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What's in a word? Photo by Ilan Kelman

Keep resilience language simple!

Ilan Kelman

Many resilience academic paradigms use complex language, even though it is not needed. Here, I provide thoughts and interpretations on some common phrases:

1. The words 'panarchy' and 'consilience' have been used for over 150 years, yet are still not common English vocabulary. They require extensive hand-waving and complex diagrams to convey their core points and meanings.
2. The phrase 'adaptive capacity' does not mean much by itself. Detailed explanation is required.
3. Regarding 'social-ecological systems', 'social' broadly means society, 'ecological' broadly means living organisms interacting with their environment, and 'systems' broadly means a connected collection or combination. For me, a connected collection or combination amongst society, living organisms, and the environment is usually termed 'reality'.

All these phrases are difficult to explain to non-specialists in English. They are also difficult, sometimes impossible, to translate into many other languages and cultures. Moreover, such vocabulary is not particularly needed.

I have yet to meet a taxi driver who did not understand the basic realities conveyed by the terminology above. I have yet to meet a taxi driver who I am certain would understand these specific words and phrases.

To work with people on the ground, I do not and cannot use this vocabulary. When the same concepts and meanings can be conveyed in an understandable manner--not the case for many scientific fields--why is it so important for resilience academics to use the complex versions in academic journals?

Let's avoid, as the joke goes, appearing to be so intelligent only because no one can understand what we are saying.

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