The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover From Disaster
Introduction: The Cities Rise Again and Conclusion: Axioms of Resilience
— Vale and Campanella

Vale and Campanella start their discussion of resilient cities with the observation that throughout history cities have been rebuilt, as a rule, after destruction. Only 42 cities worldwide were abandoned following destruction between 1100 and 1800. While this is interesting, it brings a few questions to mind.

- If almost every city (aside from those unfortunate 42) qualifies as resilient, what does it mean to be a resilient city? In almost every case cities emerge from traumatic events.
- Is resiliency important or even desirable?
- Can a city rebuild and not be resilient?

In their introduction, Vale and Campanella described how they planned to tackle the large subject of resilient cities. The scale of the destruction, human toll, or their presumed cause can be used to categorize urban disasters. They looked at the social, cultural, and political process of the city and how they apply both to the disaster as well as the subsequent recovery. Vale and Campanella also searched for commonalities across cultures in design politics: politics of symbolic succession and politics of institutional processes.

I enjoyed reading the discussion of the recovery process as a window into the power structure of a city after a disaster. The authors pointed out that building has often been tied to attempts to control and manipulate meanings.

In their conclusion, Vale and Campanella list twelve common messages or themes of interest to those caring for the well-being of cities. Rather than listing them all, I will mention the ones that caught my eye. Two of the themes dealt with narratives and their importance in the recovery process and their contentiousness. When working with surveys we see recall bias and selection bias impacting the results. The same can be true when dealing with narrative. The voices of the upper and middle class are heard in post disaster recovery narrative – these are not always those who feel most of the disaster impact.

In the end, I was not convinced that cities have become more resilient over time. I questioned if lost cities like Pompeii are truly resilient due to the fact they have tourism? The key properties of a city are missing. I learned from the summary facets of resiliency in the conclusion, but I still need more convincing that the different levels of resiliency shown by cities are not just a product of the type of disaster and the current political and cultural situation of the city when disaster struck.