

# Resilience Science

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About

Statistics

Article Map

## Admin

Login

## Contributors

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## Journals

Ecology and Society

## News

SciDev.net

## Organizations

Albaeco

MA

Resilience Alliance

## Weblogs

3 quarks daily

Afrigadget

Agricultural Biodiversity Weblog

Conservation Journal Watch

Cultural Landscapes

Dot Earth

Ecosystems and Poverty

ESA blog

Globalisation and the environment

Homunculus

IslandPress Blog

Long Now Foundation Blog

Maribo

My heart's in Accra

Next Billion

Oekologie

PostNormal Times

Statistical Modeling, Causal

Inference, and Social Science

the Crossing

WorldChanging

## resilience workbook

Resilience Workbook Wiki

## Categories

Adaptation

Big Back Loop

Cities

Design

Ecological Economics

Ecological Management

Ecosystem services

Gaming

General

Greenlash

Ideas

Inequality

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

Networks

New Orleans

Reflections

Regime Shifts

Reorganization

Scenarios

Tools

Visualization

Vulnerability

« Holly Gibbs on biofuels and climate change

Economist on fat tails and finance »

## Community-mapping projects for sustainability

Published by Henrik Ernstson on February 16, 2009 in Cities, Scenarios and Visualization.

Tags: civil society, green maps, participatory mapping, stockholm green map.

How to strengthen the voice and knowledge of locals in planning processes? Many have argued that in order to face complexity and uncertainty, decision-making processes need to engage with a diverse set of actors representing different knowledges (see for instance recent article by Carpenter, Folke, Scheffer and Westley 2009, or from planning theory, Jonathan Murdoch, *Post-structuralist Geography*, 2006).

One civil-society response seems to be to engage with an activity historically mostly attached to top-down and centralized control, and start producing your own maps! By merging community activism with cheap Internet mapping techniques, such local responses are growing into an emergent international movement of community map-makers at [Green Map](#)®.



The organization writes that the focus is to "highlight the social, cultural, and sustainable resources of a particular geographic area" and to support "perspective-changing community 'portraits' which act as comprehensive inventories for decision-making and as practical guides for residents and tourists."

Starting in New York in 1992 the organization now claims to collect hundreds of evolving maps across the world. Just recently the initiative reached one of the community organizations here in my own neighbourhood Bagarmossen, Stockholm, to build the "[Stockholm Green Map](#)" (betaversion).



Of course maps have historically been seen as a tool for control, representing the vision of the ruler or the state. And although a critical analysis is still valid when it comes to community-maps, the Green Map® project and similar projects certainly bring out new possibilities for the general public to participate in the production of facts, values, plans and visions about the landscape. Still though, community maps at Green Map seems to be a bias towards the values of sites and points, a bias that might miss social and ecological linkages across the landscape, which is of concern for the generation of ecosystem services and ecological resilience. Another problem seems to be the openness of the map-making process. When zooming into the [Stockholm Green Map](#) one will also find gasoline stations (selling biofuels), restaurants (serving eco-food) and clothing stores. The map becomes a mosaic of quite non-related things vaguely placed under the umbrella of an urban sustainable lifestyle. A coherent narrative is missing that can bring out new perspectives and knowledges of urban realities so as to change spatial planning processes.

Framed as a tool for organized public interests like urban (social) and environmental movements, however, this type of mapping could be valuable in visualizing suppressed values and forsaken spatial realities.

As such it could enrich knowledge(s) needed for building more equitable and resilient cities.



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Tags

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fire food global

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quiggin map NASA nassim

taleb papers resilience

Resilience 2008 sea

ice Stockholm

Stockholm Resilience

Centre Sweden USA

video water World Bank

worldchanging WRI

## Categories

Adaptation (33)

Big Back Loop (31)

Cities (20)

Design (23)

Ecological Economics (41)

Ecological Management (51)

Ecosystem services (44)

Gaming (7)

General (175)

Greenlash (41)

Ideas (103)

Inequality (13)

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

(24)

Networks (20)

New Orleans (14)

Reflections (18)

Regime Shifts (54)

Reorganization (54)

Scenarios (37)

Tools (36)

Visualization (84)

Vulnerability (52)

## Archives

March 2009 (10)

February 2009 (28)

January 2009 (17)

December 2008 (20)

November 2008 (23)

October 2008 (9)

September 2008 (16)

August 2008 (7)

July 2008 (12)

June 2008 (11)

May 2008 (14)

April 2008 (14)

March 2008 (16)

February 2008 (9)

January 2008 (6)

December 2007 (8)

November 2007 (9)

October 2007 (13)

September 2007 (14)

August 2007 (5)

July 2007 (2)

May 2007 (2)

April 2007 (16)

March 2007 (11)