a survey and invited all members of *NCSR+* to comment on the draft definition. 75% of respondents agreed with the draft definition – and we received some very helpful comments to improve the definition from 19% of respondents who asked for changes to be made.

The conclusion of this work was an *NCSR+* working definition for whole-of-society resilience. Our aim in writing this definition was to provide helpful guidance to *NCSR+* on possible UK+ interpretations of *whole-of-society resilience* for local resilience – to inform the discussions, not to constrain them.

Our *NCSR+* working definition of *whole-of-society resilience*:

capability created by local systems that help people and places to adapt and advance in a changing environment

There is a lot of substance behind the words used in this working definition – too much detail to add to the definition itself. Hence, we defined each of the terms in italics in the working definition as follows:

- ***capability*** is a demonstrable ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from a particular threat or hazard
 - Whole-of-society resilience capabilities should work to understand risk, pinpoint vulnerability, enhance preparedness, and leverage agency. Examples of capabilities include the management of spontaneous volunteers and warning and informing

¹ [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#). UK Government Cabinet Office, March 2021

- **created** includes the initial establishing of the capability as well as the ongoing nurturing, care and maintenance of it
- **local systems** include actors (e.g. individuals/households, community groups, businesses, and organisations - such as voluntary organisations and the public sector), the relationships that bond them, and governance (e.g. the framework for organising, delivering, and evaluating capabilities)
 - o local systems should be integrated with regional and national systems
 - o systems have the following components: strategy and leadership, intelligence and partnerships, management systems, coordination and communication, and delivery functions
- **help** can be provided before, during, and after changes in the environment
- **people** includes vulnerable people, staff, critical workers, volunteers, school children, citizens, visitors, households
- **places** includes employment hubs, service and infrastructure providers, indoor and outdoor spaces, natural environment, risk locations (e.g. flood-prone areas)
- **adapt** includes activities to enhance mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery from disruptions and uncertainties
- **advance** includes an aim for society to renew following a change – to improve its resilience (e.g. reduce risk and vulnerability, increase preparedness and agency) and improve generally (e.g. community cohesion, sustainability)
- **changing environment** includes effects of, for example, local disruptions, wide-scale disasters, changing climate

But, not a single definition

To reiterate an earlier point, there should not be a single definition of whole-of-society resilience, because each of the terms (i.e. *whole-of-society* and *resilience*) are used in different contexts where the terms mean different things. Also, the user/audience for the definition will change, meaning we need to change the type of language in the definition and the concepts to align to the context. As such, we recognise that while NCSR+ working definition may be appropriate for local resilience partnerships and sector partners, it may be less appropriate of other users/audiences.

For example, local community groups may not warm to the NCSR+ working definition because it does not speak in their language to their priorities. Recognising this, The University of Manchester created an intuitive, community-focused definition of whole-of-society resilience which can be used when communicating with community groups:

capabilities created before, during, and after a disruption that involves everyone who wishes to support those who are in need

Two key aspects underpin this definition:

- **capabilities** can be planned (e.g. collaborations across community groups, businesses, Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise, local government) or spontaneous (e.g. crowd-funding, spontaneous volunteering)
- **who** includes individuals wherever they are, community groups, businesses, and organisations

This definition amplifies those aspects that community groups may have an interest in – without seeking to cover the widest landscape in the way that the NCSR+ definition should to be more useful to NCSR+ partners.

Conclusion

The purpose of the NCSR+ working definition of whole-of-society resilience is to help NCSR+ partners to coalesce around a shared view for the common pursuit that unites the consortium. The purpose of the NCSR+ working definition is to begin to work with the concept and uncover more about what whole-of-society resilience means in order to understand how it can be communicated, developed, and operationalised across society. The working definition helps NCSR+ to explore its nature, opportunities, and challenges and to understand what should be added or removed to make the definition more useful.

We need to work more on whole-of-society resilience before we can define it with confidence – and there should be no single definition as different aspects should be amplified to different groups in society according to their context. For example, a deeper understanding is needed on what whole-of-society resilience means to businesses and organisations, how they might benefit from it, and how they can contribute to the resilience of the wider community. Future TMB articles will examine the local systems within the working definition, such as the link between organisational resilience and the ability of businesses to contribute to an ecosystem of societal resilience.

The Manchester Team are also beginning to think about the inclusion of 'whole-of' in the term. For example, is that aspirational dimension causing the term to be too broad to operationalise at the local level? We are considering whether a more defined focus would be more operational – specifically enabling a clearer focus on those local individuals/households, communities, businesses and organisations that are most at risk, with key vulnerabilities, lower preparedness, and without agency. Perhaps focusing on *local societal resilience* would spotlight local societal issues and local continuity, especially of essential local services, as a way to operationalise societal resilience.

Next month's TMB will explore the concept of co-production; the opportunities, challenges, various modes and techniques, and core considerations when embarking on co-production as collaborative method for developing plans to deliver local societal resilience.