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## Reclaiming resilience back: A local turn in EU external governance

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### ABSTRACT

Resilience seems to have become “the everyday” covering many aspects of our lives and the policy agenda of major international institutions. However, despite the upsurge in its popularity, are we sure we understand resilience well enough to make full use of its potential? Is resilience just about an entity and its qualities, the knowledge of which could help us improve its response to adversity? Or is it more about resilience as governance-thinking which could enable local communities to self-organize to build life they have reason to value, with external assistance as necessary? Tackling these fundamentals is important, not least to ensure that resilience is not another buzzword but an opportunity to make governance more adaptive. This article argues that resilience cannot be engineered externally, and requires local communities, aware of their own strength and capacities, to actualize their own potential in their strife for “good life,” the way they specify.

**KEYWORDS** Resilience; external governance; the local; self-governance; capabilities

Over the past few decades resilience seems to have become “the everyday”: It means “all things to all people” and speaks to every aspect of our daily lives—from “resilient” economies, cultures, sport, health, family, Brexit, to children’s TV (“resilient Peter Rabbit” on CBeebies), and even “resilient humanity” in “Doctor Who,” a popular BBC sci-fi series. It has also pervaded the governance agenda of major international institutions including the World Bank, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the European Union (EU)—all seeking to offer effective solutions to local problems, and help the vulnerable to become better “prepared and able to respond to an emergency” (United Kingdom government, 2013). The focus of their resilience-based policies is equally all-encompassing. It involves issues of humanitarian aid, development, security, military, defense, diplomacy, food,

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climate, crisis prevention, and capacity-building—covering possibly, every aspect of state intervention, internal and external, and making “resilience” one of the most inclusive and popular terms of the day.

However, with this broad appeal, and a recent surge in popularity, are we sure we understand the concept of resilience well enough, to make full use of its arresting potential? Is it just about an entity, be it a state, a community or a person, and its qualities including their “inherent strength” and “capacity” (European Commission, 2012, p. 5), the knowledge and development of which could make them more robust and responsive to change? Or is it also about how we should think today to make governance more adaptive, and communities—more self-organizing in times of uncertainty and diminishing control—to enable them to build a life people have reason to value and strive for? To this end should resilience be always associated with an emergency, or is it more about a long-term development, shaped by a sense of “good life” and communal values, and upheld by relevant institutions? More importantly, can resilience be engineered externally, as the policy world tends to believe, and if *not*, how to build resilience in practice?

Curiously, none of these questions would receive a clear or unifying answer today, not least when defining resilience in governance terms. As a concept, it is clearly not new, and scholars have done already much work to uncover its meaning (Kaufmann, 2017; Krause, 2018; Wagner & Anholt, 2016; Walker & Cooper, 2011), albeit resulting in its further relativization (Bourbeau, 2018), and as some would even claim, “great derangement” (Ghosh as cited in Chandler, 2019, p. 4). On the other hand, as regime of governance or a way of thinking in a policy or practitioner world, resilience is still nascent, but already fraught with contradictions, given its multiple meanings, and a false premise that it could be generated externally for target communities.

The use of resilience by the EU is particularly instructive. It was brought to political prominence by EU institutions (European Commission, 2012) and especially the office of the EU High Representative, when articulating the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) in 2016. Resilience was defined in this document as “the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises” (European External Action Service, 2016, p. 23). Facing multiple crises in the neighborhood (e.g., Ukraine and the reversal of the Arab Spring) the EU was searching for more effective ways to govern and to stay connected to retain a degree of control over a rapidly changing environment, where “predictable unpredictability” was becoming a central feature (European External Action Service, 2016, p. 46). In light of its “constructive ambiguity” (Wagner & Anholt, 2016), resilience seemed to have “fit the bill” to enable the EU to make its external space more manageable by shifting the focus (and responsibility) onto “the outside,” “the local” and a problem at source, hoping that in the long run “the local agency” would learn to manage itself independently.

In an age of growing complexity, the timeliness of this thinking could not be over-estimated: Empowering local communities by placing them in charge of their own destiny, is a deeply attractive concept, as an opportunity to extend its outreach, and more crucially, to better connect with “the local” in order to keep its governance on a sustainable track (Korosteleva, 2018a; Tocci, 2019). And yet, for various reasons, including perhaps not knowing *how exactly* to apply resilience to practice, EU conventional governance-thinking, through intervention, has prevailed turning resilience into a risk-management exercise, and “the local,” “the internal” simply into a source of vulnerability requiring urgent security measures. This “external-internal” duality of EU resilience-thinking—that is, resolving “internal” problems of communities (e.g., lack of reserve capacity, dysfunctional institutions, stagnant markets) with “external” solutions of the western world, including framing them in security terms—now risks forfeiting resilience’s arresting potentiality as self-governance, instead falling into a trap of external engineering and security maintenance.

These developments, in the EU and the policy world more broadly, have been mirrored by a scholarly debate. Many saw resilience as an artificial concept, to paper over the cracks without offering any real solutions. It has been regarded as “too ambiguous,” “hardly straightforward” (Rhinar, 2017, p. 5), and even “defensive”—an optimal tool of security governance for forming “buffer zones,” almost as if “when Europe’s neighbors are resilient to certain threats, those threats will not reach Europe itself” (Biscop, 2017, p. 3). Others treated it as an extension of neo-liberal governance (Joseph, 2013; Mavelli, 2016) to reconfigure its outreach and traction by way of inculcating a sense of responsibility and (an illusion of) autonomy through externally engineered technologies and self-securitizing practices. However, enmeshing resilience in liberal governmentality (Foucault, 2007) has recently encountered growing criticism, especially for its externalization of a “problem at source” and “compartmentalized” thinking, which some argue (Corry, 2014), impedes resilience’s potential. An “alternative” approach to resilience-thinking—the Anthropocene—while fully appreciating its virtues, also posits some doubts about a possibility of agency to overcome the present duality of governance (Chandler, 2019). This is because “local problems” would always be seen as “external” to a policy world and “internal” to local communities, requiring *external* intervention, prevention and preparedness, thus never genuinely grasping the needs of the community seen to require resilience.

So, is it a dead-end for resilience as we know it, or more precisely, *not yet know it*? This article argues otherwise. Resilience does have an arresting potentiality, provided it is “reclaimed” and “repatriated” back to “the local,” to belong to “community,” a social system that “feeds upon deviations ... and thrives upon disruptions to *its own state of equilibrium* [emphasis

added]” (Luhmann, 1990, p. 180). More crucially, it has to be self-referential, and “its change will always require *working within* [emphasis added], not against [or outwith] the system” (Luhmann, 1990, p. 183). This article, therefore, will explore whether resilience-thinking, here understood as self-governance, is possible and able to work within a set duality of governance—that is, of external assistance as necessary, to internal problems—to seek its own equilibrium, from within. Is it achievable to develop an “appropriate balance between external security guarantees and resources ... and the degree to which the local system has the freedom to develop its own self-organisation” (De Coning, 2016, p. 175)?

This article will explore these possibilities, by first, examining resilience-thinking in the EU mainstream discourse, to reflect on its external-internal duality and the alleged security-predicated nature. This is an important analytical exercise to facilitate a shift from understanding resilience as a quality that may be generated externally, to *resilience as an analytic of governance*, that focuses on developing the internal strength and capacities of a system, and how this thinking could make external governance more adaptive today.

The article then will turn to a resilience-focused scholarly debate to expose its often confused and circumscribed thinking about resilience as a western-laden (neoliberal) concept, which invariably, limits its potential by denying “the outside,” “the local” their agency to creatively respond to uncertainty and adapt to the ever-changing world.

The article will, finally, conclude by introducing a new research agenda to understanding resilience effectively as an analytic of governance-thinking using Sen’s capabilities approach (Sen, 1985) along with the actualization of “self-referential agency” of a complex social system (Luhmann, 1990), to reclaim resilience by and for “the local.” The added value of this thinking is not just to bring more clarity to the concept of resilience itself and its practical operationalization; it is also about how we can ensure that today’s governance becomes more responsive and adaptable to the challenges of uncertainty, complexity and diminishing control. After all, as the final section argues, if it is about the local communities determining their own priorities and futures, as well as resources they may require to achieve that (with external help as and when necessary), only then resilience would acquire ownership and purpose; and governance—the needed responsiveness to change and sustainability.

## **Resilience as an external tool of EU governance**

Resilience has rapidly spread through the policy world driven by the desire to respond in a more sustainable way to the environment’s growing complexity and uncertainty. It, for example, became “part and parcel” of the British

government as early as the 2000s, being defined as a strategy for “better preparedness and ability to respond to an emergency ... using local resources and knowledge” (United Kingdom government, 2013). Soon after, resilience entered the World Bank’s discourse being framed as “a capacity to mitigate the impact of disaster-related asset losses on welfare” (World Bank, 2016), which with the help of external policy interventions was meant “to assess, predict and minimize the losses to welfare caused by internal or external crises.” The OSCE (2017) defined resilience as a “capacity to prevent and recover from hazardous events or shocks,” but also a “capacity to support a constant transformative action to allow societies to adapt in the face of continual change” (p. 1). NATO’s understanding of resilience was centered on “being prepared—that is, having thought, planned and exercised in order to ‘absorb, recover and then adapt to adverse events’” (Lasconjarias, 2017, p. 3).

This snapshot of the use of resilience in a policy world demonstrates that while it has been seen as *internal capacity* of an entity to prepare to cope with adversity, a far greater emphasis is placed on the external intervention to help “engineer” a more resilient response to problem-solving. This, however, makes entities dependable on the external provider. As Rhinard (2017) argues “resilience [would always be] at best, a second-order effect of other policies” (p. 27). The underlying assumption is that a system can only develop resilience if it is amenable to external governing, which would assist the “internal” agency with knowledge and resources to help it recover and transform, to be able to mitigate future risks. This, however, as Rhinard contends, comes with a disclaimer that “directing policies towards building resilience may be more wishful thinking than a concrete possibility” (p. 27), simply because resilience, just as democracy before, may be supported, but not engineered.

This external-internal framing of resilience has become fully articulated in the EU official discourse in the early 2010s, and has gained a life of its own. Resilience received its first proper elaboration in 2012, in the European Commission’s Communication on *The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises*. Being the world’s largest humanitarian donor, the EU saw resilience then as a *jointly engineered long-term effort* to “support populations at risk to withstand, cope with and adapt to repeated adverse events and long-term stress” (European Commission, 2012, p. 2). This effort, according to the European Commission, should be systematic and enduring, for only under these conditions “investing in resilience [would be] cost effective” (p. 3).

In this first EU policy document, resilience’s external-internal duality receives its explicit differentiation. It was defined as having two dimensions: “the inherent strength of an entity—an individual, a household, a community or a larger structure—to better resist stress and shock, and the capacity of this entity to bounce back rapidly from the impact” (European Commission, 2012, p. 5). Therefore, to increase “resilience” of an entity meant activating the EU

machinery of governance to help the entity develop “internal” critical infrastructures to reduce the intensity of a variety of impacts. By the same token, “strengthening resilience lies at the interface of humanitarian and development assistance” (p. 5), emphatically prioritizing the external side of governance, without a qualifying reference to the entity itself and its “inherent characteristics.” Curiously, the same document also insisted that growing resilience should be bottom-up, but not by way of freeing the entity to act as it sees it fit, but rather by way of embedding external policies and interiorizing resilience measures into national programs:

Action to strengthen resilience needs to be based on sound methodologies for risk and vulnerability assessment (European Commission, 2012, p. 12) ... [and] be firmly embedded in national policy and planning ... as part of a sustainable development process. (p. 2)

The European Commission not only expressed the ambition to support the development of these methodologies, but also to “put in place a framework for measuring *the impact and results of its support for resilience* [emphasis added]” prepared by “humanitarian and development actors covering medium to long-term interventions” (European Commission, 2012, p. 12). Furthermore, the Commission noted that it “will review regularly progress made on the resilience agenda, looking in particular at programming, methodologies and results” (p. 12). Lastly and importantly, “the EU will promote resilience in international fora” (p. 12), which shows once more the duality of the concept.

To sum up, this first important iteration of resilience-thinking in the EU official (humanitarian-development) discourse was clearly ridden with tensions. On the one hand, the Commission saw “the local” as a critical beneficiary (and “a keeper”) of resilience articulated through the narratives of “inherent strength” and internal “capacity” to respond and transform, while the EU would serve as a mentor, a partner, and facilitator. On the other hand, the Commission explicitly espoused to deal with a volatile outside, a problem at source *externally*, through directive governance and “sound methodologies” of policy solutions prioritizing interventions over “the local” as a supposedly “self-referential” system for resilience-growth. This meant investing effort predominantly, in EU assistance to provide, assess, and risk-manage “the outside,” while ensuring that these resilience-building measures—“readiness, responsiveness and revitalization”—are also duly embedded in national programs, in anticipation of the future “resilience dividend” (Rodin, 2014).

This “externalization” of resilience—that is fostering resilience by external means—was amplified with its entry to the EU security discourse, as part of the EUGS (European External Action Service, 2016). While defining resilience as “the ability of states and societies to reform,” the document also underscored that “a resilient state is a *secure* [emphasis added] state, and security



is key for prosperity and democracy” (European External Action Service, 2016, p. 23). This (security) thinking became more tangible with the European Commission’s new *Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU’s External Action* (2017a), ensuing in profound implications for its meaning and application to practice. Indeed, the difference in the EU’s resilience-thinking of 2012 and that of 2017 cannot be more starkly. Resilience was seen, in 2012, as a joint endeavor with a target country and a “goal in itself.” In 2017, it was considered “a means not an end” (European Commission, 2017a, p. 23), a framework to secure a more governable, and stable outside, especially at a time of crises and uncertainty. The uptake of this security turn in EU resilience-thinking was to make “the outside” more “predictable” and “manageable.” The downside was, however, the denial of agency to “the local,” associated with a displaced sense of autonomy and a downward spiral to full governmentalization of “the outside” in modernist terms:

The EU’s strategic approach to resilience is ... to achieve long-term ... security goals. It is about securing progress towards these goals by addressing vulnerabilities and underlying structural risks ... [This is because] development, and progress towards democracy, peace and security, is not a linear process, and these ... on their own, are not always enough to ensure sustainable results. (European Commission, 2017a, p. 23)

An Action Plan within the same document purports further that:

The primary responsibility of integrating [engineered] resilience into national and local policy frameworks lies within each country. However, the EU and its Member States can support strengthening of resilience through raising the issue as an integral part of its political dialogue, including at the highest level. (European Commission, 2017a, p. 23)

To sum up, resilience as an EU narrative has now become fully governmentalized, prioritizing security of the EU environment, by way of embedding its external technologies in national programs of target states. To support this, the EU was also prepared to make “resilience-thinking” political, with some profound implications for the intended “adaptive strategies” of EU engagement with “the local.” This is further corroborated by EUGS implementation reports of 2017 and 2018. Notably, the 2017 report (European External Action Service, p. 14) emphasized a “transformational approach to resilience,” defining it as a political construct in terms of “protection of human rights, building political participation, fostering sustainable development and security,” exemplified on the case of EU support for Ukraine. The ultimate outcome of this engagement was to turn resilience into a governing exercise to provide “better risk-informed analysis and monitoring,” especially for “how external resilience can impact the EU’s own resilience in areas such as hybrid threats, cyber security, strategic communication and counter-terrorism” (European External Action Service, 2017, p. 16). The second report (European

External Action Service, 2018) went even further to package “resilience” as the EU’s “integrated approach to conflicts and crises,” where:

human security is at the core of all our actions and wherever we can, we engage at an early stage to prevent conflicts and save lives, also in close cooperation with civil society on the ground. (European External Action Service, 2018, p. 8)

Consequently, instead of helping the EU to decenter and empower “the local” to tackle their own needs, resilience became an equivalent to institution-building of what “normal” democracies would require: “professional police, judges, doctors, administrators, as well as a reliable and controlled army”—economic development and building capacities for early warning and risk assessment (European External Action Service, 2018, p. 9).

There is a familiar undertone in all these iterations of resilience—that of political democracy promotion, risk-management, and security provision for crises prevention and reduction of vulnerabilities. It was a key feature in all previous iterations of EU governance (Korosteleva, 2018a) toward the neighborhood symbolizing a return to “the EU normal” via resilience as governing regime. A shift to “the local,” through externalization of resilience to empower local communities and develop responsible agencies, in the EU language, appear only to mean externalization of EU governing technologies ensuing in the interiorization of security provision by the target countries. There is of course nothing wrong with this way of thinking, except that it continues to deny agency to “the local,” thus negating the very meaning of resilience as a “self-referenced” social system, thriving on its deviations in search for its own equilibrium (Luhmann, 1990). This no doubt becomes a source of frustration even for the “modernists,” when resilience transforms into a “problem of development” outgrowing its neoliberal restraints (Joseph, 2013, p. 45). Equally so, it is an increasing source of desperation for those who appreciate the potentiality of resilience, and yet see the impossibility of its governance in the currently fixed settings of separation from “the local” and “the (disturbing) outside” (Chandler & Reid, 2016; Evans & Reid, 2014; Grove & Chandler, 2016).

The question is, however, if the nature of governance in EU resilience-thinking effectively remains the same using conventional technologies of power transfer—perhaps less intrusive and disciplinary, but still directive, intervening and without paying much heed to “the local”—then why bring in “resilience” in the first place? Wagner and Anholt (2016, p. 423) aptly noted that there are other “lingua franca” (such as “sustainable development”) that have preceded resilience and may still serve the purpose, while the latter is yet to prove its utility. Do we need new governing “wineskins” (Kelley, 2006) to cover the same “old” logics of intervention and engineering technologies, this time driven by security-predicated ideas and a desire for a more stable outside? Some skeptics would consent to it by observing that often, “the

redefinition of these categories within the security-development nexus effectively takes them off the policy agenda at the same time as putting them to the fore rhetorically” (Chandler, 2007, p. 377). This, however, runs counter to Tocci’s (2019) overview of the EU resilience discourse and intentions, and in addition, seems far too complicated to be exploited just as a fig-leaf measure.

The problem, it seems, is how “resilience-thinking” is being framed, understood and delivered in the modernist policy world riddled with greater unknowns and a depleting (external) stock of knowledge and technologies in the face of uncertainty. The question is whether governance can be overcome to acknowledge a forever less governable outside, and yet support it in its individuation for the “good life” worth fighting for. The next section will explore conceptual problems of these parochial understandings of resilience, before suggesting a new research agenda to help reclaim resilience back for “the local,” and to make full use of its potential as an “analytic of governance.”

### **Resilience: Engineered autonomy, impossibility of governance or else**

Heath-Kelly (2016, p. 217) notes that research on resilience in IR seems to have been stunted by two contrasting dynamics today. One is being significantly preoccupied with “recycling the genealogical heritage of resilience” in an effort to consolidate its multiple episteme (Biermann, Hillmer-Pegram, Knapp, & Hum, 2016; Bourbeau, 2018; Walker & Cooper, 2011). Although it is doubtlessly important for our understanding of the nature of resilience today to enable the best realization of its potentiality, the key concern here, as Heath-Kelly observes, is its predominantly “retrospective temporality,” which while useful in thrashing out its many meanings and origin, nevertheless is delimiting for grasping its workings today, as its policy applications have shown.

The other one, with much higher critical mass of engagement (Joseph, 2013; Lundborg & Vaughan-Williams, 2011; Mavelli, 2016), effectively revolves around “the same debates rehearsed about resilience as a governmentalizing agenda” and its critique. There “resilience is explored as an anticipatory mechanism by which a population is managed against an imagined future danger” (Heath-Kelly, 2016, p. 218). It is essentially conceived in terms of its “prospective temporality,” which however leaves a “gaping hole” of how to manage emergencies and complex systems here and now, through resilience. Once again, the policy limitations of resilience exposed in the previous section, may be a direct consequence of this “gaping hole” of the present, which is also starkly exhibited by the governmentalizing (neoliberal) debates. As Schmidt recalls (2015) resilience-thinking may indeed seem

“intuitively neoliberal” in its anticipatory temporality, displaying a range of similarities with the liberal logics of governance, most notably in the ideational production of autonomy and freedom for “the outside.”

The difference, as Corry (2014) argues, however, arises when the logics of resilience and neoliberal governmentality are applied to practice, in their present temporalities exposing contrasting ways of working with “the outside” to empower “the local.” Notably, resilience analytic of governing aims to grow the capacity of local communities as self-referential social systems, which are operating, possibly with some external assistance, through internal deviations and disruptions towards achieving their own sustainable equilibrium (Luhmann, 1990), as against the one engineered from “the outside.” Conversely, the neo-liberal agenda is committed to externalizing “good governance” of western institutions to local communities, which are then supposed to embed these solutions in the national programs to make themselves sustainable (Joseph, 2013). As an analysis of EU governing patterns in the neighborhood have shown (Korosteleva, 2018a; Raik, 2006; Wolczuk, 2009), this kind of neoliberal analytic more often than not, has cascaded the problems down to a source, without necessarily offering any further solution or adaptation—Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, Belarus are but a few such examples, discussed by Petrova and Delcour (2019).

Joseph (2013) offered a seemingly convincing argument to suggest that the logic of Foucauldian liberal governmentality (governance from a distance) significantly overlaps with the rationality of resilience, or at least the way it is exercised and delivered by the international system today. He argued that governmentality constructs “neoliberal subjects,” to enable them as “free” citizens to “take responsibility for their own life choices,” while following the rules of “conduct” (2013, p. 42). Neoliberal governmentality, in his view, thus offers a nonintrusive way to “conduct the conduct” by responsabilizing the citizens (“the local”) externally, to grow their capacity for achieving their social and economic well-being. He argued that resilience-thinking in many ways, intends exactly the same (2013): It encourages people through heightened self-awareness about the world out of bounds and their own reflectivity, to take responsibility for adapting and reforming the system to minimize its external/internal disruptions.

This may be true in terms of the anticipatory temporality for both governing analytics, as aiming to reduce vulnerabilities and to improve wellbeing through the freedom of choice. However, when applied to the present temporality, the outcome is strikingly different for the communities in question, both locally and globally. While resilience-thinking focuses on “the empowerment and responsibility of agency at the local societal level, rather than upon the assertion of the right of external sovereign agency” (Chandler as cited in Joseph, 2013, p. 44)—this opens up a plethora of local governance domains in their self-sustaining dynamics and cooperative potential, with profound

implications for the global. Conversely, neo-liberal governmentality seems “self-consuming” (Schmidt, 2015), promoting “good governance ... decided by Western interests and transmitted through a normative and normalizing discourse that transfers responsibility to local agents” (Joseph, 2013, p. 44), which however, instead of reducing complexity generates insecurity by making local communities dependable on the external source, and offering problem-solving measures of only a temporary nature.

The most contrasting difference between resilience-thinking and a neoliberal agenda lies however in the production of freedom. For “the modernists,” as Chandler (2013, p. 279) refers to them, seeing the world in fixed binaries of “subject/object,” “inside/outside,” “human/nature,” “known/unknown,” the notion of autonomy is different. Given that “individual freedom is socially constructed within complex adaptive systems,” Joseph posits, “autonomy appears as the problem which requires management” (2013, p. 45). This suggests that, in neoliberal thinking, “it has never been about empowering an individual, or community in their self-organization” (Korosteleva, 2018b); rather the focus has always been on power (re)production constructing inter-dependencies to render “conduct of the conduct” perpetual in a hierarchical system of governance (Corry, 2014). This may not be a problem per se, especially when concerned with sharing “good governance” and “best practice”; the difference emerges when it is applied to practice allowing “good governance” to interfere with the logics of internal capacity-building, thus denying agency to local communities.

Another contrasting feature of resilience-thinking to neoliberalism, is its grasp of complexity, or what Chandler (in Grove, 2017) describes as the difference between “simple” and “general” complexity. The former associates more with a neoliberal thought “positing a closed system with emergent, non-linear properties. It maintains boundaries between *the inside* of the system and *its outside*—and thus retains, in theory, an external position from which the system can be ... known and controlled” (Grove, 2017, p. 185). Conversely, resilience-thinking reflects general complexity, in which governance must be creative and “limitless,” “to facilitate ‘natural’ life processes rather than force life to conform to externally-imposed policy agendas” (p. 185). Paradoxically, neoliberalism demands greater intervention to bring order to what it conceives to be “a governing normal.” Resilience, as Grove argues, “transforms ‘the local’ into a site of indeterminate potential, unbounded from transcendental law of both the state and the market” (2017, p. 186). “Resilience does not promise protection from harm or evil” (p. 186). It thrives on a system’s disruptive qualities in search for its own equilibrium. Interiorized security for resilience-thinking is a misnomer, and its external engineering is impossibility. What is more, real resilience-thinking dismantles space as “fixed, bounded and quantifiably determined,” which allows “the *global* [emphasis added] emerge out of and through *localized* [emphasis

added] processes and interactions as much as it is their backdrop or container” (Grove & Chandler, 2016, p. 5).

This reveals a real potentiality of resilience as an analytic of governance, not yet known to the policy world, which is slowly emerging in alternative scholarship, in the form, for example, of the “Anthropocene” debate referenced by Chandler (2019), and going well beyond political governance (Grove, 2017; Grove & Chandler, 2016). This kind of resilience is capable of breaking boundaries and connecting “the global” with “the local,” in an organic way of initiation, and a creative response, through mobilizing a communal strength and capacity, to treat adversity and crisis as an opportunity to reform and excel. “The global” in this resilience-thinking can only be conceived through “the local” and its governance domain, defined by its disruptive qualities and struggles for an equilibrium and leading to a new imaginary of an international system consisting of more bottom-up and responsive regional orders, which through their resilient thinking are by nature more cooperative and sustainable in their self-organizing manner.

Is realizing and practicing this kind of resilience possible? The next section will briefly outline a new understanding for resilience-thinking and research agenda for further discussion.

### **Reclaiming resilience back: Capabilities, “good life,” and self-reflection**

So, is resilience as self-governance—that is, “where governance is no longer a matter of intervening” (Chandler, 2014, p. 27)—possible in a policy world of embedded external-internal duality, faced with the increasing “uncontrollability” and the growing complexity of a rapidly changing environment? For adaptive governance predicated on resilience as self-organization to occur, it would require a shift from understanding resilience just as a system’s quality, to its becoming an analytic of governance embracing complexity in full. This is where it becomes a challenge for implementation.

For a policy world to embrace “self-governance” as resilience-building of local communities would mean, first, a paradigmatic shift beyond instrumental security-predicated governance operating in a “world amenable to cause-and-effect understandings of policy-making” (Chandler, 2014, p. 58). As Bendiek, for example, argues (2017, p. 28), “it is difficult to overlook the fact that ‘Europe of security’ and the concept of resilience have a tense relationship.” This is primarily due to how external governance has been intended to date in a western policy world—to secure the “unstable outside” using where possible, existing problem-solving technologies of security governance, delivered via dissemination of best practice and security measures to bring “the outside” in line with the international “normal.”<sup>1</sup> This ought to change, if resilience-thinking were to be properly applied,

with a view of allowing the emergence of many different governing domains, and also the need to bring them to a “shared normal” under a renewed global governance architecture. This thinking clearly challenges the foundations of International Relations as a discipline for how “the global” should be understood and studied today.

Second, and relatedly, embracing full-fledged resilience would also entail rejecting some tenets of today’s EU resilience-thinking strategy—most notably, the idea of engineering and managing resilience *outside-in*, by way of offering external solutions to internal problems for communities, turning them into dependable subjectivities and consumers of the western modes of “good governance,” as neoliberal thinking would suggest. Resilience-thinking has to offer a different kind of governing analytic, to start with the communities, and work their way “inside-out” when seeking assistance and advice as necessary, thus building up “the global” through “the local” and this way, making “the global” system far more connected, responsive and agile to the needs of the local communities.

Despite the limitations of the current policy and scholarly debates, there is a silver-lining for possible improvement in the use of resilience-thinking as a new (EU) governing regime. Notably, the EU in contrast to its cumbersome architecture, is surprisingly agile and reflective about its engagement with “the outside,” which perhaps led it to conceiving of resilience as a new governing strategy after a series of less successful attempts to develop traction in the wider neighborhood (Schumacher, Marchetti, & Demmelhuber, 2018). Furthermore, the EU seems to have an intuitive understanding of the important role of communities, as opposed to that of the state and society, for resilience-building. This was attested to by the 2017 Resilience Strategy (European Commission, 2017a) which explicitly differentiated “community” from any other agency to underline the relevance of local ownership (and just the embeddedness of policies in national programs) for achieving the “good life.” What needs to happen next is to develop an understanding of how to enable communal resilience-building, along with a joined-up thinking across different policies, institutions and governing spaces, to ensure that as an analytic of governance, resilience is no longer dependable on external interventions, and instead can draw on them as necessary, when initiating change.

This thinking is supported by a critical turn in EU resilience governance studies—a turn to “the local,” briefly outlined in the introduction.<sup>2</sup> This type of governance infers working through, or more pertinently, with communities: Through recognizing the capacities and capabilities that already exist and could be encouraged. It is about an ontological understanding of our natural abilities to cooperate with each other and construct communities of shared interest, through constantly striving for the “common good.” In this sense, governance based on resilience, needs to be reframed in order to



recognize the creative and self-ordering power of life itself, as expressed by the Anthropocene (Chandler, 2019).

Without delving too much into detail, the Anthropocene has the advantage of breaking silos and external-internal boundaries in delivering governance for human empowerment. The Anthropocene imaginary “forces humans to confront the limits of knowledge” and promises “new ways of being and knowing without separations and cuts dependent on linear spatial and temporal conceptions of the world” (Grove & Chandler, 2016, p. 6). Governing in the Anthropocene “never starts a process with goals or aims at transformation, and instead is reactive and responsive rather than a matter of initiation” (Grove & Chandler, 2016, p. 7) orchestrated externally. Yet, the Anthropocene comes with its caveats. One relates to its path-dependent reactive temporality of thinking when responding to the challenges without setting the goals for development. Being in a reactive and perhaps more agile mode is one matter; but striving to make choices for the betterment of community is another, and it is this purposefulness, including planning, of collective living, that seems to be missing from the current Anthropocene-thinking. The second challenge is how to get there, when contextualizing resilience in each given case, without knowing “the knowns” or “the unknowns”; and when the boundaries of knowledge are no longer a blockage.

How can we help communities to empower themselves in the face of adversity, unpredictability and complexity, without turning assistance into intervention? If the outside-in governance approach hitherto yielded only limited results, how can an inside-out resilience-building work better and become more sustainable as alternative analytic of governing?

Developing capabilities, as Sen (1985; see also Nussbaum, 2013) for example argues, could be a certain way forward. What determines communal well-being then is not so much the provision of utilities (or institutional infrastructures), nor that of primary goods that would drive the levels of welfare up. Instead, it should be about developing “the capabilities to choose a life one has reason to value” (Sen as cited in Stewart & Deveulin, 2002, p. 61). Based on Aristotle’s thinking, Sen argued that development was about providing conditions to facilitate people’s ability to lead flourishing lives. These conditions he defined as *capabilities*—as the ability to choose “what people may choose to be, or do,” over their *functionings*—that is, “what people actually are or do” (Stewart & Deveulin, 2002, p. 62). This process requires reflection, learning and public discussion “that need to be solved within the society affected and not by outsiders” (Stewart & Deveulin, 2002, p. 64). At the heart of this process is the aspiration for “the common good”: “The common good is the *good human life* of the multitude of persons; it is their communion in good life; it is therefore common to the whole and to the parts, on which it flows back and who must all benefit from it” (Maritain as cited in Deneulin, 2006, p. 55).



Each community would have an inner sense of what is invariably good for them as a collective, to be underpinned by respective primary institutions and governance structures in search for congruence between values and tradition, on the one hand, and achieving the ideational “Significant We” (Flockhart, 2006), on the other. Many communities have tacit words to depict this sense of communal becoming—Arabic term “al-harak,” referring, as Sadiki argues (2016, p. 338) to the “peoplehood” to encapsulate *their* vision for a better life, *agaciro* in African (Rutazibwa, 2014), “hygge” in Danish, *tutyashya* in Belarusian, or *mahalla* in Kazakh. It implies, as Rutazibwa argues, people’s “understanding that [they] are the agents of [their] own change” (2014, p. 5), a particular philosophy of life that draws on self-reliance and the inner knowledge of the people of what they are, and what they want to be, and could serve as a premise for resilience governance thinking.

Growing capabilities—that is, developing an understanding of choice, a sense of identity and purposefulness of “good life”—does not come naturally in the world of resilience. It cannot be engineered from outside or inculcated as an expectation of conduct as neo-liberal governance may suggest. It has to come through experience, trial, and even failure, this is where the EU once again seems to have some intuitive understanding of the process but fails to put it to practice.

The EU programming of capacity-development measures as part of a relatively new European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) for the Eastern Partnership countries, under a single support framework, serves as a testimony to its delimiting creativity, captured by neoliberal practices. In particular, the EU when planning resilience support for the neighbors, seems to go by the book when identifying “strategic objectives,” “sectors for intervention” and “financial instruments,” specific for each partner-country—all set with reference to a generic frame of programmatic interventions. And yet, the same ENI suddenly comes to offer new tools of assistance—a *complementary support* “in favour of civil society” and “for capacity development and institution-building.” The elements of surprise here include first, that these are *additional* measures to the priority commitments derived from and fixed by the EU agreements and sector interventions; and second, they aim to “cover” and to deal with “emergent challenges including, but not limited to, those covered under priority sectors” (European Commission, 2017b; see also European Commission, 2013). These two measures seem to speak the language of resilience proper, and imply an opportunity for the local communities to go creative about tackling their respective problems, and act in accordance with the resilient analytic of governance—that is, to be their own agents of choice in accordance with their needs and vision. This innovation in the ENI programming however is relatively new, and is conceived by the European Commission (2017b, 2013) as “complementary,” meaning that in

terms of the budget it would receive no more than 5% of financial support; while leaving the remaining 95% for the pre-set planning and target management. At the same time, while meager, it still points in the right direction—of enabling communities to adapt to emergent challenges and seek their own efficient ways to respond to them, inside-out, while developing a better grasp of their own potential.

This inherent understanding cannot come without self-reflection as to what we are as a community, and *self-reference*. The latter is particularly important to operationalizing resilience-thinking. As Luhmann notes (1990): “the unity of the system is the self-reference of the system, and its change will always require operating within, not against, ‘the system’” (p. 183). This self-referential system can absorb planning (and assistance) despite its naturally disruptive qualities (p. 180); the focus of these systems is not “on control but autonomy, not on static but dynamic stability, not on planning but evolution” (p. 187). Hence the importance of working with communities “inside-out” rather than from the external perspective, in engineering their adaptation to and working around a problem at source, with some external assistance as necessary.

This is where EU resilience-thinking as initially conceived by the EUGS and concretized by the EU strategic approach to resilience (European Commission, 2017a) has so much arresting potentiality: aiming to empower the local communities, enable them to grow their strength and capacity to achieve a sense of the “good life” while the EU would walk along as a mentor and a partner to act as necessary. However, adopting resilience as analytic of governance requires change in how the EU and other international institutions would come to practise it. Can we rely on the everyday, the local and the peoplehood, to “own” their challenges, and more importantly, to know how to overcome them, in becoming what they want to be and so to protect their *agaciro*, *hygge*, or *al-harak*?

This is still an open-ended question. Intuitively, as Chandler points out (2015, p. 38), resilience governance presumes a process of “construction or recognition of ‘negotiated moral communities’ capable of self-organizing in relation to the shared world.” At the same time, how are we to assist with supporting these “negotiated moral communities,” especially in a developing world, when it is exposed to daily hardship and dictators’ brutality, perpetual corruption and withering hopes for the “good life”? How do we exercise the kind of resilience as a non-intervening analytic of governance to avoid the entrapments of compliance and dependency?

Kaufmann (2013, 2017) suggests placing more emphasis on the study of self-organization, as part of the wider network system of governance. This kind of governance might be best described as “guided self-organization,” which relies on a networked system of shared interests and rules, where change starts with the local, while “the global” renders it its support and

then changes itself through a continuing process of adaptation and reflectivity. In this context, the resilience of the peoplehood, as Chandler (2014) argues, “removes the external intervener from external intervention and with this makes local capacities, practices, and understandings the means and the ends of intervention” (p. 48). This, however, requires an enduring process of change and adaptation, and we seem to be only at the very beginning of responding to it.

## Conclusion

Owing to its growing popularity as well as policy and scholarly confusion, this article has insisted on examining resilience, not as a quality of a system, or a policy tool introduced by the EUGS in 2016, but rather, more broadly, as a new *analytic of governance*. To better understand resilience and fully utilize its potential, which definitions and practices are far from unifying today, it is important to view it as a process of self-referential capacity-development premised on a community’s sense of “good life” and articulated through the mechanisms of self-governance. While this meaning is intuitive, there are no yet easy ways of putting resilience to practice, and this article has exposed tensions and misperceptions of resilience both in the policy and scholarly worlds.

While policy-makers, especially in the EU, have been keen to adopt resilience-thinking as a “turn to the local,” by shifting the focus and responsibility onto external communities, and acting as “mentors” and “partners” along the way, its implementation and practice have already caused much controversy. In particular, the same tried-and-tested governing technologies prioritizing external intervention over developing resilience *inside-out*, tend to prevail. Furthermore, given the increasing unpredictability of the outside and a strong desire of major donors to stay in control of their governing practices in an anticipation of results, resilience-thinking has become enmeshed in security priorities of the donors, rather than “the local needs” of the recipients.

Equally, scholars find themselves in a similar state of confusion, often seeing resilience either as papering over the cracks, or simply as an extension of neo-liberal governmentality, which either way tend to deny agency to “the local.” An emergent critical thinking, as part of the Anthropocene, challenges these “modernist technologies,” and yet, it struggles to reconcile the potentiality of resilience with the persistent external-internal duality of the established governing mentality and architecture.

To prevent resilience from losing its arresting potential, this article insisted on first, understanding resilience as a long-term self-organizing process of capability-development rather than just a system’s quality(ies) needed for survival. Second, as self-referential governance, resilience cannot be engineered externally, and can only be internally nurtured with external assistance as

and when necessary, drawing on existing resources, and a sense of “good life”—hence, it is crucial to locate resilience with and for “the local.” Finally, reclaiming resilience back by “the local” as a self-organizing and self-referential system, as an organizing principle belonging to communities (not states or donors), is an important and critical step forward for changing our thinking about how we can better govern today and respond to change. Developing best practices for this (new) type of adaptive governance is, however, going to be a challenge, owing to the current delimiting and often circumscribing thinking by both the policy and scholarly worlds. They often find themselves, as the article showed, being trapped in thinking “global” at the expense of and the disconnect with “the local,” under the illusion of “taking control” where none is possible.

For global governance to become more responsive to change, it is critical that “local communities” should be in charge of actualizing their inherent strength and turning their capacities into capabilities to make social systems at all levels more sustainable, and a life worth living for. How to do it through resilience is, however, an enduring but exciting pursuit.

## Notes

1. For more discussion see Tocci’s points (2019) on securitization of resilience.
2. See Korosteleva and Flockhart (in press).

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