Vulnerability, Criticality and Resilience in the Face of Climate Change: Insights for Disaster Risk Management from a Visit to the Conceptual Zoo

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A careful review of the meanings of resilience, vulnerability, and their many related and underlying concepts (such as persistence, absorption, recovery, renewal, learning, coping, adjusting, adapting, transformation, capacity, criticality etc.) in the literature on global change reveals a commonly recognized diversity. In fact, many would argue, the state of affairs is one of nagging contradictions, and occasionally surprising convergences, of terms. What appears at first as a veritable zoo of concepts, however, once caged and somewhat tamed, actually yields some interesting insights. This paper focuses on social scientific contributions to the understanding of vulnerability, adaptation and resilience, teases apart the meanings of key ideas, and relates them to human dimensions work on social capital, learning, governance, stakeholder engagement, and decision support. By doing so, it will show how the emerging insights can actually help bridge and bring together the long-separate discourses of disaster risk management and climate change adaptation. Implications for “integration of resilience into policy” are discussed.