

Chapter 2

Key Concepts, Definitions and Perspectives

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Chapter Objectives

- Define the concepts used for disaster and grasp the similarities and differences among them.
- Understand and distinguish the traditions of hazards, disaster, and risk.
- Explain the importance of Comprehensive Emergency Management.
- Know key theoretical perspectives for understanding disaster behavior.
- Understand current political and social definitions of disaster
- Explain the emergence and importance of using a multidisciplinary approach to emergency management.

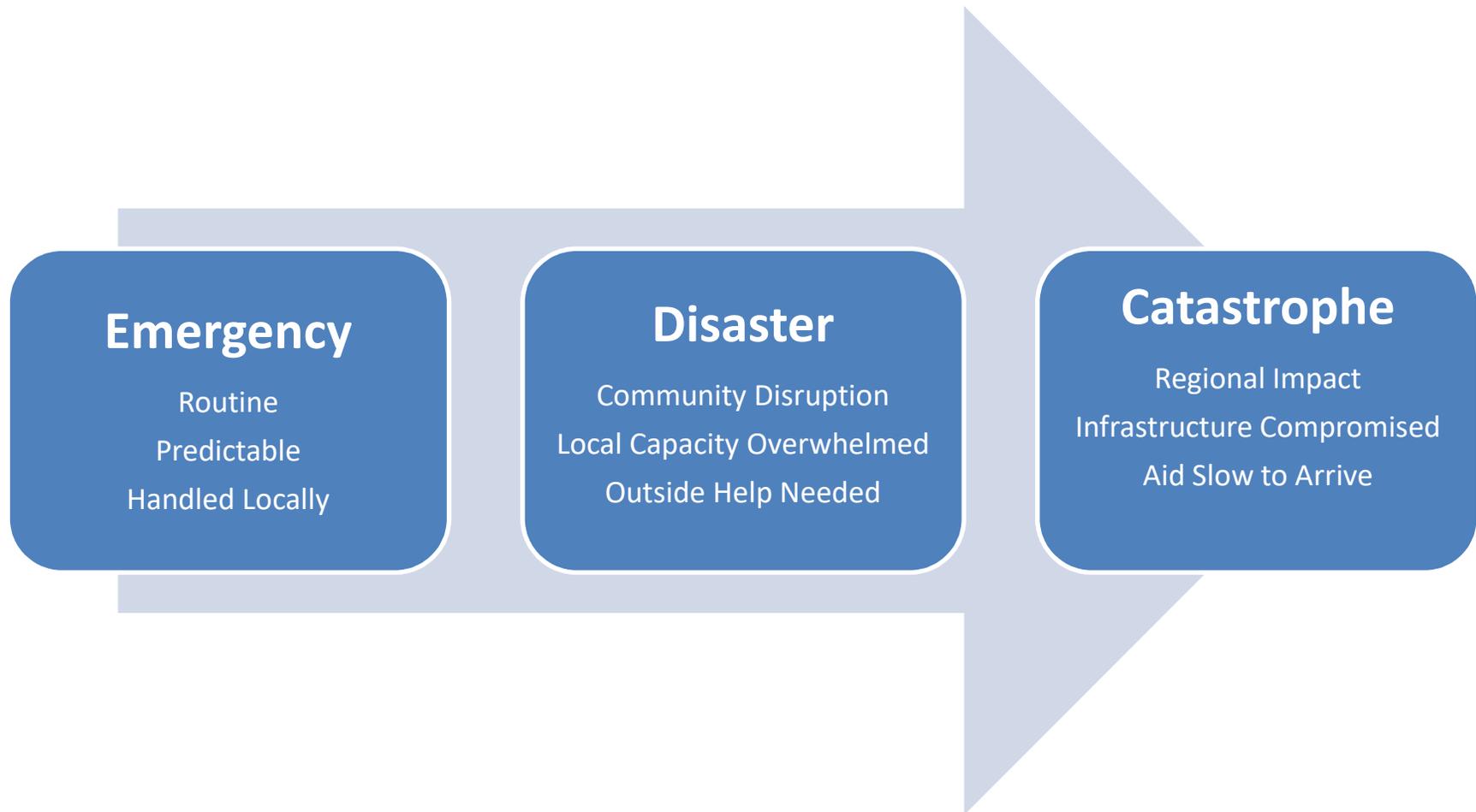
Defining Disasters

- Multiple Definitions Exist
- Textbook Focus – Disasters are social events
- Classic definition for disaster is an: ” ...actual or threatened accidental or uncontrollable events that are concentrated in time and space, in which a society, or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of society undergoes severe danger, and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of the society, or its subdivision, is prevented (Fritz 1961, p. 655).”

Types of Events

- Everyday life / Emergency
 - Predictable day to day events, e.g. housefires
- Disaster
 - Events that disrupt day to day activities within a community
- Catastrophe
 - Events that disrupt day to day activities not only in a community but wide geographic region. Resources become difficult to obtain, and aid beyond political boundaries are necessary

A Continuum of Disaster



National Governors Association Report 1979

- Comprehensive Emergency Management
- The Four Phases of Emergency Management
 - Preparedness – getting ready for a disaster
 - Response – dealing with the impact of a disaster
 - Recovery – getting life back to normal
 - Mitigation – activities to decrease a disaster impact

Comprehensive Emergency Management



National Governors Association Report 1979, cont.

- All Hazards Approach
 - One major planning document
 - More similarities than differences among social dimensions of disaster
 - Use across all four phases of disaster
 - Exceptions dealt with in planning annex
 - Much more efficient for preparedness and planning

The Hazards Tradition

- Geographer Gilbert White
- Initial focus on hazard mitigation efforts
- Multidiscipline approach toward hazards
- Formed Natural Hazards Research and Application Information Center mid-1970's at the University of Colorado-Center
- Tradition continues strong today

Disaster Research Center Tradition

- Charles Fritz, E. L. Quarantelli and Russell R. Dynes – all sociologists
- Initial focus human behavior during war and “response time” activities
- DRC formed 1963 at The Ohio State University
 - Quarantelli, Dynes, Haas
- Tradition Continues today at University of Delaware
 - Studies all phases today
 - Draws upon interdisciplinary work
 - Over 600 field trips to disaster sites

Risk and Risk Perception

- Originated after Three Mile Island nuclear accident in 1979
- Focus on
 - How people see risk (probability of an event taking place)
 - How risk influences people's behavior
- Primarily the work of (social) psychologists
- All perspectives can be used simultaneously to understand events

Broader Perspectives

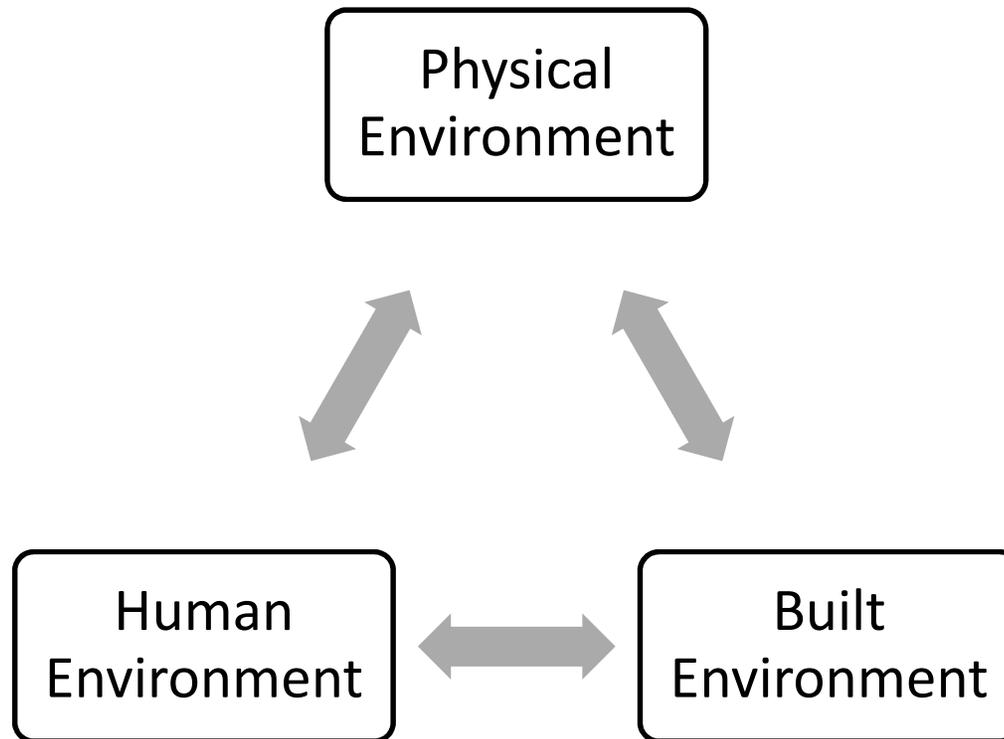
- Emergent Norm
- Systems Theory
- Sociopolitical Ecology Perspective
- All three provide different views to understand hazards, disasters and risk

Emergent Norm

- Foundation for “quick response” research
- Key Characteristics
- New Norms
 - altruistic behavior
 - decrease of crime
- New Structure
 - altruistic behavior
 - decrease of crime
 - And new norms: emergent search and rescue group
- Spontaneous Behavior
 - *Ad hoc* neighborhood search and rescue groups

Systems Theory

- How the built environment, physical environment and people interact together
- Foundation for initial Hazards approach
- Key question: How do people live next to and adjust living next to such events as:
 - Earthquakes
 - Floods
 - Tornadoes



Systems Theory
(Based on Mileti 1999)

Source: Phillips 2009, with permission.

Sociopolitical Ecology Perspective

- Foundation from Systems Theory
- Looks at
 - Competition for resources in a community
 - Patterns of disaster victimization
- Highlights that certain groups more likely to be disaster victims, such as:
 - The poor
 - Ethnic minorities
 - The elderly

Key Issues Today

- Political Dimension
 - Power influences political and governmental definitions of disaster
 - Presidentially Declared disasters have little political influence
- Slow Moving Disasters
 - Events harder to define
 - Challenges many conventional notions of disaster

Key Issues Today, cont.

- Non-Traditional Events
 - Emergency Operating Centers and Professional Managers provide expertise for other events
 - Large crowd gatherings or even riots
 - Space Shuttle Columbia recovery
- Multidisciplinary Perspectives
 - Different social sciences provide key perspectives on individual, group, organizational and political behavior
 - Engineering and hard sciences assist with issues such as building standards, geology and meteorology
 - Emergency managements must know about many different fields for their jobs