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To cite this article: David Bailey & Ivan Turok (2016) Editorial: Resilience Revisited, *Regional Studies*, 50:4, 557-560, DOI: [10.1080/00343404.2016.1146478](https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2016.1146478)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2016.1146478>



Published online: 25 Feb 2016.



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Editorial: Resilience Revisited

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The papers in this themed issue are part of a burgeoning debate underway in regional studies about the value and limitations of the concept of resilience, influenced no doubt by the volatile international economic situation and political instability. As the debate unfolds, the pros and cons of applying resilience to regional analysis are coming into sharper focus, and new ideas and insights are emerging to enhance established approaches and perspectives. Various hidden assumptions and unexpected implications are also becoming clearer, which is helping to fuel a lively conversation.

The issue features papers on the resilience of employment and other economic variables across Europe, Canada and Australia. There is a particular concern with the regional consequences of the global financial crisis and environmental shocks. The six papers all approach resilience from different angles, and offer useful reflections on the scope and limits of the concept itself. Their particular focus includes UK regions (MARTIN *et al.*, 2016, in this issue), Wales (SENSIER and ARTIS, 2014, in this issue), Turkey (ERAYDIN, 2015, in this issue), Canada (DUBE and POLESE, 2015, in this issue), Australia (COURVISANOS *et al.*, 2015, in this issue), and European regions (DORAN and FINGLETON, 2015, in this issue).

The new papers complement and reinforce a substantial body of work in *Regional Studies* on the impact of the economic downturn and other chronic stresses on cities and regions. These include the effects on different forms of employment and unemployment (GREEN and LIVANOS, 2013; LEE, 2014); finance and investment (HALL and LEYSHON, 2013; APPLEYARD, 2013; HEBB and SHARMA, 2014); housing and uneven development (HINCKS *et al.*, 2014); regional resistance and recovery (CELLINI and TORRISI, 2014), and regional policy responses (BAILEY and BERKELEY, 2014).

A valuable feature of efforts to unravel such impacts has been to situate the analysis within the context of longer-run challenges facing each region (BAILEY and DE PROPRIS, 2014). This enriches understanding of the underlying obstacles encountered and behavioural responses as regions address new pressures and problems. The present papers by MARTIN *et al.* (2016, in this

issue), SENSIER and ARTIS (2014, in this issue) and ERAYDIN (2015, in this issue) all seek to achieve this. Earlier efforts include TAULBUT and ROBINSON (2015) on the availability of job vacancies across regions and DAWLEY *et al.* (2014) on the enduring occupational structures of regional labour markets. BATHELT *et al.* (2013) reveal how a region's prior exposure to economic crises had prepared it to deal with new setbacks because local firms were already engaged in ongoing innovation and efforts to upgrade and diversify into new products and markets.¹

Resilience-thinking has made several important contributions to long-running regional research into the performance and adaptability of territories in the wake of damaging events and extreme pressures. A major concern has been how and why local communities and regional economies respond to major disturbances, including the balance between continuity and change (TUROK, 2014). Another has been a normative concern with how improved outcomes might be developed, interpreted and narrated. Similarly, considerable work has been done on how institutional capacity might be enhanced to enable organizations, firms and regions to anticipate to and be better prepared for disasters and other problems (MYKHENKO, 2016).

There remain marked differences in how the concept of resilience is defined and applied in regional research (BAILEY and DE PROPRIS, 2014; SEELIGER and TUROK, 2013). MARTIN (2012) distinguishes between three interpretations: engineering, ecological and adaptive resilience. BRISTOW and HEALY (2014) focus on the difference between engineering conceptions and those derived from complex adaptive systems theory. The latter are preferred within evolutionary economic geography because of the emphasis on change rather than continuity. MARTIN (2012) and MARTIN *et al.* (2016, in this issue) explore four dimensions of evolutionary regional resilience: resistance, recovery, reorientation and renewal (whether on a pre-recession path or a hysteretic shift to a new path). DUBE and POLESE (2015, in this issue) raise questions about how to build a multi-criteria model to capture all these dimensions. SENSIER and ARTIS

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(2014, in this issue) also build on MARTIN (2012) and FINGLETON *et al.* (2012) in developing a sensitivity index to gauge the extent of employment loss in a region compared with the nation, including a more flexible method of dating the business cycle.

MARTIN *et al.* (2016, in this issue) examine how employment in major UK regions has responded to the four major recessions of the last 40 years, using notions of resistance and recoverability. They find both continuities and changes in regional impacts across the different recessions. They also find that while economic structure has influenced the resistance and recoverability of certain regions, 'region specific' or 'competitiveness' effects have been at least as significant.

ERAYDIN (2015, in this issue) highlights the distinction between a region's 'ability to respond' (consistent with Martin's resistance and recovery) and its 'adaptability and adaptive capacity' (related to reorientation and renewal). The latter links to HOLM and ØSTERGAARD (2015), who see resilience as an adaptive capability comprising the ability to resist shocks, to make small or large changes, and either recover, reorientate or transform. Interestingly, the particular responses and the sources of resilience are found to vary widely across regions. BOSCHMA (2015) suggests that regions with a long-term ability to develop new growth paths are capable of overcoming a trade-off between adaptation and adaptability, as embodied in related and unrelated variety, loosely coupled networks, and loosely coherent institutional structures. This approach enables him to develop a more comprehensive view on resilience that combines industrial, network and institutional dimensions.

Several of the current papers recognize the need to explore institutional and policy factors in understanding how regions avoid hazards, cope with acute shocks and develop new trajectories. ERAYDIN (2015, this issue) echoes RODRÍGUEZ-POSE (2013) in arguing that institutional interventions need to vary according to the context, and that learning from experience is vital for firms and governments.² This is related to BOSCHMA's (2015) emphasis on investigating what kinds of regional institutional structures react most swiftly and are most responsive to new growth possibilities.³

Temporal and spatial dimensions of regional responses are stressed by COURVISANOS *et al.* (2015, in this issue). They draw on the 'panarchy' model of regional adaptive cycles developed by SIMMIE and MARTIN (2010), based on four sequential phases of reorganization, exploitation, conservation and release. They recognize that this can be criticized for evaluating socio-economic systems from a Western, developed country perspective. This ignores the existence of traditional, indigenous systems that may be resilient even if a conventional approach to assessment is difficult.

This is relevant to a wider critique in the development literature of how notions of resilience are

applied in the fields of public policy and administration. Donors, financial institutions and Western governments are inclined to emphasize community self-reliance, individual self-help and the capacity to cope with pressure (MYKHENKO, 2016). There is a tendency to play down the role of the state and to use the concept to reinforce ideologies that espouse market forces (MACK-INNON and DRISCOLL DERICKSON, 2013). Hence, the idea can be 'easily captured by neoliberal ideology, to prioritize the status quo, and the importance of self-reliance, flexibility and role of 'self-correcting' market adjustments' (MARTIN and SUNLEY, 2015, p. 8).

A related concern is the possibility that urban and regional development agendas in the global South are skewed away from the long-term imperatives of economic growth and development and towards a focus on managing short-term risks, such as extreme weather events, outbreaks of disease or civil disorder. This is partly a function of how narrowly or broadly resilience is defined and interpreted in practice. There is not necessarily a fundamental trade-off between strategies to increase prosperity and measures to build capacity to withstand shocks, but there are undoubted tensions and differences of emphasis. These are the source of considerable debate within international support programmes that combine regions in the global North and South, such as the 100 Resilient Cities initiative (ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION, 2016).

More broadly, the term 'resilience' has been criticized for being more descriptive than explanatory (CHRISTOPHERSON *et al.*, 2010). A wide ranging critique by OLSSON *et al.* (2015) raises several fundamental doubts about applying resilience in social sciences, including the ontology and boundary of social and economic systems, and the dangers of structural functionalism in resilience thinking. Counter-arguments for resilience include its holistic, integrative perspective, the sensitivity to interconnected systems and their wider contexts, recognition of powerful feedback effects within regional systems, and an awareness of the importance of adaptability and innovation in regional development.

The papers in this volume make important contributions to ongoing debates, including: understanding more fully how recessions and subsequent recoveries have impacted on UK regions (MARTIN *et al.*, 2016, in this issue); considering resilience from the perspective of the individual (DORAN and FINGLETON, 2015, in this issue); developing better sensitivity measures of employment loss and business cycles in regions (SENSIER and ARTIS, 2014, in this issue); understanding the characteristics of regions that affect resilience (ERAYDIN, 2015, in this issue); applying the panarchy model to identify strong and weak resilience pathways (COURVISANOS *et al.*, 2015, in this issue); and reflecting on the value of resilience when building multi-criteria models (DUBE and POLESE, 2015, in this issue).


NOTES

1. There is considerable debate about what influences the ability of regions to diversify into new development paths. FRENKEN *et al.* (2007) argue that this may be a function of their degree of 'related' and 'unrelated' variety, although this has been questioned by KEMENY and STORPER (2015).
2. BAILEY *et al.* (2014) highlight how regional policy responses to shocks need to be (1) long-term, so as to foster adaptability, (2) multidimensional, so as to transcend narrow sectoral concerns, and (3)

inclusive of a broad coalition of economic and social stakeholders.

3. DE PROPRIIS and HAMDOUN (2013) stress that a major challenge for place-based policies is whether local and regional governance systems can promote path-breaking shifts.

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