Urban Resilience: Normative Frames and Narratives

What is resilience? What are we becoming resilient to? What are the political and environmental conditions that lead to vulnerability and resilience? And, perhaps most importantly, how can we transition our understanding of resilience in a way that allows for us to create a better situation than that which might have existed before a disaster? These are some of the complex questions that were addressed in the session on "Urban Resilience: Normative Frames and Narratives." Peter Rogers of Macquarie University delivered a powerful plenary address to kick off the session. In his remarks, Rogers argued: "we need to successfully operationalize resilience without finding a single model of resiliency." Operating from the premise that there is a single model of resilience is problematic because it embeds rigidity, not flexibility, which is antithetical to what the complexity of resilience is all about. Rogers contends that if we are to embrace a more sophisticated conceptualization of resilience that goes beyond disaster management and remediation, than resilience ought to be about "action, agency, and empowerment." Simin Davoudi of Newcastle University, Sallie Keller of the Virginia Tech, and Barbara Allen of Virginia Tech each carried on some of the themes that Rogers raised. Davoudi pointedly asked, "is my resilience your vulnerability" – a question that goes directly to the heart of the normative implications of resilience. Keller contextualized the need for big data to help achieve resilience for the "next billion people that will join us on the planet," each of whom will require water, shelter, food, education, and healthcare. And Allen rounded out the panel by raising questions about how our conceptions of justice shape the group practices that construct resilience and vulnerability. Overall, the contributors to this panel successfully raised critical questions about the very nature of resilience and how the ideologies behind resilience apply to our contemporary world.