Recovery Retrospective: Lessons from the Trenches

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Loma Prieta: A “limited” disaster?

- 63 deaths and $8 billion in damage
- Region largely remained functional
- Disaster in focused areas: Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Oakland, parts of SF, etc.
- Mostly avoided major population centers
Comparison to Kobe Earthquake Disaster

- 8,000 killed
- 45,000 injured
- 300,000 displaced
- Loss of infrastructure function and services lasting months/years
- Disaster at a regional scale
Challenge Moving Forward

- Can we have an earthquake but limit the “disaster” of it?
- Will incremental gains in mitigation be sufficient?
- Are we prepared?
- How can we encourage and fund investments in preparedness and mitigation?
- What do we know about recovery?
1. Hard-hit areas experience recovery as extremely difficult and stressful

- Immediate aftermath:
  - Tough decisions
  - Limited time and information
  - Risk taking: defining acceptable risks
  - Balancing life safety and other priorities such as business resumption
  - Community-wide stress (families, businesses, organizations)
2. Post-disaster time compression pushes people out of their comfort zones

- Politicians: many decisions, no time for “ripening”; loss of control (issues laid bare)
- Bureaucrats: irrelevancy of normal tools and rules; urgency and overload; MIA
- Community: ongoing multiple stresses (post-traumatic stress overlay)
“Every day is like fighting a battle. We have had a weak life since the earthquake.”

Kazutoshi Sazayama, Mayor of Kobe, Sept. 1995

“I still have great pain in my heart.”

--Vice Mayor Ogawa
4. The first years are the hardest years

- Short-term recovery demands action and interim solutions:
  - Housing
  - Infrastructure
  - Business resumption
  - Gearing up/charting a course
  - Assessing realistic options
5. Long term recovery starts immediately

- Emergency response sets the tone
- Assessing the new realities
- Designing a viable planning process
- Adjusting the political course
- Assimilating change
- Attracting investment
- Balancing speed and deliberation
6. The fundamental recovery variable: underlying economic strength

- Santa Cruz success built on:
  - Tourism base
  - Growth of University of California Santa Cruz (enrollment doubling)
  - Regional employment base: Silicon Valley connection
  - Educated, largely affluent population
7. Variations can be substantial between adjacent communities

- Watsonville faced completely different context:
  - Structural shift: loss of agricultural processing industry
  - Low wage agricultural economy
  - High unemployment (17-25%)
  - Strawberries
  - Need for affordable housing and commercial development
8. Recovery strategies: no “one size fits all” solution

- Santa Cruz
  - Downtown focus
  - Use of multiple financial tools
  - Minimize entitlement risk, gain community support via Downtown Recovery Plan
  - Specific Plan

- Watsonville:
  - Job generation, economic development
  - Use of multiple tools
  - Affordable housing to support agriculture
  - Focus on community growth and major new development
  - General Plan
9. Recovery starts as a sprint, then is a marathon of incremental investment

- Turning point at year 5 for both SC and Watsonville
- Watsonville recovery measured in terms of 20 year growth objectives
- New Orleans struggling 4 years after: lacking economic/population base
- Kobe: reinvention and massive government investment
- Recessions/economic cycle
So What? How to anticipate recovery

- Identify vulnerable areas and population: where the hit will be hardest
- Mitigate (priorities!)
- Encourage investment and economic health
- Focus on smart, safe growth and development practices
So What? How to plan for recovery

- Community-based disaster response planning
- Connect with businesses and populations
- Identify useable planning resources
- Consider how to be ready to re-invent the organization (public, private, NGO)
- Post-Earthquake Goal: Good decision-making in real time; collaborate (or fail)
- No guarantees for success
More Information

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- Planning for Post – Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction
  - Robert Doyle, Charles Eadie, Jim Schwab, Richard Smith, Kenneth Topping
  - Published by APA Planning Advisory Service (PAS 483/484), 1998