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Understanding Societal Resilience

The Case for Engaged Scholarship

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Introduction

Since the second half of the 20th century, the concept of resilience has been gaining ground in research, policy, and practice in a wide variety of domains. In the last decade, both scholars and practitioners have increasingly added the lexicon of resilience thinking to their work. Nevertheless, what resilience actually entails remains a highly debated topic. Both scholars and practitioners have grappled with pinpointing what resilience means and defining its conceptual boundaries.

In this chapter, we argue that rather than problematizing the conceptual ambiguity surrounding the concept of resilience, we should embrace its openness and approach resilience through an open research methodology, such as action research and engaged scholarship. Such approaches take the complexity of societal issues to which resilience is being applied as a starting point and thus welcome a pluralist perspective of the problems and realities resilience-based approaches are designed to address.

Our chapter is structured as follows. In the first part we focus on theoretical issues. We address the use of the concept of resilience in social studies and discuss the various criticisms that resilience has received throughout the social sciences. We then argue that accepting the conceptual openness of resilience is necessary because of the complexity of societal concerns to which resilience is being applied. In the second part, we describe engaged scholarship as an opportunity for inclusive societal resilience. In the third part, we focus on the

operationalization of engaged scholarship to understand societal resilience. We briefly introduce the Institute for Societal Resilience (ISR) at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Here, we discuss various examples of ongoing research at ISR to demonstrate the need for bridging academic and practical expertise for a better understanding of resilience. We conclude with a plea for more plural theorization of resilience that should be the conceptual seedlings to grow into further research.

Understanding Societal Resilience

The term *resilience* itself is far from new. Its roots can be traced to the Latin word *resilire*, which signifies something that rebounds or recoils. Resilience has been used by physical scientists to describe and explore the characteristics of a spring, as well as the resistance of materials to external shocks and their ability to spring back to their original shape (Davoudi, 2012). During the 1970s, the term became increasingly common in the fields of resource management, engineering, and ecology. This is especially due to the work of Canadian ecologist Crawford Stanley Holling (1973, 1986), who approached resilience as a way to explore how natural systems would—and could—reach equilibrium after unexpected and acute disturbances, as well as how these systems could transform while returning to equilibrium (Walker & Cooper, 2011).

More recently, resilience thinking has entered the social sciences as a way to better examine the response of individuals, communities, and organizations in the face of challenges (Walker & Cooper, 2011). Much like its scientific origins in the natural and physical sciences, resilience in social studies has two different, but nevertheless connected, perspectives. The first is that of *conservative resilience*, which investigates how social systems reach equilibrium after a shock. The second is referred to as *transformative resilience*, which is more focused on how these systems renew themselves while going back to normal functioning after disturbances (Brown, 2011; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013; Pain & Levine, 2012; Walker & Cooper, 2011). Although these two approaches can be understood as two different streams, they are not airtight categories. As previously explained, the genealogy of resilience is closely related to both adaptive and transformative capacities of a system. It is, then, a concept that takes the well-known adage “Never waste a good crisis” to heart: it examines and exposes how disturbing events can trigger social systems’ adaptive and restructuring functionalities.

This is well illustrated by the work of social psychologists and organizational managers in studies of the adaptation and transformation cycles in human systems (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). By studying cosmology episodes (Orton & O’Grady, 2016)—that is, acute disturbing events, in which “people suddenly and deeply feel that the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system” (Weick, 1993, p. 633)—these disciplines have provided insights on how individuals and organizations experience collapse—“sense-losing”—as well as how they may eventually restructure themselves to create a new normal through sense-making (Weick, 1993).

This focus on acute and unlikely disturbances to individuals and communities has not been circumscribed to social psychology and organizational management. Rather, it has

increasingly gained ground across various domains that aim to understand global vulnerabilities and transnational responses. Climate change has brought about a global sense of uncertainty about the future—ranging from critical infrastructure problems to the prospect of displacement and/or total loss of livelihoods (Maldonado, Shearer, Bronen, Peterson, & Lazrus, 2013; Tanner et al., 2014). Terrorism has heightened an overall sense of insecurity, with pre-emptive security measures and policies being justified on the basis of a constant and uncertain threat of terrorist attacks (Aradau & Munster, 2007; Coaffee & Wood, 2006; De Goede, 2008). Moreover, contemporary armed conflicts have often been studied with regards to their complexity, prolonged duration, and impact beyond the immediate locality where hostilities take place (Anholt, 2017; Commission of the European Communities, 2004; Smith & Fischbacher, 2009). Contemporary humanitarian crises have also been explored in their growing complexity, interconnectedness, and protractedness—characteristics that have increased the acute, unlikely, and prolonged effects of such events. (Anholt, 2017; Commission of the European Communities, 2004; Macrae & Harmer, 2004).

It is within this scenario that the concept of [resilience has rapidly proliferated in the social sciences. Departing from the observations that contemporary social issues are increasingly uncertain, prolonged, complex, and interdependent, resilience has emerged as a transdisciplinary term for investigating cycles of adaptation and transformation of social systems to the challenges of today. For this reason, resilience has, for instance, often been coupled with the notion of a culture of preparedness, whereby individuals and communities are expected to be continuously prepared to absorb and address very unlikely—but not impossible—stresses (Renn & Klinke, 2015; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2007; Walker & Cooper, 2011). Resilience has also been closely linked to emergency response toward more long-term goals and development assistance, as a way to curb the complex and protracted profile of crises today (Anholt, 2017; Ghorashi, de Boer, & ten Holder, 2018; Pain & Levine, 2012). Moreover, the term has also been a common background to proposals for more multilevel and transnational crisis response governance, given the growing interdependence of contemporary global issues (Aradau, 2014; Dunn Cavely, Kaufmann, & Soby Kristensen, 2015; Pugh, Gabay, & Williams, 2013).

In parallel to this growing interdisciplinary expansion within social studies, resilience has also been increasingly met with criticism. In this regard, one of the most common critiques of the concept has been related to its conceptual openness. Despite prominently featuring in mainstream discourses of development, humanitarian aid, economy, and sustainability, the term has been considered as an “under-theorized term of art” (Walker & Cooper, 2011, p. 3). The capacity of being translatable across different disciplines has then been at the expense of more defined boundaries for the term—something that has been considered to render the concept as “evidently common sense, and yet conceptually and programmatically elusive” (Pain & Levine, 2012, p. 3).

For instance, conceptual vagueness in transformative resilience led to the critique that social change is not always positive (Brasset & Vaughan-Williams, 2015; Pain & Levine, 2012). Not only that, the elusive sense of ubiquitous uncertainty and social threat has also been considered to propel forward constant state of exceptionalism and securitization within society (Evans & Reid, 2013; Malcolm, 2013; Manyena & Gordon, 2015). Furthermore, the

lack of preciseness as to how a culture of preparedness is to be achieved has been criticized, especially with regard to how it places the responsibility for insecurity on the shoulders of individuals rather than states (Brasnet & Vaughan-Williams, 2015; Chandler, 2014; Howell, 2015). Moreover, the focus of resilience on the response of individuals and communities to crises—which is not necessarily met with a more concrete definition of roles, responsibilities, and solutions tested in action—has often been criticized for enabling a neoliberal model for addressing contemporary societal problems (Chandler 2013a, 2013b; Chandler & Coaffee, 2017; Duffield, 2012; Joseph, 2013; Rogers, 2013). The concept has also been critiqued for its underestimation of equity and power in human–environmental systems. Matin, Forrester, and Ensor (2018), for example, use the term *equitable resilience* instead. Based on a literature review, they identify four themes essential to understanding equitable resilience in practice: attention to subjectivities, inclusion, cross-scale interactions, and transformation. They formulate a middle-range theory that attends to the social, cultural, and political factors that distribute resilience outcomes. Along similar lines, Pelling and Manuel-Navarrete (2011) use the idea of equitable resilience and propose combining it with a sociological theory of power whereby the reproduction of social systems is based on both structure as well as agents.

In view of all this, it could be argued that the way forward would be to work toward a more precise and defined understanding of resilience. Indeed, this could help shed light on crucial programmatic issues, in an effort to standardize and improve coherence among interventions and policies (Pain & Levine, 2012). However, we submit that the closing-off of the concept is not necessarily the way to solve its conceptual and practical conundrums.

Whereas the previously delineated criticisms by and large converge their considerations toward the lack of preciseness of the term, other essential questions underlie those concerns. The argument that transformative resilience is not always positive raises the questions: *Who* benefits from social change, and *what* are the broader consequences of these transformations? When decentralized and private-based forms of governance and resilience are denounced, this asks for elaboration on the *means* by which resilient-based policies and practices are being carried out. When one underscores that the term may be underestimating equity, this is fundamentally a question of *who* is included in so-called resilient approaches to social issues and whether they benefit at all.

In view of this, it becomes clear that the current concerns are not about the conceptual openness of resilience and that the solution is not to be found in a more definite, closed definition of the term. Rather, it cuts deep into a recurrent theme in interdisciplinary studies—that of the impossibility of a universal and absolute understanding of a topic (Welch, 2011; Klein, 1996). Just as in the genealogy of resilience, interdisciplinarity departs from the realization that world phenomena are too complex to be dealt by one single perspective (Chettiparamb, 2007; Katz, 2001; Klein, 2010). Instead, the complexity of our realities calls for integrative understanding of different approaches—which should not be considered as mutually exclusive, but as complementary to each other. And this is where interdisciplinary studies show that the openness of a term is not necessarily a negative factor. Interdisciplinary researchers have been generally “tolerant of ambiguity” (Welch, 2011, p. 18), as this can allow for a more dynamic kaleidoscopic of methods for co-generating knowledge (Bromme, 2000; Hursh, Haas, & Moore, 1983).

With this in mind, we argue that the current “undefinition” of resilience is not entirely undesirable for social studies. Rather, when one sees such fluidity as a possibility for a more multidimensional approach to the term, such broadness can turn into an opportunity for inclusiveness, from which social sciences will benefit. However, which specific methodology could provide the means to benefit from such conceptual openness?

Engaged Scholarship as an Opportunity

To understand how conceptual openness can be used as an advantage for researching societal resilience, the notion of engaged scholarship (or action research) can be a useful tool. Engaged scholarship builds upon the idea that social problems are increasingly complex and that understanding and addressing them requires joint efforts between different stakeholders, including researchers, practitioners, citizens, and policymakers (Van de Ven, 2007). This approach takes into consideration that learning and producing knowledge can never be absolute, all-encompassing or universal and, consequently calls for engagement between various perspectives to provide a more comprehensive overview of certain issues. The importance of this engagement is the symbiotic relationship between academic and practical expertise: people and places outside the campus bring academia toward larger, more humane ends, while academics bring a set of organizational, methodological, and structural tools to better organize and advance scientific knowledge regarding the topic at hand (McNiff, 2013; Van de Ven, 2007).

The chaotic outlook of the conceptual openness of social resilience reverberates a scenery that is familiar for action researchers. Departing from the realization of the high complexity (i.e., multisystemic nature) of contemporary social problems, action researchers acknowledge the messy social reality whose complexity goes beyond conventional theoretical and disciplinary models (McNiff, 2013). Because of this, action research propels forward the idea of embracing this chaos and seeing it as an opportunity to break with the conventional mold and seek new solutions by going for a cogenerated knowledge across and beyond academic insights (Coghlan, 2011).

Engaged scholarship is also closely tied to the idea of research being transformative. Practical knowledge is historically rooted in a scholarship from the margins, which sought to break from the paradigms of neutrality and detachment of mainstream positivist research and engage academia with social change (Coghlan, 2011). Engaged scholars acknowledge that contrary to positivist models the production of knowledge is never detached from the social context from which it is created. Rather, it is socially constructed—and aligns with an agenda that seeks to challenge unjust and undemocratic systems. This does not make it less scientific. Engaged scholarship, or action research, has a particular focus in producing insights that can be applied to societal issues, which makes the collaboration with the most at-risk stakeholders crucial for such an aim (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003). This collaboration allows not only for co-generating knowledge with relevance tested in action, but also to stimulate a comprehensive and critical research approach, which is sensitive and responsive to power imbalances (McNiff, 2013). In other words, collaboration between

academia and practice creates scientific understanding of the complex dynamics of the social challenges we face today and offers concrete insights on how to improve policies, methodologies, and interventions for specific problems (Bekkers, 2016).

With this in mind, we argue that resilience cannot be grasped through a fully closed definition. Instead, resilience requires open research methodologies that includes the different perspectives of multiple stakeholders, as well as practical expertise. Therefore, instead of seeing engaged scholarship as a means to understand resilience as an open and ambiguous concept, it is the complexity of the phenomena that *requires* both this openness of the concept as well as engaged scholarship.

How would this engaged scholarship translate in studies on societal resilience? How could this methodology be used to study and apply resilience to societal issues? To illustrate how this has been done in practice, the next section presents various cases in which engaged scholarship is used to study forms of societal resilience in various projects of the Institute for Societal Resilience at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Operationalizing Engaged Scholarship

Established in 2015, the ISR is embedded within the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. ISR aims at identifying what makes citizens, institutions, and governance systems resilient in dealing with complex social issues—such as increased social inequality, tensions between ethnic and religious communities, new forms of (cyber) crime, and challenges to systems of care and welfare. Examples of ISR research projects follow. These include (a) transformations in urban education, (b) authoritative alliances for resilient identities, and (c) resilient responses to refugee reception.

Transformations in Urban Education

Research was conducted at an MBO school in Amsterdam (secondary vocational education) as part of a larger research project on the professionalization of education. This study focused on the student perspective on code switching and self-efficacy and connected the student perspective with that of the teachers. Central is the idea that for students to be successful and climb the school-ladder, students need to have self-efficacy and in class to switch in their behavior to adhere to certain norms or codes (e.g. to arrive in time, be attentive in class and participate actively). The project aimed to better understand students' code-switching behavior and to understand how students themselves view their needs to climb the school ladder and to compare these needs with what teachers can offer.

The project consisted of three tracks. In the first track, two researchers studied code-switching behavior through participatory observation in class settings in school as well as outside school during students' internships. In the second track, a researcher conducted semistructured interviews with students about their behavior, attitudes, motivations, and experiences in class and how these are influenced by the teacher's practices. The last track includes the teachers' perspectives, through analysis of peer review conversations between two teachers and a trainer that were part of the professionalization program.

The findings show a bright contrast between the students' behavior during internships (in which students rather smoothly adopt the professional codes) and in school, where students often refrain from switching to school codes (they come in late, shout, speak Arabic or other non-Dutch languages with fellow students, watch movies on their laptop or visit web shops on their phones during class). That they relatively smoothly adopt the professional codes during internships shifts the focus from the student's individual code-switching ability to the role of the institutional context, which we consider as one of the fundamental factors of societal resilience. It appears that in school students place the responsibility for the norms to be enforced with the teacher. In affirmation of the developed transformative teaching model, for students to experience self-efficacy, they find it important that a normative framework is effectuated while at the same time teachers should support them, with humanity and respect. Although the teachers' conversations show that most teachers do recognize these conditions, the conversations also show that these conditions are not easy to establish. They are often perceived as contrary, particularly in the interaction with "difficult" groups of students. Clearly, also teachers often lack self-efficacy.

In analogy with Ervin Goffman's metaphor of the frontstage and backstage, these results call for a strengthening of the area behind the scenes, between the stage where the primary performance takes place (the classroom or the internship) and the dressing room where informal codes dominate (teachers' lounge or the peer group). This is where teachers align their normative frameworks and where they coach and support each other. This is where the collective efficacy of the team forms, which is inductive for the self-efficacy of individual teachers (resilience). Also, students can benefit from such middle area. This area is where students are prepared—and prepare themselves in mutual interaction—for the professional stage. This where they play active roles in shaping their own roles, personality, and education and where they can unwind from the pressures they feel in their internships and life outside school (which for many students is no sinecure). Instead of informality, this area is characterized by constructive learning codes and attitudes. The strengthening of these middle areas behind the scenes calls for an engaged and actively involved school management.

The results showed three positive outcomes. First, the relationship, trust, and shared interest became a common issue and ensured the involvement of school management, which greatly facilitated access to the school. Second, the engagement of the school management led to automatic valorization and use of the gained knowledge.

Finally, the recommendations directly feed into the intervention line, strengthening the professionalization projects at the same school (and other schools). In this way, through the engaged scholarship approach, the study contributes to the strengthening of societal resilience in the Dutch education system.

The findings illustrate the advantages of an open approach, which is multidisciplinary, with the close involvement of practical stakeholders. Through the combination of sociological perspectives with didactical and psychological perspectives, concepts, and models, the academic framework capitalizes on the complementary nature of various disciplines. The actor-centered perspective was crucial. It led us to reveal unforeseen mechanisms, and hence increased the understanding of how schools can increase experiences of self-efficacy (of students, teachers and teams) and stimulate a fertile learning environment (for both students

and teachers). The project showed how schools can strengthen societal resilience. (El Hadioui et al., 2019).

Crisis Governance or Governance Crisis? Resilient Responses to Refugee Reception

In 2015, many Dutch municipalities faced the sudden challenge of needing to receive and accommodate high numbers of refugees in their communities. During that year, the situation became tense, and various protests, chants, threats and other harsh expressions of resistance against arrival of refugees emerged. The arrival of refugees was framed in terms of “the refugee crisis.” These tensions—closely covered by (social) media—gave the impression that the Netherlands was responding to the refugees’ arrival in resentful ways. However, most of the municipalities did not witness such reactions. The responses in municipalities varied widely, in content, shape, and fierceness. While in some municipalities the arrival of refugees caused tensions and evoked harsh reactions, in other municipalities refugee arrivals did not evoke any significant reaction. In reaction, municipal executives responded differently to the issue of refugee arrival in their municipalities. What explained these various responses to the “refugee crisis”? The antagonistic reactions that occurred in some places, and especially the ferocity of them, evoked the desire to examine the differences between the municipalities. What could we learn from these diversities? The “refugee crisis” provided a window of opportunity to research the decision-making process and communication strategies on the local level in the (national) context of societal tensions around developments that many citizens perceived as a threat.

The research project had a mixed-method design, using both big data (quantitative analyses of sentiments in media coverage) and small data (qualitative interviews with municipal officials and administrators, focus groups and a public research session). Around 500,000 messages in traditional media, over 5 million tweets, and more than 800,000 messages on public Facebook pages were scraped in the period from July 2015 until July 2016. In November 2016, during a public research session local and national officials, administrators, nongovernmental organizations, and researchers reflected on the crises—supported by the data the research project presented.

The quantitative analysis of media coverage showed a strong increase in online messages, posts and reactions from August 2015 onward. This increase in (social) media attention created the perception the whole country was in turmoil although not all municipalities were involved—by far. In fact, media coverage on the refugee crises was strongly influenced by events in only a few municipalities. In only 7 of 391 total municipalities, more than 20 messages per 100 inhabitants were sent—predominantly expressing negative sentiments.

Based on the qualitative data gathered, we found that already existing networks among the municipal population played an important role in the articulation of “positive” versus “negative” voices with regard to arrival of refugees. This can be framed as a form of societal resilience with respect to the reception of refugees. Also, the type of reactions corresponded with respectively consensus or division among municipal executives. Interaction with the administrative level seemed to reinforce the dominant response of residents in the municipalities involved; the more division among municipal executives, the more negatively citizens

seemed to respond. By applying this multisystemic approach to the arrival of refugees, three decision-making paths could be distinguished. First, in municipalities with a participatory tradition involving their citizens in decision-making and important developments, inhabitants predominantly showed more confidence in the local authorities and reactions were less antagonistic. In contrast, in municipalities with a less participative style of governance and where citizens were less involved in local decision-making and decisions on refugee reception were taken more top-down, citizens showed less confidence in their local government and were less satisfied with the decisions. In some of these top-down municipalities the responses of local citizen networks were extremely antagonistic. These networks took their chance to (finally) make themselves heard, unleashing years of accumulated dissatisfaction.

We found that, against the dominant media-driven public perception, and despite some serious disruptive incidents, Dutch society in general responded in a rather resilient manner to the arrival of relatively large numbers refugees. Can we conclude that the municipal decision-making process, which in many municipalities prevented escalations, would have prevented escalations in the other municipalities and would result in a similar smoothness in future crises? The results suggest that united and decisive action by local government can make a positive difference, but not in all cases. For example, unity and decisiveness can also be perceived and interpreted as a top-down imposition of (unpopular) measures. In the case of the 2015 refugee crisis, some of the municipalities could not prevent escalations. They seemed to be curbed by the decision-making processes that shaped over decennia.

The project offered participating municipalities and professionals practical lessons for resilient governance. During the public research session, stakeholders shared recommendations: (a) “invest in sustainable interactive forms of public consultation,” (b) develop mechanisms to manage consequences of “unwelcome decisions,” and (c) organize conditions for what in the project is called as “democracy from below.” In the long term, however, it is questionable whether these recommendations are sufficient. The role of the governance dimension in such crisis-like situations should be investigated more thoroughly. Path dependencies can be bent and/or broken during crises. The 2015 refugee crisis is a case par excellence in this regard. Possible dormant dissatisfaction with local governance styles might surface in contexts where decision-making processes ran smoothly so far. Meaningful lessons might have been learned in contexts that apparently seemed problematic and—in retrospect—all commotion proved to be quite functional. It’s important to continue researching the (social, administrative, and institutional) implications of the decision-making period in 2015, thus allowing us to determine which administrative practices are also resilient in the long term.

Authoritative Alliances for Resilient Identities

In 2016, during the European Union Council of Government leader’s chairmanship by the Netherlands, a wave of violent extremism was washing over European soil caused by Daesh and the involvement of our countries in the Iraq–Syrian civil war. In this climate of civil and political panic over a seemingly uncontrollable threat, policymakers were demanding more legal measures, expansion of intelligence, and instrumental breach of civil rights if necessary. In this same climate, the Dutch minister and his team responsible for youth affairs decided to change course and explore a pedagogical approach to understanding and tackling

violent radicalization. In the policy brief, the topic of extremism, generally approached from a legalistic–criminological point of view, was looked at from an unusual angle: the challenge of education in youth centers and the role of parents and police in building resilient identities. This opening of minds led to the current research project.

In earlier research, radicalization was often understood as a coping reaction to troubled individual, social, and political identity development. As the need for agency and radicality is characteristic of youth in socially and culturally deprived situations, programs directed at deradicalization of youth deserve more scrutiny. Sieckelinck introduced the term *reradicalization* as a strategy against extremism. Therefore, the current research project (2017–2020) is titled “Social Strategies for Resilient Identities: Authoritative Alliances as Practices of Re-Radicalization.” In this research project, the schools’, youth works’, and religious institutions’ possibilities and limits of reacting from an educative and empowering approach against (possible) radicalization is explored. Is there an alternative to the authorities’ threat with force in the early stage of interest or engagement?

By taking a so-called reradicalizing approach (Sieckelinck, Kaulingfreks, & De Winter 2015), the project intends to find out what happens when young people start to identify themselves with a particular group, or movement. Then the conversation is opened up, instead of closed down.

Where strategies of surveillance—silencing antiliberal democratic voices—are generally considered effective short-term instruments of repression against political and religious extremism, its longer-term effect is unclear. Promoting resilience among marginalized youth is generally seen as an effective preventative strategy on the longer term, forming a response to radicalization and group polarization as well. Although its fitnesses are largely unexamined, building, boosting, and bolstering resilience is at the order of the day in policy papers targeting the social domain. All over the world, professionals are expected to build resilience against extremism, but they often feel lonely and incapable of doing this. Meanwhile, young citizens from the margins are overwhelmingly negative about their future and ask for guidance to help leading their lives and coping with their problems but—due to the moral unavailability of adults—risk finding credible moral authority in anti-social or extremist milieus.

As stated in a recent USAID report that explores the merits of a process akin to reradicalization, what we need is empowerment informed by a deep understanding of what makes radicalization so total, so quick, and so potent a path for creating transformative personal and social change.¹ Hence, the importance of creating *places of resilience* where the desire for agency and radicality is nourished, not frustrated.

Operationally, this research project is divided into three studies:

- A first study examines the impact of preventing violent extremism policies toward building resilience. It is based on document analysis and nonexperimental qualitative field work. It consists of in-depth interviews (Phase 1), Q-sorting (Phase 2), and focus groups with adult respondents in a professional role (individually and in group, online and offline).
- A second study has a descriptive and a normative leg. First, it is an examination of 15 formal and nonformal contexts of upbringing and civic education. It draws mainly on qualitative, nonexperimental fieldwork. Second, it helps practices to building resilience in

co-creation with these local partners within an action-research design. This study makes use of in-depth interviews with adult professionals (Phase 1), observations of group interactions between professionals and youth of 15 to 20 years old (Phase 2) and intergenerational focus groups (Phase 3).

- A third study examines the role for police in building resilient identities. It consists of ethnographical classroom observations (nonexperimental) of group interactions between police officers and children (10–14 years old) in the context of civic education.

Although the project, compared to standard research project, is complex in design, ethics, and operation, it benefits from an open multidisciplinary approach, with the close involvement of practical stakeholders.

The following findings recur in the field reports: authoritative alliances, it seems, lead to building resilient identities if one succeeds in setting up shared authoritative practices where youth feel at home and can air their grievances and where pedagogical confrontations are organized. Much less results are expected in contexts where these confrontations are avoided or brought to escalation. Authoritative alliances, based on this specific form of authority, increase trust and a sense of responsibility, two cornerstones of resilient identity development. (Sieckelink, 2018; Sieckelink, Sikkens, Kotnis, van San, & de Winter, 2017).

Conclusion

In this chapter we sketched out the current understandings of societal resilience and/or resilience in social sciences. At present, the term does not have a generally agreed-upon definition, and scholars have noted the potential dangers of its conceptual ambiguity.

This chapter argues that at present the openness of the concept of societal resilience should be considered crucial to the rightful use of resilience. As we have shown, its conceptual openness allows for taking into account societal complexities and variations in the forms of resilience studied and for the inclusion of multiple perspectives. Engaged scholarship is a productive way of doing so. As the ISR projects illustrate, engaged scholarship approaches have the potential to bridge academic with practical (societal) expertise. Academic knowledge provides the scientific rigor to comprehend and identify the notions shares among scholars of what societal resilience fundamentally consists of. Practical knowledge, in turn, adds the necessary detail and differentiation required to address complex societal issues. The symbiotic relationship that characterizes engaged scholarship approaches allows for developing balanced academically sound understandings in combination with a factual strengthening of societal resilience in various forms, in various contexts, for various stakeholders.

Key Messages

1. Resilience has been gaining ground in research, policy, and practice in a wide variety of domains; both scholars and practitioners have increasingly added the lexicon of resilience thinking to their work.

2. What resilience actually entails remains a highly debated topic. In particular, both scholars and practitioners have grappled with pinpointing what resilience means and defining its conceptual boundaries.
3. Rather than problematizing the conceptual ambiguity surrounding the concept of resilience we should embrace its openness and approach resilience through an open research methodology, such as action research and engaged scholarship.

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Note

1. According to the report, radicalization can be seen as a destructive form of empowerment when it leads to violence. When taken alone, then, and decoupled from violence, radicalization is little more than a process of empowerment hyperfocused on specific ideological or social convictions. There are individual psychological processes that affect empowerment, and these include the need for agency, personal identity, purpose, justice, and control. These same needs that, when addressed, lead to what we call “empowerment,” can also lead to acts of abuse or violence, such as terrorism.

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