

// RELATIONAL RESILIENCIES

// examining the pragmatics and politics of a travelling concept

symposium + panel discussion

may 27 2021, 13:00 – 17:00

[register](#) before May 24 2021 to receive the zoom link
[link to google .doc form](#)

// about the symposium

The notion of resilience, originally a descriptive concept in the study of ecosystems, has proven to be a particularly mobile concept. Taken up in fields and practices as diverse as public administration, social work and urban policy, environmental policy and practice, and health care, it has a storied social life, with professionals, practitioners, and policy-makers mobilizing it in institutional as well as broader political agendas. This has also made resilience a highly contested notion. Some commentators are critical of the concept, suggesting that it represents an intensification of existing neoliberal subjectifications and arrangements, responsabilizing individuals or communities to 'bounce back' from preventable social stressors such as unemployment or marginalization. Others however, while recognizing this critique, have sought to tease out possibilities for resistance and agency in the notion of resilience, emphasizing the politically affirmative potential of the metaphor.

However, while such approaches to resilience have helpfully drawn out its political uses (and misuses), in this symposium, we seek to move beyond either celebration or dismissal by examining its operation in practices. Emphasizing the way resilience is imagined, enacted, and relationally constituted in a highly diverse set of practices and fields, this symposium aims to examine empirically how resilience is taken up. What does resilience *do*, and how? And what is made of resilience in turn? In so doing, this symposium conceptualizes the multiple character of resilience, situates different articulations of resilience in specific practices, and highlights the notion's social life in empirical detail.

// for whom

Relational Resiliencies is an interdisciplinary exploration of the way the notion of resilience is currently reshaping institutional, governmental, environmental, as well as professional practices. Bringing together insights from a diversity of fields, including **ecology**, **social work**, **radicalization studies**, **environmental humanities**, **science and technology studies** and **urban studies**, this symposium will be of interest to an interdisciplinary audience of students and academics, as well as professionals working within these sites.

// symposium program

13.00 Welcome

13.15 Session 1

Critical Transitions and Resilience in Nature: Recovering from Forest Wildfires in the Mediterranean - *Ana Vasques*

Arranging for Resilience: Relationships for Preventing Violent Extremism - *William Stephens*

From Subjects to Practices of Resilience: The Politics of Everydayness in Youth Work Sites during Corona Measures - *Lieke Wissink*

14.45 Break

15.00 Session 2

From Resilience to Resourcefulness? Limitations and Possibilities of both Concepts in Socio-Spatial Studies - *Ympkje Albeda & Elise Schillebeeckx*

Governing the Resilient City: Between a Hopeful Progressive Politics and Cruel Optimism - *Sabrina Rahmawan-Huizenga*

Thinking-with and Dissenting-Within Environmental Resilience: A Research Proposal - *Irene van Oorschot*

16.30 Collective reflection

Moderated by *Femke Kaulingfreks*, lector Jeugd en Samenleving Inholland

// about the organizers

Irene van Oorschot is a senior lecturer at Erasmus University College and a fellow at the Erasmus Center for Liberal Arts and Sciences ECLAS. She recently published *The Law Multiple: Judgment and Knowledge in Practice* (Cambridge University Press). As a Marie Curie Skłodowska Fellow she is soon to commence the three-year research project *FosResil*, during which she will ethnographically examine how environmental management professionals foster environmental resilience in practice at the *Life Science and Society Lab* at the KU Leuven.

Lieke Wissink is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Applied Sciences, Inholland, at the lectorate Youth and Society. Her current project, *Relations of resilience in times of crisis among marginalized youth*, is funded by NWO as part of the NWA-route *Towards Resilient Societies*. She also currently teaches at the Amsterdam Institute of Social Sciences, University of Amsterdam.

// abstracts

Critical Transitions and Resilience in Nature: Recovering from Forest Wildfires in the Mediterranean

Ana Vasques

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A critical transition is said to happen if a system shifts to a state that is governed by different relationships between key variables. Transitions can take many shapes, but they are often linked to anthropogenically-driven disturbances. From a resilience perspective, the likelihood of this shift does not only depend on the perturbation, but also on the characteristics of the system. According to the theory of the adaptive cycle of change, systems go through phases of destruction and organization in a cyclic fashion. In the reorganization phase the organisms that are present get the chance to influence the future. If we think about a forest system, forest fires are one of the events that can lead to system's reorganization. When managing for resilience, the regeneration characteristics of the species that are present should be taken into account as they have the potential to determine whether the system will develop into a diverse and highly resilient or into a fire-prone and, over time, degraded state.

Arranging for Resilience: Relationships for Preventing Violent Extremism

William Stephens

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The idea of building resilience to radicalization is increasingly popular, but what does that really mean? In this paper I argue that not all ways of thinking about resilience are equally helpful, with some being quite problematic. However, I suggest the idea of resilience can be helpful when we direct our focus away from individual youth and towards the social environment. In this way we start to think about the local conditions in different areas rather than any generic idea of resilience. We also start to look more carefully at key relationships: those between youth and social institutions such as school, youth workers, police and community groups, and those amongst these social institutions. The question shifts from: how do we build resilience in young people? to: how do we create an environment for resilient responses in the face of potentially polarizing and radicalizing forces?

From Subjects to Practices of Resilience: The Politics of Everydayness in Youth Work Sites during Corona Measures

Lieke Wissink

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As corona measures were introduced, hitting youth hard, those who already found themselves in marginalized positions were confronted with yet new challenges. Based on participatory fieldwork in social work settings designed around undocumented youth in Amsterdam, this research asks what daily life looks like amidst such 'double crisis'. However, being wary to take part in neoliberal dynamics producing a subject that is 'willing to cope with conditions of increasing precarization' (Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay 2016: 8), the focus here is not on youth as a subject of resilience. After all, what do those who are structurally marginalized need to 'bounce back' to? Rather, this research suggests to take practices as a focus point in resilience research that explores responses to crises. What infrastructures nurture such practices, who gathers where and why, and what activities and relations hence become possible to retain meaningful elements of life? Empirically exploring the potential and complexities of conceptualizing practices of resilience, the ritual of coffee making will be unpacked as such.

From Resilience to Resourcefulness? Limitations and Possibilities of both Concepts in Socio-Spatial Studies

Ympkje Albeda & Elise Schillebeeckx

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In line with the Big Society in the UK or the participation society in the Netherlands, a restructuring of socio-spatial policies has led to an increasingly explicit emphasis on support provided by individuals and their families. Residents of neighbourhoods in distress are asked to create caring communities. Thereto, governmental bodies are urging local communities to increase their socio-spatial resilience. Resilience thinking has its roots in ecology, but has in the meantime travelled to a wide range of disciplines, amongst others socio-spatial studies. However, the extension of the concept of resilience outside of its 'birth place' stays contested.

In the academic debate on resilience, MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) propose the concept of *resourcefulness* as an alternative approach. In this presentation we will apply both concepts - resilience and resourcefulness - on the same case, to unravel the limitations and possibilities of each concept. Our case is the local network 'Geestverwanten', which aims to create 'caring neighbourhoods'. In a sense, this network tries to increase the resilience of neighbourhoods to help them cope with mental health vulnerabilities.

Governing the Resilient City: Between a Hopeful Progressive Politics and Cruel Optimism

Sabrina Rahmawan-Huizenga

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Increasingly, resilient cities are taken up as a way to deal with emerging complexity and increasing uncertainty about the future. In our multi-site ethnography, we 'followed resilience around' different urban field sites and practices within the city of Rotterdam, that joined the *one hundred resilient cities* network pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation in 2016. At the same time, we have scrutinized one specific urban district, BoTu, in depth, as it is set out to become the cities first resilient district.

We give insight into the question whether and how resilience might entail a space for creativity and action, thereby enabling a more hopeful progressive politics (Rose and Lentzos 2017) or in contrary entails a form of cruel optimism (Berlant 2011; Bracke 2016), even depoliticizing the future (Kaika 2017). The resilience city as a strategy, we argue, materializes in five governmental techniques that together form a hybrid mix of old and new governing techniques. We analyse them as (1) anticipation, (2) transcending, (3) laboratization, (4) benchmarking and (5) responsabilizing, through which a specific type of resilient futurity unfolds.

Thinking-with and Dissenting-Within Environmental Resilience

Irene van Oorschot

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Environmental management professionals (EMPs) have a crucial role to play in strengthening ecosystems and mitigating the effects of global warming. Given the fundamental unpredictability of climate change-associated events such as droughts or floods, however, EMPs are increasingly asked to 'foster ecosystem resilience', thereby enhancing ecosystems' capacities to bounce back from, or adapt to, unpredictable environmental stressors.

As a recently emerged environmental policy paradigm, however, 'resilience' remains a contested concept.

Commentators within sociology and the environmental humanities suggest that 'fostering resilience' may in fact preclude political and ethical engagement with the (manmade) stressors on environments. In this presentation, however, I seek to outline a conceptual and empirical research agenda that problematizes resilience differently beyond either simple celebration or critique. Thinking with the notion of care as articulated by Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), I aim to tease out possibilities to 'think-with' and 'dissent-within' resilience, and will point in the direction of situated environmental judgments and situated environmental knowledges as valuable empirical directions to explore.