Profiling Canadian Risk and Hazard Trailblazers: Jack Lindsay
Laurentian University

Public Forum
Fifth Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas
Montreal, Canada.
9 March 2017
A Conversation between
Jack Lindsay and Shona de Jong
Background

Job Title/Role/Organization: Associate Professor and Department Chair, Applied Disaster and Emergency Studies, Brandon University

Academic background: BA (Hons) in Geography, Masters City Planning (both at University of Manitoba), currently a PhD Candidate in Emergency Management at Massey University’s Joint Centre for Disaster Research (Wellington NZ)


Years in DRM: 25 to 30, depending when you start counting
To what do you attribute your interest in disaster risk management (DRM) and when did you first become aware of your interest in this discipline.

I was just starting my MCP degree when the Loma Prieta earthquake damaged so much of San Francisco’s infrastructure and I started my career-long interest in how community planning can and should be focused on making communities safer. I was fortunate to have Dr Neil Britton on my Master’s committee and then to work with him at my first job as planning coordinator with Wellington Emergency Management Office in NZ. Coming into the profession 25 years ago with an academic background rather than the more traditional military or emergency services experience, combined with working with colleagues who shared a similar evidence-based perspective, ensured I have always been a reflective practitioner. My later positions, as the Emergency Manager for Auckland City Council and then a founding member of Manitoba Health’s Office of Disaster Management, allowed me to continue to question what we were doing and why, before addressing how to accomplish our goals. In 2001 I was given the opportunity to begin teaching at Brandon University and joined the ADES faculty full time in 2005. I consider myself to be an emergency management professional in an academic position, the same way a lawyer or nurse teaching at a university is still retains their professional identity.
What do you do on the job and what are your favourite aspects of your work?

I remember giving my first public talk on emergency management to one of our Community Counter Disaster groups. It was a small audience in a volunteer’s living room and I had overhead sheets with a projector. I recall the thrill of seeing people make the connection between their individual and collective decisions and the creation of risk. Since then I have always welcomed opportunities to engage in public awareness and teaching. So the chance to be involved from the very outset in the ADES program has been a wonderful experience.

Being the Department’s chair involves me in the same kind of institutional management I was familiar with from my time with local and Provincial government which I accept as necessary part of the job.

At times I even enjoy the creative opportunities strategic planning and program development can present. More than anything though I enjoy teaching our great ADES students and I am very proud of the wide ranging successes our graduates have achieved in their own professional careers.
What are some vital lessons your role has taught you?

I feel strongly that emergency and continuity management, as a profession and as a practical undertaking, will not realize its full potential until we, as practitioners, release our sense of ownership of community risks. What I mean by that is I’ve seen too many practitioners who cling to their responsibility for emergencies and are reluctant to accept, or outright disbelieve, that others (i.e. other departments, disciplines, jurisdictions etc.) have as much of a role in generating and mitigating hazards and responding and recovering from disasters. Sometimes we seem to embrace the role of professional scapegoat: we’re happy to be responsible for dealing with the messes others create. Emergency and continuity management should be implicit within all management and not treated as an afterthought or disconnected from the management structure. I feel we can learn from the way financial management or corporate communications often operates within organizations. They are seen as being every manager’s responsibility but still retain separate specialist offices to ensure organization-wide consistency etc.

Just as many other occupations have passed through the steps of professionalization, emergency and continuity management is transitioning with new pathways into the career. Newcomers need to see their role as leaders within their organizations, even if many organizations may still treat emergency and continuity management as a minor task. Veterans need to realize that the future of our profession, and the practitioners who undertake the new challenges, may not all be the same as the past. We need to keep open minds and design our profession for the future rather than institutionalizing the past.
Which practice area is beyond the scope of your current work that you would most like to become involved in or what would your ideal DRM related job or project be?

I am currently deeply involved with the connections between community planning and hazards mitigation. I am also enjoying supervising a grad student who is looking at the role of the local community planner in disaster recovery.

I feel pre-event disaster recovery planning, with its natural connections to risk reduction, is what will clearly differentiate emergency and continuity management from the response work of the emergency services.

I believe there is an opportunity, through education and professional development aimed at cross-training between disciplines, to integrate emergency and continuity management into community and organization planning and to achieve our shared goals of sustainability and safety.
Looking ahead 10 years into the future, how will your current job description roles and responsibilities change as a result of radical changes in technology, environment, or the economy? Emergency and continuity management should always incorporate healthy doses of change management and risk management. I always find it ironic when we, as a profession that is supposedly about identifying and planning for future risk, seem to blindsided by an election or other event that we should have seen coming and considered the possible impacts.

I feel our profession has, at times, been the tail chasing the dog when it comes to issues like social media. Instead of looking at decades of knowledge with the question “how is this new ______ (technology, climate, economy etc.) likely to influence our efforts and how should we manage that change?” we have been too reactive. We seem anxious to jump on each bandwagon rather than seeing what path we should steer that wagon down.

A more proactive approach is about putting us in charge of the issue rather than the issue pushing our decisions. We, as individual practitioners and as a collective profession, should be charting our course into the next decade.
www.crhnet.ca

- Current + Past Symposia
- Library
- Resources
- Ongoing research
- National Platform for DRR

Social Media networks
much more...