Deconstructing contemporary survivalism as futures knowledge

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Presentation overview

1. Background
2. Surviving & survivalism
3. Research material & method
4. Results
5. Conclusions
Why survivalism?

Anticipating futures balances between
• **Focus on something particular**
  vs.
• **Necessity to see beyond (complexity)**
  (cf. Kuusi et al 2015 vs. Taleb 2009)

Hypothesis:
*Survivalist approach not confined by external focal limitations*
\[ \rightarrow \text{access to truly alternative futures & answering to complexity} \]

Surviving & survivalism

**Surviving:**
*Remaining alive, enduring, outliving, carrying on, prospering*
(Merriam Webster)

**Survivalism:**
*A philosophical and practical approach to disasters of different scale*
(Lamy 1997)
  • *Being prepared; prepping*
  • *Collecting food & material, improving skills*
  • *Norm-criticality & collapse*
  • *From Cold War & nuclear shelters to lifestyle*
(Kabel & Chmidling 2014; Lamy 1997; Mitchell 2002; Rahm 2013; Vanderbilt 2002)
Research material & method

Research question: How are alternative futures anticipated and prepared for in a contemporary survivalist context?

Qualitative analysis on a collection of media sources:
1) Internet forum discussions at survivalismi.org (5 topics/600 posts)

Causal layered analysis (Sohail Inayatullah)
• Four layers: 1) litany, 2) systemic cause, 3) discourse + 4) metaphor

How are futures anticipated and prepared for?

• From speculative to material:
  • Creating the scenarios: What will happen?
  • Defining the needed skills/material: What needs to be done?
  • Implementation: Acquiring the skills & things to survive

• Between everyday and unexpected:
  • “Our preparedness is very ordinary, we are not expecting the end of the world. [...] Instead, we maintain our own little empire and strive to stay as self-sufficient and invulnerable in infrastructural problems.” (web forum quote)
What causes the need for survivalism?

“I consider that we have a blank canvas. We can define the threats we prepare for by ourselves.”
(Interview quote)

• Global vs. personal level of SHTF (S**t Hits The Fan)
  • Black outs, falling in stairs, mass migrations, global financial crisis, divorce, homelessness...
  • “Now the worst case scenario stems from terrorism, with Brexit on the background.”
  • “When leaving the house, check the keys. And what about the coffeemaker?”
    (Interview quote)

What kinds of ideologies/assumptions are present?

• Deep-ecology, conservatism, do-it-yourself ethos, nationalism...
• Dissidence & norm-criticality:
  • “People seem to have a fundamental inner feeling of safety, which I have never suffered from. The more I read history, the more carefully I look after my food supply.”
    (Web forum quote)
• Individualism/self-reliance vs. collectivism:
  • Surviving from people with people
Conclusions

• Survivalists free to speculate:
  • Coffee makers & climate change, divorce to terrorist attack
  • ”There are like million things during the day you can focus on” (Interview quote)
  ➔ Approach is rhizomatic, anything can be connected to anything
    (Deleuze & Guattari)

• Survivalist futures negotiated between
  1. Communal & individual ➔ Who are surviving?
  2. Universal & personal ➔ Of what one survives from?
  3. Material & speculative ➔ How does one survive?

Thank you!

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References


