

# Deconstructing contemporary survivalism as futures knowledge

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Futures of a Complex World

12.6.2017

## 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*

→ *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)
- 2) Interviews, documentary, a book (in total 6 pieces, 2011–2017)

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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