

“Constructing Resilience, Negotiating Vulnerability”

Special Issue for *Social Sciences*

Guest Editors

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Keywords

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During the last decades, perceptions of the future have become more and more alarmistic. The world, it seems, lives in a permanent state of emergency. In media, popular fiction, scientific reports and government policy the world is portrayed as increasingly dangerous and volatile. First, as observed by sociologists of risk from the 1980ies onwards, the widely shared assumption about societal abilities to transform uncertainty into calculable, individually or collectively manageable risks has been fundamentally challenged in recent times. Second, societal discourses about future prospects increasingly turned from valuing indeterminacy as an opportunity to perceiving uncertainty as a threat. Such discomforting sentiments are corroborated by the accounts on the impacts of natural disasters like Hurricane Sandy or socio-technical misjudgements as unveiled by the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima. Somewhere between resignation and the belief to control risks a “new language of preparedness” (Amin 2013) is emerging.

The aim of the special issue is to scrutinize the analytical potential of vulnerability and resilience as keywords in this new language of preparedness and to explore processes of socio-technical construction of resilience across manifold empirical fields. In generic terms, *vulnerability* involves the processes of negotiating the value of entities that are endangered by hazards (Christmann and Ibert 2012). These threats can unfold gradually (‘slow burn’) or abruptly (‘shocks’), they are possibly irreversible, and also might constrain vital functions of the respective entity. The notion *resilience* addresses the ability of the threatened entity to survive possible harms. Resilience can either be achieved by the entity’s robustness to ‘bounce back’ into its former shape or by its flexibility to change its internal

structures and by cultivating a robust state of adaptability (Grabher 1997; Grabher and Stark 1997).

While initially mainly used for the analysis of natural disasters, the notions vulnerability and resilience are increasingly employed to conceptualize societal challenges, organizational change as well as economic or regional crises. However, these debates have remained quite disconnected until today. The notions' extensive use in many different contexts of practical application has additionally blurred their analytical sharpness. Both terms are criticized for being used in a normative, self-evident and essentialist way (Christmann and Ibert 2012). Moreover, the notions' spatial dimensions and implications are all but clear (Pendall et al. 2010). It is, for instance, not well understood why territories differ with respect to their collective assessments of threats or selections of counter-strategies. It is also little explored how spatial categories (like ranges, distances, scales or territories) are integrated in strategies of identifying vulnerability or improving resilience.

Topics and research questions

The special issue aims at offering a cross-disciplinary 'trading zone' about the notions' social scientific analytical potentials and socio-spatial implications. Authors from various disciplines ranging from geography and sociology to economy, political science and planning are invited to submit papers that address one or several of the following interrelated issues:

(1) Vulnerability and Resilience as Cognitive Constructs: *Perceptions*

- What differences exist across regions, historical phases or societal groups with respect to perceived dangers and considered counter-strategies?
- Which blind spots and omissions exist in societal perceptions of threats?
- What are the reasons for different perceptions of threats and what are the consequences of varying perceptions?
- How do different perceptions impact upon the inclination and capacity to take collective action?

(2) Resilience as Dynamic and Systemic Construct: *Adaptability*

- Is there a robust analytical core of the notion of resilience across the various debates?
- Which concepts offer alternatives to a reactive, equilibrium-oriented understanding of resilience?
- What cognitive predispositions, like tolerance for ambiguity, foster the ability to perceive expositions to threats?
- In how far do organizational or systemic features, like diversity, loose coupling, redundancy or rivalry, influence adaptive capacities?

- How can these cognitive predispositions and organizational features be generated and sustained under conditions of austerity?

(3) Resilience as Political Construct: *Governance*

- How do perceptions of threats relate to subsequent counter-strategies?
- How are reactive and proactive capabilities linked to each other?
- How do different scales of intervention interact with each other and what are possible frictions between overlapping scales?
- What are non-intended side effects of resilience strategies and how can they be considered in a more systematic fashion?
- What is the role of socio-technical materiality in governance processes?

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“Editorial”

Gabriela Christmann, IRS Erkner, Germany
 Gernot Grabher, HCU Ham burg, Germany
 Oliver Ibert, IRS Erkner, Germany
 Heiderose Kilper, IRS Erkner, Germany

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Walter W. Powell, Stanford University, USA
 John Padgett, University of Chicago, USA

“Title tbc”

David Stark, Columbia University New York, USA

“Heterarchy: Urban Adaptability to Self-Induced Shocks?”

Gernot Grabher, HCU Hamburg, Germany
 Joachim Thiel, HCU Hamburg, Germany

“Conundrums of Resilience: Diversity and Recovery in Post-Katrina New Orleans”

Kevin Fox Gotham, Tulane University New Orleans, USA
 Richard Campanella, Tulane University New Orleans, USA

“Evolutionary Urban Resilience: Towards Shock-Proof Cities or Redundant Subject”

Jon Coaffee, University of Warwick, UK

“Once you are in you might need to get out: Labor Market Resilience of Musical Actors between Adaptation and Adaptability”

Oliver Ibert, IRS Erkner, Germany
 Suntje Schmidt, IRS Erkner, Germany

“Analysing Policy Discourses: Resilience as the new Sustainability”

Katrina Brown, University of Exeter, UK

“From a ‘Risk Society’ to a ‘Resilient Society’: What is at Stake?”

Florence Rudolf, Insa de Strasbourg, France

“Local Constructions of Vulnerability and Resilience in the Context of Climate Change. A Comparison of Lübeck and Rostock”

Gabriela B. Christmann, IRS Erkner, Germany
Karsten Balgar, Free University Berlin, Germany
Nicole Mahlkow, IRS Erkner, Germany

“Resilience Through Collaborative Storytelling”

Bruce Goldstein, University of Colorado Boulder, USA

“Your resilience is my vulnerability: Institutional voids and ‘rules in use’ in a local water conflict”

Timothy Moss, IRS Erkner, Germany
Frank Sondershaus, IRS Erkner, Germany

„Epilogue“

Ash Amin, University of Cambridge, UK