

## Community Engagement and Healing in Times of Disaster

### Retrieving the Wisdom of Those in Need

By Paul Born – Tamarack an Institute for Community Engagement, Canada.

This collection of blogs and annotated list of resources was prepared for a discussion being convened by the [Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars](#)

connected to the internet.

The nature of this research is not to answer the questions posed but to provide context and background to support the reader's own inquiry. The focus is on three broad areas of inquiry: Peaceful Society, Technology and Community Engagement, and Community Participation and Governance in times of disaster. These three areas provide the technical aspect of the inquiry. Further to this is the broader inquiry implied in the title, *Retrieving the Wisdom of Those in Need*, which speaks to the sense that there is an intuitive wisdom, an innate energy and talent that can be accessed through community engagement.

This document has five sections:

- I. Background
- II. Peaceful Society
- III. Technology and Community Engagement
- IV. Community Participation and Governance
- V. Conclusions

## I. BACKGROUND

By engaging people (*retrieving the wisdom of those in need*) and preparing communities for disaster, we can make a huge difference in mitigating the loss of human life during an event, helping to stabilize the region during the critical days after the event, and preparing the human capital needed to rebuild the infrastructure and spirit of an area (*healing*). Thus moderating the longer term effects of a disaster.

### Blog 1

#### 1000 Buses Waiting to Help

– By Paul Born

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roofs of school buses, like rows of yellow dominoes, appeared above the surface. At Tamarack, we looked at this picture in disbelief, asking each other how a thousand school buses could be left in place when so many people had trouble evacuating the city? We wondered who had made the decision to leave them there and not use them in the evacuation?

Our questions prompted us to read the New Orleans Emergency Preparedness Plan for answers, and to see if there were other communities in the world with preparedness plans that might have deployed those buses.

### **The Questions we asked during our inquiry**

Over the next several days, these questions emerged for our team:

- If people were engaged – had a role to play, knew what to do, were part of a team – would this have made a difference? Would those buses have been deployed to help people?
- Who “owned” the Emergency Preparedness Plan? Who’s job was it to see it implemented?
- What preparations were made? Were citizens engaged? What about the bus drivers?
- How prepared are *we*? What’s my emergency preparedness plan?
- How much can government do alone? What do citizens do?
- Why do citizens become criminals?
- What role do factors like demographic makeup of the population/geographic layout play in emergency preparedness?
- Are some countries more effective than others at emergency preparedness?
- What role does formal/informal leadership play?
- Are there models/stories/resources we can share?

### **Blog 3**

#### **Why this really matters**

**– By Paul Born**

An Oxfam report released in 2007 states that the number of weather related disasters have quadrupled in the last 25 years. The number of people affected by disasters has risen by 68 percent, from an average of 174 million a year between 1985 and 1994, to 254 million a year between 1995 and 2004. Many scientists are predicting that such disasters will become ever more prevalent. These natural disasters will be most devastating in larger urban centers (especially in coastal cities) where many people have arrived from rural areas, often due to famine or war, to cities that are ill equipped to welcome them. This mass migration has resulted in millions of people living without

family support in sub standard housing and deep poverty in cities unable to support them. This combination makes them especially vulnerable in times of disaster.

**Further Reading:**

[City's Balance Undone in Many Ways](#): This *New York Times* article describes the events in New Orleans immediately after the hurricane and what went wrong during emergency operations in a city of nearly 500,000 people. At one point in the

**Blog 4**  
**Community in Times of Disaster**  
**– By Paul Born**

It seems to me that places where people know and care for one another will be more resilient than places where this is not true. I suggest that place and connection cause reciprocal action. And I fur.53501101 people

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that promote control and order. Therefore

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life. A belief in the value of collective action and collective altruism are central for both government and citizens.

Questions to Consider:

- How are communities voicing their needs and how are governments and funders listening and responding to what communities are saying, or not?
- What is the proper balance between



3. *Risk Reduction Measures Are Community*

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