

Introduction: Resilience in Context

Resilience is a word that feels like it should have been around for a long time, but in fact it has only entered into contemporary political discourse very recently. It has made up for lost time by spreading rapidly through a whole range of policy areas from development policy to counter-terrorism strategy. Indeed the proliferation of the term has been so rapid that, like the revolutions in communications and digital technology, we are left with a sense of being overwhelmed and wondering how we managed before the idea emerged. It seems as if before we started using the term, we were left exposed to such shocks and traumas as terrorist attacks, economic crises, civil wars, droughts, floods, hurricanes and earthquakes, cyber threats, power blackouts and other infrastructure failures. A major purpose of this book, therefore, is to take stock and to step back. It seeks to raise questions about the rise of resilience and to query both whether the idea is useful, and also whether the spread of the idea really is as widespread or significant as it at first seems. There are two principal ways in which this can be done: by looking at the influence of resilience across a range of different policy areas, and by looking at whether this influence is evenly spread across a number of different countries.

If this were a book on a major philosophical issue we might expect a lengthy discussion of the meaning of the idea as well as a likely refusal to attempt to provide a simple definition for a very complex notion. In the case of resilience, this book, while opening with a chapter on the meaning of the term, sees more to be learned from its use than from engaging in a thorough philosophical investigation. Surveys of the literature (Manyena 2006; Martin-Breen and Anderies 2011; emBRACE 2012; Bourbeau 2015) commonly note the absence of any agreed concept of resilience, or even a general agreement of approach, either among academics or policy makers. The emphasis of this book is, therefore, on exploring varieties of understanding and differences

in approach. It does this by shifting attention to the contexts within which resilience operates.

While possible contexts are wide and varied, this book is concerned with the social, political and international contexts of resilience. In particular, the argument is concerned with resilience as it relates to societies and people and the particular ways in which these are managed, regulated and governed. Notwithstanding the problems of definition, resilience might be understood in its simplest sense as the ability of societies and people to manage, withstand and recover from shocks. This understanding – based on how the majority of policy papers and strategy documents use the term¹ – is focused on the socio-political aspects of resilience or what might be termed societal resilience. The following chapters will provide a comparative analysis of socio-political contexts and will consider varieties of resilience in the shifting contexts of different societies and different forms of societal consciousness and awareness. A societal approach points to how the practices of resilience vary according to their different social, political and cultural environments, as well as various political traditions and historical legacies. The more-political dynamics of societal resilience are highlighted through a focus on the processes and mechanisms of governance.

Conceptual Framework

Chapter 1 will briefly trace some of the origins of the idea of resilience, starting with influential ecology literature and examining how this relates to particular understandings of society. These understandings are, in turn, related to certain ontological assumptions that are sometimes implicit, but often explicit, in arguments about societal resilience, its wider context and the nature of various key actors and institutions. Ecology literature introduces the idea of complex systems that are in constant motion with no one stable state, and subject to multiple externally imposed crises and shocks (Holling 1973). Resilience comes to refer to the ability to ‘bounce back’, to withstand, or to evolve and adapt to a constantly changing equilibrium. These arguments relate to major trends in contemporary social and political discourse, for example, ideas about social and system complexity, non-linear causality,

¹ E.g., DFID 2011a: 7, European Commission 2012b: 5.

emergent states, relationality, social embeddedness, reflexivity and adaptability (see Chandler 2014). Resilience is also associated with wider philosophical notions such as post-humanism, non-cognitive functioning and emergent complexity.

The aim here is not to write a philosophical book that closely interrogates these assumptions, but to look at how these work in relation to strategies of governance insofar as they constitute something of a discursive shift in how we understand the world, our societies, the nature of the social, and the role of human action and consequently the means of governing our behaviour and environment. Our concern, thus, shifts away from a philosophical account of deeper human or social conditions to a more strategic-focused argument about how these ideas support certain forms of behaviour, preparing us for the subsequent chapters which examine the influence resilience and its associated notions have on a range of policy areas and across different countries and organisations. Hence the argument is sceptical of the claim that resilience, in itself, represents a fundamental shift in late-modern, post-modern or post-liberal thinking (see Chandler 2014; Evans and Reid 2014) and instead is concentrated on the way that resilience-thinking accompanies and supports various practices, tactics, strategies and interventions.

Key to the conceptual framework for understanding resilience, and why this book fits within the field of politics and international relations, is the claim that *resilience derives its meaningful character from its relation to governance strategies that have various populations as their target*. For this reason, the conceptual framework is organised around the concept of governmentality. This approach, as will be outlined in the next section, argues that contemporary governance relates to the mechanisms for the management of populations, a concern for their health and welfare and an attempt to direct their conduct from a distance (Foucault 2007: 108). What is distinctively liberal about governmentality is the attempt to appeal to the freedom of the governed. Liberal governmentality seeks to limit direct forms of governance by appealing to the governed to govern themselves (Foucault 2008: 319). This becomes embedded in a set of normative assumptions about individual conduct and responsible behaviour. Applying this to a study of resilience means looking at how a resilience strategy works ‘from a distance’ (Miller and Rose 1990: 9) by appealing to responsible behaviour and in particular, placing emphasis on strategies of learning,

awareness and adaptability. In terms of governance, it is about shifting responsibility away from states and institutions and on to populations and communities. Governmentality draws attention to the way resilience goes beyond a reactive approach that teaches us how to ‘bounce back’ but is, in O’Malley’s (2010) view, a new way of creating adaptable subjects capable of responding to, and even taking advantage of, situations of radical uncertainty.

For now, the point to emphasise is that the emergence of resilience in policy discourse has to be understood as related to, and dependent on, strategies of governance that seek to shape human conduct in particular ways. Indeed, it will be argued that resilience is derivative of these governance approaches. The book refrains from calling resilience a concept in its own right and instead sees it as a particularly useful *tool of governance*. Its usefulness to policy makers derives from its ability to play a certain role, particularly in its societal resilience guise, in managing or governing populations. As this book progresses, the case will be made for *why* resilience is being used by policy makers and *how* it works in particular policy contexts. However, the scope of resilience must be somewhat wider than this in order to justify extensive examination. Hence the starting focus on some key ontological and epistemological assumptions that render resilience a significant contemporary idea. While a strong argument of the book is that resilience fits with contemporary forms of governance (or governmentality), it is also the case that resilience offers a slightly different way of thinking about important questions relating to the nature of the social, the human, our context and our capacities, that challenges some of the essential assumptions of classical liberalism while enhancing the technologies and techniques of governance.

Comparative Approach

An effort will be made to determine whether resilience has more influence in some fields than others and, perhaps more significantly, whether it has greater impact in certain cultures and societies than others. It will soon become clear that resilience fits very well with an Anglo-Saxon way of thinking and that it is more prominent in these cultures or policy spheres. An important puzzle for this book is why it does not enjoy quite the same success in different European contexts. This unevenness of influence also has an impact of the way the

argument is presented, since in studying the uptake of resilience we are not comparing like with like. By comparative approach, therefore, we do not mean the use of a ‘scientific method’ to discover an empirical relationship between variables (Lijphart 1971: 683), nor do we engage in a full cross-societal institutional comparison. If resilience is far less prominent in French policy making, then there is little point writing a full chapter on French resilience-thinking. The United Kingdom is therefore taken as the baseline by which to compare the influence of resilience in other countries as the United Kingdom is the country where resilience discourse is most-developed and most-influential. In each of the policy fields, the UK position will be outlined in most detail, with other countries brought in by way of comparison and contrast. This focus reflects the reality of the situation as described above, rather than any intended UK-centric bias on the part of the author. It is hoped that such a focus is nevertheless illuminating of other countries’ approaches as well as illustrative of the leading position the United Kingdom has in resilience thinking.²

The method of analysis is to examine the most important policy documents produced by national governments and leading departments. Resilience is clearly a diverse notion to be found in an array of non-governmental domains. The book does not try to cover this wide area of things, like community-based projects or private initiatives. Instead, it concentrates on the idea of resilience as governance and looks at the leading policy documents that support this view. It is recognised that this contradicts those governmentality approaches that would start from the bottom up and look at the emergence of resilience among a set of everyday micro practices. Instead, it takes the view that such practices – even if they ‘come into play at the lowest levels’ – acquire the most influence when they are ‘displaced, extended and modified’ and how they are ‘invested or annexed’ by powers at the macro level (Foucault 2004: 30–1). The study therefore seeks to trace dominant trends rather than trying to cover every instance of the idea’s presence. These trends are discernible from the main policy

² Of course it can still be argued that the focus of the book is Eurocentric if not UK-centric. This is a reasonable point since, in keeping with much Foucauldian scholarship, the discussion is limited to questions of governance and power within Western countries. An account of non-Western forms of resilience is of course of pressing concern, but this study at least shows that the idea of a coherent Western or European perspective is itself something of a myth.

documents, even if this does not indicate the possible differences and difficulties in translating these into action on the ground. The focus is more on revealing the extent to which resilience is shaping, or is shaped, by policy discourse and as such, a focus on the main documents is sufficient for such a purpose. The book's analysis is informed by critical approaches to discourse (Fairclough 2003), but is not an exercise in detailed textual analysis. It is enough to determine the dominant trends and influences.

This book seeks to address two key questions about resilience in this policy context. The first is whether resilience means the same thing and is playing the same role across different policy domains. The second is whether resilience is understood in the same way and is used for similar purposes in the policy making of the different countries studied. For example, resilience is often seen as a security concept because of its close relationship to civil-defence strategies. But, is the way the concept works in this area similar to the way it works in development policy? When resilience is applied to natural disaster management, does it retain the same security focus? And is the way that resilience is understood in French security strategy the same as in UK security strategy? Such questions raise the issue of the relationship between meaning and context. To examine context is to look at dominant culture, discourse, political traditions, institutional arrangements, legal frameworks and historical path dependencies, among others.

The brief argument above suggests that the answer to these questions is that resilience means different things in different contexts, but this has to be empirically demonstrated. Such a project never starts from a neutral ground and the assumptions driving this particular research are based on an understanding of the relationship between governmentality and neo-liberalism. As Chapter 1 argues, governmentality, while not an exclusively neo-liberal form of governance, takes neo-liberalism as its dominant form in this contemporary period. This is due to the dominance of particular states in the world system, and particular socio-economic models in those dominant states.

However, if this is the case, it is equally true that taking this as our framework might lull us into the sense that resilience is spreading everywhere across the globe due to its relationship to dominant socio-economic models. If, however, this dominant discourse is predominantly Anglo-Saxon in character, then we would expect resilience to face significant challenges when encountering other national or cultural

contexts. The researcher has to be careful not to confuse the views from the United Kingdom and the United States as representative of the rest of the world, even if this view carries a particular weight within international relations. This book argues that the Anglo-Saxon view of the world is not quite as prevalent as it first appears and that consequently, resilience cannot be considered to have achieved the status of an all-conquering idea, reflective of Anglo-Saxon hegemony. In many parts of the world, and indeed, across Europe, resilience is nowhere near as prevalent as it is, for example, in the United Kingdom. In Europe, in particular, different social and political traditions and different ways of understanding the role of the state, make it difficult for the idea to spread in an unconstrained or uncontested way.

The politics of the EU and its member states is particularly interesting because the EU is an evolving project whose direction is still being debated. Different member states have different socio-economic models as well as different political traditions relating to the role of the state, legal system, civil society and private sphere. This leads to differences not only between member states such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom, but within the EU as well. The discussion that follows intends to reveal these differences across a range of policy areas. There may, for example, be significant differences in how civil defence and counter-terrorism are understood in various countries because of different understandings of the relationship between state and society, or state and legal system. However, in other areas – such as overseas development and humanitarian aid policy – we may find that there is much more consensus between countries. Likewise, EU policy in various areas may reflect strong divisions between different socio-economic models, while development policy may appear to be much more coherent or have a greater degree of consensus. It is suggested that this is due to a closer fit with what is going on among other international organisations – like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee – where an Anglo-Saxon consensus is much more evident. There is also less pressure on the EU in this area of policy making because of its external focus. So, the development of ideas like resilience depends on context, whether this is national, regional or international, or to do with policy context and the prevalent socio-economic discourse. While studies of resilience

might be tempted to claim that its influence is spreading rapidly across these different areas, the task of the rest of this book is to draw attention to the particularity of context and to highlight the unevenness of the idea's development.

I will now briefly conclude by summarising the issues at stake and outline the plan of the book in going about drawing out the different policy and country contexts.

Structure of the Book

The main issue that this book addresses is the degree to which resilience is becoming a widespread part of policy making across a significant number of areas and within a range of countries – and to search for varieties of resilience that might be on offer.³ Because the focus is on policy making, the book only looks at the resilience strategies of governments or departments and not at independent resilience-building projects carried out locally, within communities or by private initiatives. The survey is focused on Western countries and is not an attempt to assess whether resilience-building projects can succeed in poorer countries, or indeed whether poor countries can develop their own approaches to resilience. However, the following pages should indicate areas of agreement and disagreement and variations in interpretation, understanding and implementation across Western countries based on distinct political cultures and traditions. Clearly an issue to address is whether resilience is mainly a neo-liberal discourse or Anglo-Saxon phenomenon, or whether it has resonance elsewhere.

This is the main issue of the book and therefore a more empirical, policy-oriented approach is deployed. However, underpinning this is a particular conceptual agenda. By focusing on actual policy, and the degree of influence resilience has in different areas, certain core conceptual issues can start to be addressed. Clearly the issue of neo-liberalism is paramount, alongside a particular understanding of new forms of governance. Behind this lie further issues that the book's analysis will address, notably, the issue of governing from a distance, the use of monitoring and surveillance, the use of benchmarking and

³ It should be noted that the book was largely written prior to Brexit and the Trump victory which will clearly have an impact on some of the issues discussed in the following pages.

performance indicators, the notion of reflexive governance, awareness of coordination problems, the role of government as a facilitator, the promotion of the private sector, models of socio-economic development, welfare and security issues, risk and insurance and the changing role of the state and international organisations. From an International Relations perspective, the book raises questions about the main global actors, power relations and inequality in world politics, bureaucracy and norm diffusion, global governance and the promotion of good governance, partnership approaches and local ownership. Clearly many of these issues are overlapping and co-dependent, so the perspective of the book is holistic, looking for continuities and discontinuities within dominant discourses of governance.

The chapters that follow are structured according to policy areas. Within these areas the approaches of different countries as well as the EU will be considered and compared with the dominant UK approach. The first policy chapter (Chapter 2) looks at security policy and counter-terrorism strategy and compares the approaches of the United Kingdom, United States, France, Germany and the EU. It aims to tease out differences between Anglo-Saxon approaches and the more statist and legalist approaches of France and Germany. It also focuses on issues such as prevention versus preparedness, and whether the state has an obligation to provide protection. It argues that approaches such as the UK's, place more emphasis on populations and how they respond to crises. Tensions between different approaches is evident in EU policy and practice.

Chapter 3 provides an analysis of disaster management and critical infrastructure protection, continuing many of the policy themes given that these are closely related to security strategy. It looks, for example, at US disaster management post-Katrina as well as European strategy in the wake of disasters like flooding and earthquakes. This chapter focuses on internal disaster management (Chapter 4 looks at overseas policy in these areas), again teasing out differences between more the statist and legal approaches of some countries, and the population-focused approaches of others. It notes that at a European level, a more Anglo-Saxon view is being pushed by the European Commission.

Chapter 4, focusing on resilience and development strategy, notes that while EU policy is divided on internal matters, there is more coherence on overseas development and humanitarian policy because the neo-liberal approach is widely accepted in this policy area and is to be

found across other international organisations. A comparison between European and American (e.g., United States Agency for International Development – USAID) approaches finds remarkable similarity. The new development agenda is discussed and related to the governmentality approach. This is developed in Chapter 5 and the Conclusion which tie together the issues of resilience, governance and governmentality. These final two chapters are more conceptual, but draw on the empirical evidence of the previous sections. The Conclusion summarises the main findings and suggests possible future research agendas.