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Resilience between nature and society: a new tool for neoliberal governance?

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1. Resilience: nature, society and governance

In order to understand the ongoing changes and their effects on social relations, there is often a need to resort to the formulation of new explanatory categories, or to the renewal of traditional ones, capable of capturing their significant aspects. The complexity of reality inevitably requires this effort of reduction to the fundamental and emerging characteristics of a given social phenomenon. The Weberian ideal-type represents the model to which

[1] Università di Ferrara - This paper is the outcome of a process that began about two years ago and has not yet been completed, taking due account of the vastness of the topic and its many facets in the various social sciences. It can be assumed that the consideration presented here is still characterised by the euphoria, but also by the confusion, typical of a work in progress.

sociological knowledge refers in its considerations. This need is accompanied, in a game of cross-references, by the possible translation of these categories into principles of government according to Foucault's well-known analysis of the concept of "governmentality", or rather "the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security". (Foucault, 2005, p. 88). The discursive repertoire promoted by experts is consequently reflected in administrative choices in the face of changing socio-economic, political and cultural arrangements.

A significant example of this configuration is the increasing diffusion of the term 'resilience' in academic debate, in documents, intervention programmes promoted by transnational agencies, such as the World Bank and the European Union, and in policies at the local level[2]. In addition, networks such as Resilient Cities and the Resilience Alliance have recently emerged to promote and disseminate resilient practices at various levels (see Lisa. Schipper, Langston, 2015).

The positive value of resilience emerges with all its evocative power, regardless of its analytical declination and possible field of application. The key to understanding its overwhelming success lies, first and foremost, in its etymological meaning, from the Latin *resilire*, 'to rebound', 'to leap back in the opposite direction', which recalls the idea of resistance/adaptation[3]. In fact, the term was originally used to indicate the *resistant* property of a specific material to external pressures potentially capable of altering or deforming its structure. Its semantic translation into other fields of study appears, therefore, more than justified since its use in the 1970s in the field of ecology to identify the rebalancing capacity of the natural environment under the pressure of human action in a perspective of sustainability (Holling, 1973). In the classic definition, Holling emphasises that resilience is a *measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables* (Holling, 1973, p. 14).

On this horizon, the correlation between nature and society is evident with respect to a model of socio-economic development that increases exposure to the risks and consequences of possible national disasters, especially in terms of climate change (Kates et al. 2001; Kates 2011). On this level of reflection, resilience takes on a clear and precise sociological meaning, namely, the reaction of certain groups and/or communities affected by catastrophic events, e.g. earthquakes, floods. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasise the self-organising element of a given local system and its ability to learn and adapt to the new socio-environmental conditions (Adger et al. 2005, p. 1036).

This shift to the *social* amplifies the dynamism and learning possibilities of *resilience thinking*. In this case, it is useful to recall the further field of research in which the term has had particular relevance, concerning the psychological study of the destabilising effects of specific traumas and the capacity of individuals to adapt positively to them. One of the best-known investigations has been the longitudinal research by Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith on the condition of at-risk children in Hawaii, from which it emerged that a part of the minors observed, despite living in a degraded social and family environment, showed non-deviant

[2] The dissemination of the term and its success in the academic debate has been so widespread that we have witnessed the birth of some international journals, such as "Resilience. International Policies, Practices and Discourses", "Resilience: a Journal of the Environmental Humanities", "Resilience: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Science and Humanitarianism". The widespread and abundant use of the term resilience can be seen in the impressive number of titles present in Google Scholar: more than 60,000 in 2013 alone (Deverteuil, 2016). On its widespread use in the academic literature see also Olsson et al. (2015).

[3] For an in-depth etymology see Pizzo (2015).

behaviour and regular lifestyles as adults (Werner, Smith, 1982). Over the decades there has been an important extension of the meanings of resilience and its applicability to encompass a wide range of phenomena related to social, economic, cultural change and possible break-downs connected to it (Hall, Lamont, 2013; CARRI, 2013). Job loss, poverty, socio-economic development, migrant integration processes, the condition of the elderly, are some of the many issues that can be addressed through the lens of resilience. In this sense, resilience manifests itself as a *boundary object* within which overlapping sets of different knowledge, techniques and models of knowledge are united by the search for structural and contingent elements capable of opposing the paradigm of resistance/adaptation to possible (traumatic) changes in the social and ecological system (Brand, Jax, 2007; Keck, Sakdapolrak, 2013; Olsson et al., 2015).
The multiplicity of definitions and meanings that have followed one another over the years as a result of the intense theoretical debate has led to a growing distrust of the term (MacKinnon, Derickson, 2013; Pizzo, 2015). Several authors have stressed the evasiveness of its conceptual boundaries by identifying it as a *"quasi-concept"*, its limited analytical capacity compared to the merely descriptive one, its normative-prescriptive character, the difficulties of making it empirically detectable and manageable, the risk of renaturalising society, depoliticising conflicts and social structures, naturalistic and sociological determinism (Brand, Jax, 2007; Davidson, 2010; Downes et al. 2013; Olsson et al. 2015; Pizzo, 2015).
Consequently, its semantic extension and, sometimes, the unconscious use of the term in different intervention contexts risk turning it into a *buzzword* (Deverteuil, Golubchikov, 2016; Slater; 2014; Pizzo, 2015).
The fundamental issue, on which it is appropriate to dwell and on which the following discussion will develop, concerns the obvious theoretical and empirical translation of the concept within the sphere of the social and sociological paradigm. In fact, if we delve into the social references with which to conjugate resilience, a number of difficulties emerge, especially in its ontological dimension and its operational applicability (Davidson et al., 2016). In the light of the observations presented so far, the concept of social resilience is defined as "*the ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political and environmental change*" (Adger 2000).
In another well-known analysis, it is related to *an outcome in which the members of a group sustain their well-being in the face of challenges to it. Well-being is intended in a broad sense, encompassing physical and mental health, material conditions, and a sense of dignity and sharing as a recognised member of a community* (Hall, Lamont, 2013, p. 14).
These definitions suffer from their inherent generality and open up a whole series of questions on which it is useful to open a detailed discussion: how do I identify the resilient characteristics of a local society, of a community, affected by a destabilizing event? What are the significant social elements that contribute to building a capacity to react to a disaster? Is there a detectable relationship between a resilient dynamic expressed by the community, that is from below, and the public institutions that should support this process?
In the determination of the resilient prerogative, a multiplicity of social, cultural, political and economic variables is involved, which both facilitate and differentiate its empirical manifestation. In its essence, there is a difficult relationship between theoretical approach and empirical reality that needs to be addressed in order not to run the risk of tautological thinking ("the capacity of a resilient subject lies in resilience") or consensual rhetoric that conceals the failure of the market as the sole regulator of social relations and local and/or trans-local institutions. Here we present some consideration on the basis of a part of the wide literature available, which is difficult to summarize. Rough reflections, a work still in search of its systematicity and coherence, addressed to a first critical analysis of the underlying ontology

and epistemology which reveals some contradictions, but at the same time can initiate further investigation to achieve alternatives of theoretical and empirical research.

2. Grandma's pie (not) always tastes good: ontology and epistemology of resilience

Resilience in its peculiar definition assumes a positive value in itself, one might recall the old adage "Grandma's pie always tastes good".
Nevertheless, beyond the conceptual ambiguity and ambivalence, the problem to be reckoned with in the reality is its intrinsic relation to the current neoliberal governmentality.
In fact, the profound changes in the socio-economic structures and, above all, in the state welfare system of our societies call for serious reflection. The reduction in the resources available to the so-called 'at risk' individuals, groups and communities has led to a redesign of intervention policies based on an emphasis on their direct involvement and participation. If on the one hand this can be seen as an undoubtedly significant aspect, on the other hand it highlights the limitation of not assessing adequately the impact of more general processes of exclusion that undermine the degree of collective mobilization necessary to contrast any potential traumatic episodes[4]. It follows that a community's ideal capacity for resilience must necessarily come to terms with the possible deficit of social rights of citizenship (work, income, access to services) which weakens its production and reproduction. Consequently, resilience becomes part of neo-liberal urban governance within which the taken-for-granted notion that communities must be capable of responding to crises produced in a context dominated by austerity and exclusionary policies is propagated (Mackinnon, Derickson, 2013).
On this critical horizon, therefore, the reference to this characteristic suffers from a rhetorical and instrumental use that legitimises the *status quo* of the structure of inequalities and reduces the direct responsibility of government institutions for the possible negative outcomes of intervention. In other words, resilience with its dimension of collective action must be supported by socio-economic and institutional conditions that favour its effective manifestation.
As some authors have rightly observed, certain vulnerable social groups, often socio-spatially segregated, are in a condition of "persistent resilience" whose contents are represented by informal and formal micro strategies of survival that are subject to continuous tensions due to the deficit of interventions and resources (Voss, 2008; Andres, Round, 2015). In essence, current socio-economic policies tend to emphasise the resilient character of interventions in the context of the rise of neo-liberal principles, the progressive reduction of welfare resources and state intervention, the increasing privatisation of services and the triumph of negative individualism, according to Robert Castel's well-known definition (1995).
Ontologically, resilience embraces the directions taken by recent social science approaches (such as new materialism, complexity theory, network analysis, and the reflexive approach) that have involved a shift away from the analytical concepts of class, status, and social identity towards the idea of an individual connected to a multiplicity of networks (Joseph, 2013; Cudworth and Hobden, 2011; Chandler, 2014)). The outcome, then, is that resilience becomes practicable (or possible) thanks to a social ontology that pushes us to deviate from the issues of the external world to those related to our subjectivity, our adaptability, our reflective capacity and understanding, our risk assessment, our skills and our responsibility to make decisions (Joseph, 2013: 40). The formalised concept of resilience assumes risk and

[4] Obviously, I use here and elsewhere the term 'trauma' in its extended meaning of an event that alters the *status quo* of the subject or of groups or communities.

vulnerability as *sine qua non* conditions of its very existence, thus a subject in constant flux, unstable and subject to the pressures of reacting to potential hazards that cannot be controlled and predicted (Evans, Reid, 2013).

In other words, from the perspective of the neoliberal regime, the resilient conversion of the social actor creates a subjectivity that must permanently struggle to adapt to the world, not to perceive a change in the existing, its structures and conditions of possibility (Reid, 2010: 3; Garrett, 2016).

The neo-liberal discourse incorporates resilience into its positive imagery as a paradigm of the self-made-man and of limitations on public institutions in guaranteeing any and/or necessary supports and back-ups (see O'Malley, 2010; Schmidt, 2015). Recalling some of the discussion and themes developed so far, the new welfare set-up, e.g. the so-called workfare, that is configured in post-industrialised societies, and that pushes, or rather thinks it is pushing, the 'beneficiary' into the sphere of work under the guise of making them become *self-reliant* (Hall, Lamont, 2013: 6)[5].

In this sense, the policy orientation under the global hegemony of neo-liberalism has progressively replaced the model of securing the human from the contingencies of the life course with a model based on resilience, that is on the individual's ability to react, learn and change (Reid, 2012: 144; see also Castel, 2007)[6].

Resilience becomes a strategy of governing the surplus and the contingency. In the first case, the surplus refers to that part of humanity/group/category/individual marked by the stigma of vulnerability and subjected to critical dynamics, or traumatic events, which are difficult to manage. In the second case, the unpredictability/contingency of trauma necessitates, as already pointed out, a perpetual tension between emancipation and risk which, in part, obscures the very causes of those traumas.

Moving on to the epistemological question, it has been observed that the vocabulary of resilience does not conform to some key concepts of social sciences such as agency, conflict, knowledge and power, as these are absent from the theory. (Olsson et al. 2015, p. 11).

In many cases, the configuration of the analysis of local social systems and communities conceals the fact that they are traversed by conflicting *cleavages* and processes of disparity and inequalities in the (re)distribution of resources and access to deliberative arenas.

From this perspective, the process of building, preserving and reproducing social resilience appears to be highly contradictory and also a process that can be extremely conflictual (see MacKinnon, Derickson, 2013). Sometimes optimising one form of resilience may mean undermining other forms of resilience (Walker and Salt, 2006). Furthermore, it is often noted that social resilience is, legitimately, a decisive argument in emphasising people's power to define what is perceived (or perceivable) as a threat, a potential disaster, while, in reality, in the hegemonic discourse that constructs strategies, the so-called subordinates are rarely heard (Voss, 2008)[7]. One should also evaluate different aspects, which reflect an analytical difficulty to be reckoned with. For example, one should ask what structural and subjective competencies are capable of producing and re-producing resilience when the opportunity arises. This is a

[5] It is no coincidence that increasing the resilience of the poor has become a goal set, for example, by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the post Johannesburg/World "Summit on Sustainable Development 2002".

[6] This kind of reflection owes much to the enlightening socio-historical and sociological insights of Robert Castel (1995; 2004).

[7] As the analysis of environmental racism has amply demonstrated, one of the most important aspects lies in the exclusion of ethnic/racial minorities from the definition of environmental risk and the related processes of decision-making (see Pulido, 1996).

crucial point, as it introduces the problem of institutionalising a practice that is consistent with this objective and closely linked to the various types of risk and/or exposure to it.
The construction of resilience, as an *epistéme*, presupposes exposure to a certain level of risk, so that, given the uncertainties in its assessment and measurement, it is very difficult to determine whether, in a given study, all individuals viewed as resilient have experienced comparable levels of adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, Becker, 2000). Due to its dynamicity and contingency, individual or collective skills and competencies functioning under certain circumstances and in a certain timeframe may become obsolete in the face of new challenges or contingencies in the physical and social space of life.
The question that arises from this perspective is: how do individual resilient mechanisms link up with collective resilient mechanisms? Resilience is not the summation of individual resiliences that magically becomes a positive immanent character of the social sphere (see Hutter, Kuhlicke, Glade, 2013). This leads to further questions: what kind of networks are decisive in order to guarantee the actual possibility of becoming resilient? Which are the most significant varieties of public and private spheres in which social relations are structured?
Social capital inevitably plays a key role in building and maintaining social resilience (Keck, Sakdaporak, 2013; Adger, 2000; Pelling, High, 2005).
The widespread orientation towards cooperative action promotes, as both cause and effect, a generalised trust between members and groups of the local society, which is fundamental, in Putman's view, to generate and reproduce a solid relational capital that can be mobilised in adverse contingencies (Putman, 2000). The close connection between these two ideal-typical aspects of collective life determines a framework articulated on different levels of reflection, which highlight certain perplexities.
An initial reflection is made on the quality and content of the network of relationships that make up the resilient virtues of social capital. From all the studies carried out, it emerges that informal networks, family networks and civic networks are crucial as social resources to nurture resilient capacity and competence (Joseph, 2013, p. 4; see also Keck, Sakdaporak, 2013). Consequently, it is important to understand the quality and quantity of social capital needed to ensure the acquisition of resilient skills. The density of networks and their weak or strong nature (*bonding or bridging*) plays a decisive role in the diffusion and sharing of values, behaviours, identities, cultural repertoires able to support adaptability to traumatic changes. In addition, attention should be paid to the downside of social capital, expressed by its possible features of unenforceable constraints and exclusionary and discriminatory practices (Portes, Landbolt, 1996).
Another significant multidimensional factor in the establishment of resilient practice (*ex ante* and *ex post*) concerns the level of social cohesion related to the quality/quantity of networks of trust and cooperative action, which reveals certain criticalities. It is absolutely misleading to assume that the more cohesive a group (or local community) is, the greater, or more likely, the positive effects on internal and external relations are. In fact, cohesion and networks also have an exclusive power, that is to exclude and create extremely important material and symbolic boundaries. On the contrary, we could assert, obviously with some stretching, that in specific cases and in given conditions resilience offers itself as an individual and collective chance in the moment in which it is able to determine (by excluding) the belonging and the quality of the member subjects.
For example, it is important to point out that "*resilience is not necessarily positively correlated with well-being: some households may have strengthened their resilience but only to the detriment of their own well-being or self-esteem*" (Bené et al., 2012, p. 13). The existence of this trade-off is replicated on another level of investigation. There is a level of exposure, intensity and spatio-temporal coordinates that can result in differences in resilient response. So, is there a single, identifiable

resilient capacity or is resilience a contextualised stratification of capacities, attitudes, habitus that may or may not be mobilised? The reference to contextualising according to spatial, historical, socio-economic parameters the degree of resilience of a society or community casts serious doubt on its normative and, in many ways, rhetorical character (Endress, 2015).
In addition, if we were to assess the vulnerability of a group or territory in order to determine the respective resilience skills, the question of a double measurement arises, which is not easy to solve: on the one hand, measuring the degree of vulnerability in its specificity, and on the other hand, the different degree of resilience that can be linked to it. In this regard, some authors argue that these two interrelated factors "cannot be directly observed and measured, so the effort is to identify a set of measurable proxy variables that can represent the different ways in which they manifest themselves" (Lisa et al. 2015, p. 12).
A social conflict or change is not a hurricane: they generate and require different reactions (Pizzo, 2015, 135).
It is interesting to notice that the constant reflection in the literature on the decisive functions of capital and social cohesion expressed by the community/group/territory of reference are connoted, like resilience, by opacity, conceptual vagueness and, especially, by the very multiplicity of variables to be considered. There is a real difficulty in using a sort of "index over index" (or indicators of indicators) to empirically decline resilience, which could confuse or overlap the object of analysis. The concrete proposals of resilient indexing and indicators promoted by (a few) authors and, principally, by transnational agencies constantly refer to the precautionary principle on the basis of the awareness of the problem related to empirical translation (see Cutter, Burton, Emrich, 2007; Lisa, Schipper, Langstone, 2015; Maxwell et al., 2015).
Still with reference to what was referred to earlier, namely the risk of tautological thinking, one might ask whether it is the same *ex ante* resilient dimensions and practices that are re-engaged *ex post* to the disruptive phenomenon.
Following the analysis carried out by Lanzara on the so-called "negative capability", it can be assumed that certain forms of resilience expressed at an individual and collective level may prove to be rigid and not adequate to the necessary changes following the trauma. As the author points out, negative capability is the source of action "which arises from emptiness, from the loss of meaning and order, but which is oriented towards the activation of contexts and the generations of possible worlds" (Lanzara, 1993: 13). Consequently, the resilient properties of a given system will have to pass through the experience of uncertainty, of the disappearance of that horizon of meaning which reconfigures the actor, their actions and expectations. It is also from this perspective that it is interesting to notice how the ephemeral organisations which have arisen following a catastrophic event represent practical examples of resilience for their *in situ* action, deprived of previous experience, of recognised leadership and consolidated patterns in the planning of interventions.
The case of the post-earthquake in L'Aquila, to give an example of the Italian case, is paradigmatic of a fundamental misunderstanding of the idea of resilience. In fact, the response to subsequent events characterised by corruption, inability to plan, and administrative deficits on the part of organised groups did not lead to a reaction capable of producing a substantial change in the *status quo*. Nevertheless, if we were to evaluate the extraordinary effort of these groups, we could invoke the resilient quality expressed locally. Consequently, as it has been rightly pointed out with reference to the earthquakes in Italy, despite various possible actions within an emergency frame, resilience may not be significantly enhanced. In this sense it could be considered a sort of by-product of policies and actions focused on multiple objectives that

do not produce emancipation and, we would add, are not always in tune with ethical action (Pizzo, 2014: 136).

3. Resilient spaces, actions and institutions

Resilience represents a social and sociological dimension open to a variety of empirical objectifications and plausible interpretations. In the face of a close connection with the demands for self-governance expressed by neoliberalism, resilient action can fit into the fractures left open by this regime of production and social reproduction. In fact, as neoliberal hegemony expands the boundaries of delegation and self-organisation, favourable environments and conditions can arise to question the order and priorities functional to the market and its logic (Deverteuil, 2106). In this sense, we must take into account Foucault's considerations that strategic reversibility can be prefigured, questioning the pre-established order (see Foucault, 1991). Basically, we must consider the unexpected formation of active resistances capable, on the one hand, of profoundly modifying the assumptions of the operational and decision-making process, and, on the other hand, of mobilising to claim one's own voice, which can be interpreted as a resilient aspect[8].

While the quantity and quality of ontological criticism of resilience and its sociological declination undermine the applicability and operability of the concept, it is conceivable not to completely reject a slice of grandma's pie. The starting point is to be aware of the fact that the process of building resilience is always complex, incomplete and locally contingent.

In addition to this, it has been repeated many times that resilience is in its essence an ongoing process, whose supposed, or real, transformative power is small-scale and contradicts itself by its incremental character (DeVerteuil, Golubchikov, 2016).

The possible kind of knowledge "*is necessarily concrete rather than abstract, so complexity and resilience lend themselves to action-research with agents in situation, rather than to the expert knowledge generated by the current neoliberal approach to policy*" (Chandler, 214, p. 41). In order for resilience to become a knowledge tool, it must be based on a "weak" theory that allows to create a course of analysis in the field capable of constructing a map of the different meanings and actions of actors situated in critical contexts.

In this horizon, assessing the resilience of "*survivor communities, provides ammunition for formulating the three thesis as entry points for the redemption of resilience as a critical concept: (i) resilience can sustain alternative and previous practices that contradict neo-liberalism; (ii) resilience is more active and dynamic than passive; and (iii) resilience can sustain survival, thus acting as a precursor to more obviously transformative action such as resistance*" (Geoff DeVerteuil & Oleg Golubchikov 2016, p. 146).

Hence the need to analyse resilience as a relationship first and foremost: a relationship between individuality and membership, between socio-economic and power inequalities, between ascribed and/or acquired differences, and relationships with institutions, particularly those we can define as public (see Hutter, Kuhlicke, Glade, 2013).

On this last point, it is worth assessing their role in supporting the local social system's capacity to react and adapt. The adaptive capacity of a given local social system depends on the nature and intelligence of the institutions and their ability to absorb traumas and redesign in changing situations.

In the face of catastrophic events (e.g. earthquake) the institutional dimension is decisive in (re)building a framework of collective action aimed at encouraging processes of responsibility and participation. In this sense, it is possible to observe a resilient institutional logic, which

[8] On this point in relation to the governance of participation in the sphere of development see Alietti, 2015.

strengthens the mechanisms of belonging and agency among the different social groups/classes, fundamental elements to activate positive dynamics in counteracting the negative effects of traumatic episodes.
Some general characteristics that constitute a resilient institution can be identified as follows and ideal-typically are: 1) transparency in the procedures of administrative choices; 2) creation of spaces for dialogue and confrontation with the population; 3) inclusion of vulnerable groups in the determination of social policies; 4) capacity to accept all the conflicting demands coming from the local society; 5) capability to innovate in the tools and strategies of intervention. Institutions can thus become generators of "fields of possibility" when they offer spaces for interaction between different visions, plurality of identities within a specific structure of inequality, and share tools to act on several levels of meaning and distinct social realities. In this perspective, conflict also becomes a constitutive factor of resilience when it is able to produce (and reproduce) democratic competences and cooperative action. It could be possible, even in this case, to reiterate the lack of operational definition (how can I measure institutional resilience?) or, as anticipated, reproduce the tautological discourse implicit in many in-depth analyses (I am resilient because I am resilient). Nonetheless, institutional arenas, particularly public ones, represent a real "political" horizon, which appears fundamental to help strengthen alternatives to neoliberal governmentality and promote a critical vision and practice of resilience, even if it is elusive to an adequate and hypothetical measurement.

4. The pandemic and the resilient communities

In the last period of the pandemic crisis, the word resilience has become increasingly popular in political debate and the media. It is difficult to escape its emotional and evocative power, its pervasiveness and its presumed virtues in the face of the growing difficulties in neutralising the socio-economic effects of the virus. Specifically in the Italian case, but also in other European contexts, the call for resilience was affirmed in the first lockdown in the face of the various support actions activated by a multiplicity of voluntary actors in their local articulation and ideological reference directed at the most fragile subjects and, subsequently, in the so-called and now famous National Recovery and Resilience Plan promoted by the Conte 2 government and the subsequent Draghi government in reference to European Union funding to counter the negative socio-economic effects of the pandemic. In the first case, the activation of support networks towards the vulnerable components of local societies, especially in metropolitan areas where distress is more widespread, undoubtedly represents a significant value of mobilisation within a framework of criticality of public intervention in identifying the complexity of needs. However, at a closer look, these resilient practices are declined within a relationship of support, however promoted from below, with respect to the deficit of the welfare state which has no emancipatory character. The transition to the phase of contesting what the pandemic has laid bare, namely the density of inequality, of critical issues in urban contexts, of denied rights, ended with the emergency phase and did not produce a socially and politically structured and equally dense configuration. The question that arises, consequently, refers to the meaning that is posed when we stress the idea of a resilient community. What are we referring to? To the groups that have become active, most of which are already politically active and, therefore, already resilient in themselves? Or to the type of relationship that supports vulnerability in times of crisis? Has the intervention to help fragile communities enhanced the resilience they can express over time, or is it only a contingent response? These questions echo what was discussed earlier and, once again, testify to the empirical confusion that arises when we rhetorically refer to so-called resilient communities. It would be appropriate to carry out research here in order to find plausible answers and emerge from the

quagmire of indeterminacy. Still on the subject of this process, it is clear from different research carried out in different contexts around the world (United States, Europe, Brazil, India) that COVID-19 has been a factor that has further aggravated and more significantly affected vulnerable and poorer groups. This empirical evidence has led to the replacement of the term 'pandemic' with the term 'syndemic' used in a major analysis published on *Lancet* in 2017 (Singer at al., 2017), which outlines how social and economic inequalities are a key vector in producing greater negative effects of the virus' impact. The concept of syndemic amply demonstrates how the virus is not actually very democratic but primarily affects African-American communities, ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees and key workers who are commonly poorly paid with fewer welfare protections (Horton, 2020; Laster, 2020; Perocco, 2021).

In line with what has been expressed and discussed so far, it is quite evident that resilience is also unequally distributed among social groups and that, paradoxically, it further increases the gaps between those who have the adequate resources to be resilient and those who do not. Not to mention, yet another paradox, the fact that these same vulnerable groups are in many ways in a condition of "persistent resilience" whose contents are represented by informal and formal micro strategies of survival that are continually under strain due to the deficit of interventions and resources.

In the second case, the national plan activated by the Italian government, the introduction of the term resilience is even more vague and out of place. Reading the programme of interventions and their possible implementation, there is no reference to any indicators that would allow to actually identify a change in that direction. Moreover, beyond the impact assessments on the policies of the plan, which can be hypothesised in the near future, it seems appropriate to underline how decisive are those pre-existing structural factors that can be linked to variables of a resilient nature that are not so present and effective in the southern regions, such as the quality of the health system, the configuration of the industrial system, the lack of skills capable of making the intervention and the related public expenditure operational. Consequently, once again it becomes clear that resilient communities are such because they already possess those resources, those capabilities, those resilient contextual conditions.

And once again, without a real change in public institutions, a profound renewal and enlargement of welfare, a change of course in economic policies and real empirical research on the practical meaning of the term, it becomes difficult to identify the political and emancipatory value of resilience.

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