

Reflecting on the Christchurch earthquakes 10 years on – new Resilience Conversations by The Resilience Shift

The Resilience Shift brings resilience experts together to reflect on how learning from Christchurch has helped us to build resilience to future uncertainties.

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, February 22, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- At 12.51 p.m. on Tuesday 22 February 2011, a shallow, 6.3 magnitude quake occurred just 10 kilometres from the centre of Christchurch, New Zealand's second-most populous city, killing 185 people and injuring several thousand. Only five months after a previous more powerful magnitude 7.1 earthquake, this earthquake occurred on a shallow fault line close to the city, so the shaking was particularly destructive. It caused the greatest ground acceleration ever recorded in New Zealand with extensive changes in ground level.



185 empty white chairs: remembering Christchurch earthquake | Bernard Spragg, Flickr

“

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Dr Juliet Mian, Deputy Director, The Resilience Shift

A new podcast series, [Resilience Conversations](#), brings together Dr Juliet Mian, Deputy Director, together with Dr Kristen MacAskill of the University of Cambridge to discuss their reflections at this time of remembrance, and to consider implications for building resilience against future events. [Reflecting on the Christchurch earthquakes 10 years on](#) also includes additional contributions from seismic engineering and resilience experts.

This builds on the previous Resilience Shift [round-table](#) series, that hosted a special session in Christchurch in February 2019 that explored infrastructure resilience

following the experience of recovery. Attendees then represented the City, utilities, key agencies

involved in the recovery and leaders from the community and health sectors. Lessons learned provided many insights particularly on the human factor and people's role as part of the critical infrastructure.

Now, Kristen and Juliet discuss the need for the same kind of community engagement in climate action – and the challenge of how to engage people with decision making when there is no specific emergency motivating them to get involved. Juliet notes that “From



Kristen MacAskill and Juliet Mian - Resilience Conversations

reflecting on Christchurch and other events through our work – such as Cape Town: Learning from Day Zero, Covid – Resilient Leadership initiative – we see that we, as society, need to build up a more compelling message that thinking about the risks we know isn't adequate. We must contemplate uncertainty and ask ourselves ‘What if...?’”.

They were both reminded of a participant at the round-table who noted, “There is universally inadequate recognition of the importance of preparedness”, and that building resilience requires us to value the effort that goes into being prepared for possibilities, rather than just being prepared for the things that might have the highest risk of occurring in the next couple of years.

Is NZ's Covid response shaped by its ‘crisis memory’?

There is a different kind of response when it is physical damage than a health crisis, and for Covid, the health angle has overtaken the civil defence process as has the fact that it must be a nationally-steered response. While New Zealand is recognised globally as having done well in the response to Covid so far, there are some chinks in the armour. Kristen notes that “One key tension highlighted in the discussion is the reliance on being able to create new legal frameworks in response to a major emergency – which is a mechanism New Zealand still relies on, despite its prior experiences. I think it would be impossible for any society to develop a framework that is going to be robust in all cases, but the message here is that we can still do better at foreseeing the potential issues and taking seriously the exposure to risk. In my mind this has pertinent links to the current House of Lords review of risk assessment in the UK.”

The long tail of recovery

Ten years into the recovery, key strategic projects have taken a long time to deliver and the central city still has some struggles to overcome. But when does ‘recovery’ stop? Juliet and Kristen in their discussion highlight that there is a huge legacy of damage to social wellbeing as well as to physical infrastructure. A positive outcome is how the city has redeveloped in a different way, bringing people back into the central zone in ways that weren't possible before.

Research shows that a 10-15 year recovery tail should be expected following a major event so it's not unsurprising that some of the bigger issues or rebuilding projects are not completed.

But "What can we do to go faster?" asks Juliet. "With climate change, more frequent catastrophic events, you can't wait 10 years, there is a cascading effect from repeating events."

The location of Christchurch in New Zealand's South Island makes it under threat from earthquakes as well as by climate change impacts such as sea-level rise, flooding, landslides and wildfires and these risks cannot be easily predicted with any precision.

The Alpine Fault is predicted to have the potential for a Magnitude 8 event (AF8) and this is a recognised hazard that would have widespread impacts. The City of Wellington is also overdue a big earthquake, and all are conscious of the learning from Christchurch.

Our thoughts go out to those in Christchurch who lost loved ones.

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