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Resilience in EU and international institutions: Redefining local ownership in a new global governance agenda

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ABSTRACT

The article introduces the special issue by exploring the full potential of “resilience” as a governing regime of the European Union and other international institutions. Developing a more comprehensive understanding of the concept is important for three reasons. One, it gives an opportunity to see resilience not only as a quality of a system, but also as a way of thinking, and a process inherent to “the local” that cannot be externally engineered. Two, as an analytic of governance, resilience challenges the current fundamentals of top-down global governance and refocuses it on the role of “the local” and “the person” to make it more responsive to people’s needs. Three, resilience cannot be understood without exploring where and how it is constituted—that is, without unpacking “the local” ordering domain to see how ontological insecurity and a sense of “good life” could contribute to the emergence of more adaptive governing systems.

KEYWORDS Resilience; governance; European Union; adaptation; transformational change

Resilience is one of those terms that seems to have appeared out of nowhere to be present everywhere: from billboards advertising “resilient skincare” to think tank policy talks about the need for more resilient critical infrastructures, and environmentalist calls for resilient planetary eco-systems. Developed in the 1970s as part of the ecological sciences, then predominantly viewed as a quality of a system, a substance, or an individual to survive and quickly recover from distress, resilience has spread rapidly across the social sciences, including financial and economic studies, corporate risk analysis, psychology, urban planning, development, and public health (Bourbeau, 2015; Walker & Cooper, 2011). In the early 2010s, the concept entered the vocabulary of critical security studies (Aradau, 2014; Dunn Cavelty, Kaufmann, & Soby Kristensen,

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2015) and several European Union (EU) foreign policy subfields such as the state- and peace-building processes (de Coning, 2016, 2018; Juncos, 2018), conflict recovery (Aldrich, 2012), crisis- and disaster management (Matyas & Pelling, 2015), and development and humanitarian aid (Duffield, 2012). It also gradually began to make inroads into the world of governance and policy-making (European Commission, 2012; World Bank, 2010; United Kingdom government, 2013), thus necessitating thinking about resilience—not just as a quality of a system, but also as processes of governance in an increasingly complex and dynamic environment at both “the local” and “the global” levels. Indeed, as suggested by Boin, Comfort, and Demchak (2010, p. 1) it appears that everything and everybody could and should be resilient, but also that resilience is a condition that requires considerable effort to establish and maintain, and which raises difficult questions about how it is managed internally and how it might be assisted externally.

Within the international relations and governance literature, debates were initially preoccupied with clarifying the many meanings of resilience as a concept (Boin et al., 2010; Bourbeau, 2018; Rhinard, 2017) and were often focused on how to manage crises and bounce back to optimum functionality in the aftermath of crisis. More recently, resilience is also inextricably linked to neoliberal governance, as a by-product or an instrument of “rolling-out neoliberal governmentality” (Joseph, 2013, p. 51) to maintain the status quo (Duffield, 2012; Evans & Reid, 2013). From this position resilience is increasingly perceived as a local process and as a self-organizing response of communities to adversity. However, so far this latter perception of resilience is voiced only by few (Chandler, 2013; Corry, 2014; Schmidt, 2015) and it appears to be seen as an alternative to the perception of resilience as a quality that is prevalent within policy and crisis management scholarship. In this special issue, we suggest that the two are not incompatible, but merely two sides of the same coin that ought to be studied through their complementarity rather than their differences.

The publication of the *EU Global Security Strategy* in 2016 with its importance attached to resilience led to a marked increase in the scholarly attention to resilience, by focusing on the emerging challenges for maintaining resilience in a world that is more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous—or as Gnad and Burrows (2017) have coined it—the “VUCA world.” In this special issue, we are concerned with how the VUCA world might best be governed through resilience building and how resilience might be understood as *an art of governance* and not just as a quality of a system that can absorb and bounce back from shocks and crises. The question thus arises as to how we can and should govern through resilience today to make complex systems more responsive to the inevitability of change and more congruent with each other in their interaction? These concerns have already prompted a rush of articles on the EU and resilience—many of them by the authors contributing

to this special issue, with several of these articles published in *Contemporary Security Policy*. Yet, while carrying a seemingly unifying message of self-reliance, adaptation, and survival in the face of adversity, resilience has continued to appear “all things to all people” suggesting a need and scope for further conceptualization and development before resilience-thinking can gain a more prominent place as a convincing analytical framework for delivering sustainable governance—both in the policy world and the wider discipline of International Relations (IR).

Our ambition in this special issue is to take the existing debate a step further, first by developing both of the above conceptual understandings in their complementarity—resilience as *a quality* and as *a way of thinking* (an analytic of governance)—in order to clarify their essential nexus in governing complexities and, second, by linking a system’s (or entity’s) quality to the question of how to govern to make our systems at different levels more resilient. In so doing we problematize some of the existing fundamentals of IR by shifting the focus (i) *from the external to the internal*, and (ii) *from “the global” to “the local.”* We argue that in some cases, even the level of the “person” may be the most appropriate focus for understanding resilience as “real people” are agents who act on behalf of collective entities that have their own governance (or ordering) arrangements designed to facilitate the achievement of a life that is suitable for their values and norms. This immediately widens the scope of discussion from what makes an entity/system or a person more adaptable, to how one can best govern to establish a stable equilibrium between “the global” and “the local”; the external and the internal, and become more responsive to the challenges and changes that are inherent in the VUCA world. The inquiry in this special issue, therefore, speaks to far greater issues than the concept and practice of resilience as it goes straight into some of the core issues of IR, such as maintaining order, facilitating the achievement of what is perceived as the “good life” and building sustainable and cooperative governance practices.

Giving resilience a unified meaning has so far turned out to be rather challenging both for the policy and the scholarly worlds: some practitioners, for example, saw “resilience” as sharing knowledge and responsabilizing individuals (Coaffee, 2013) to learn from (initial) failure; others—as a “face-saving exercise” (by shifting responsibility to the recipients) at a time of growing uncertainty, finite resources, and diminishing control (Joseph, 2013). More still would simply discard resilience for its limited currency or practicality (Rhinar, 2017); and only a few may just see it as an act of enablement, a form of self-governance, but would doubt its potency in the Anthropocene (Grove, 2017; Grove & Chandler, 2016). In this special issue, we aim to contribute towards “completing the picture”—both on the conceptual and practical levels—by unpacking the concept to understand how to bring about a more sustainable governing *modus operandi* to exert influence over a rapidly changing environment. In doing so, we look more closely at the

“what,” “why,” “where,” and “how” questions about resilience by asking “What is resilience and how it is practiced?” and “Where and how is it constituted?” We aim to start a broader discussion about how “resilience” may in fact be more than just a buzzword of the times, by constituting a very useful, and increasingly essential, addition to the vocabulary of the broader IR discipline, and as an instrument for more sustainable governing practices. We aim to take “resilience-thinking” to the very core of IR debates about governance, order and change by focusing both on resilience as a “quality” and as an “analytic of governance” to explore largely overlooked connections with the local level of domestic politics and with the conduct of the individual person.

This special issue is a result of ongoing discussions between and beyond the contributors reflecting a development of thought on “resilience” that has been tested and debated at several conferences, specialist workshops, and policy roundtables. At the *conceptual level*, it explicates how and why resilience became a driving leitmotif and practice for many EU policies (Tocci, 2019); and exposes tensions between (EU) governing approaches and resilience as an internal process of communal capacity-building as part of the Anthropocene (Chandler, 2019). *On a more theoretical level*, it examines in some detail the agent-level through “the person” in a focus on the self-governing micro-processes that precede the adaptive action needed to cope with change and hence to remain resilient (Flockhart, 2020); and explores the potency of resilience, not just as a quality of a system, but more so as a process of self-governance, prioritizing “the local” and the *internal* approach to capacity-building, to make (EU) governance more responsive and adaptable to change (Korosteleva, 2019). From more *practical and empirical* perspectives, the volume considers whether resilience is likely to help rejuvenate the EU’s seemingly exhausted practices of state- (Bargues-Pedreny, 2019), and peace-building (Joseph & Juncos, 2019); help overcome the humanitarian-development divide in the case of Syria (Anholt & Sinatti, 2019); and engage with the EU wider neighborhood, to make communities more resilient, and responsible for their own change (Petrova & Delcour, 2019/2020).

This introductory article sets out to unpack the central questions about “resilience” that bring the volume together—the “what, why, where, and how” about resilience. The article moves ahead in three sections with a final section drawing together the contributions to the special issue. In the first section, we delve into conceptual issues by asking a simple question “what is resilience and how it is practiced?” to see if we can offer a more unifying framework for understanding resilience which may help to operationalize its use in practice. Second, derived from this new reading of resilience as an art of self-governance, we will examine “why resilience is, or should be, important for IR today” by looking at the implications for interpreting order and governance in times of change. Third, we will explore “where and how resilience is constituted” by underscoring its essential link with “the local” and “the person” to lend our understanding of more

adaptive governance a new momentum and how resilience is constituted and maintained by looking at some of the agent-based micro-processes that are necessary for undertaking reflection and adaptation in the face of change. In the final section we outline how the contributing articles to the special issue together bring us closer to understanding the issues raised, whilst acknowledging that there is still plenty of scope for further reflection on this intriguing and important concept.

Resilience as a quality and as an analytic of governance

In a special issue with the word “resilience” in the title, it may seem counter-intuitive to start by asking what resilience is. This is especially true as resilience is not at all new as a concept. In fact, the first references to resilience were found as early as the seventeenth century: for example, Thomas Blount described it in his *Glossographia* as “a leaping or skipping back, a rebounding” (1656; as cited in Bourbeau, 2018, p. 26); while Samuel Johnson “spoke about the common resiliency of the mind” (1751; as cited in Bourbeau, 2018, p. 26). It was not however until the mid-twentieth century when resilience, coupled with physical features of the materials and psychological qualities of beings, acquired some of its many meanings by which we identify it today—as an entity’s ability to cope, survive, withstand, re-bounce, and transform under pressure or in crisis. From then on, its application spread across different branches and disciplines of knowledge: from the natural, environmental, and clinical studies to social, security, and political sciences reflected in its many “genealogies” (Bourbeau, 2018; Holling, 1973; Methmann & Oels, 2015; Walker & Cooper, 2011). Still more impressive is the rise of resilience across the policy world involving all major international organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and more recently, the EU Global Security Strategy (European External Action Service, 2016). The concept resilience is clearly present, both explicitly and implicitly, in foreign and security policies including disaster management and preparation, humanitarian aid, peace-building and post-conflict management as well as in development policies. This has opened a new chapter for the study and application of resilience to practice, setting higher expectations for new governance thinking and sustainable development as expressed in the UN Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs) delivered through the lens of resilience as the consequences of the VUCA world become more tangible.

With the increased attention to resilience both in policy and practice, it is important to ensure that there is a coherent unifying understanding of the concept to make full use of its potential. Today’s understanding of resilience, however, is very confused caught between the abstract and the operational

(Matyas & Pelling, 2015), and focusing on varying qualities of an entity—from their robustness and even resistance to change (Capano & Woo, 2017), to quite the opposite—their adaptability, agility, and responsiveness to change (Schmidt, 2015). Not only does this focus on a system's qualities prove too limiting, it is also insufficient if we are to develop more resilient systems of governance to respond better to change. For this to happen, we need to conceive of resilience both as a quality and a way of thinking, as a process inherent to and performed by “real people,” to ensure that we establish not just resilient qualities but also more adaptive systems of governance that connect both “the global” with “the local,” and “the external” with “the internal.”

This raises a series of important questions especially about “what it means to be ‘resilient’” on the individual, community, and state levels; and, whether “resilience” is a good thing, and if so and not least, about “how to assist communities, states, and regional orders to become more resilient in the face of adversity” (Korosteleva, 2018). These are not small questions, because depending on how they are answered by different policy actors, it could take resilience-thinking either in a parochial direction of ever-enhanced security for sustaining the hegemonic liberal order and causing more fragmentation and crises at all levels of ordering domains, or, as this special issue insists, it could take us in a more constructive direction focused on “self-governance” and the link between the global and the local and the link between the external and the internal, to facilitate more connectivity, and cooperative practices in mitigating change, complexity and unpredictability.

We advance two specific meanings of resilience—as a *quality* of an entity such as a system, organization, or even a person, and as an *analytic of governance*—both of which should be viewed as a nexus to make resilience a viable concept of IR that does not only look for a quick-fix solution of a local system, but also globally, by connecting it with “the local” processes, in an attempt to make global governance more resilient. As a quality, resilience is about having the necessary elements in place that can facilitate reflexivity and self-organization, to amplify an entity's inherent strength, awareness of the outside (Anthropocene) and its purpose and ambition. Strength is only a premise, though an important one to give foundations for “living-together” (Deneulin, 2006), and building a world underpinned by the common good and normative aspirations. Research on this topic is particularly well-developed by the Stockholm Resilience Centre (2015) that looks at the practical implications of cultivating resilience qualities across different sectoral policies (landscapes, marine, urban living, etc.) and as part of the wider hyperconnected units of the global socio-ecological system that characterizes the Anthropocene.

Yet, in a world besieged by power struggles, scarcity of resources and ontological crises, exploring resilience as a quality may not be enough, to help us understand the increasingly uncontrollable forces that present a catalogue of challenges and crises and a feeling of ever-present existential danger.

Resilience therefore cannot just be seen as a quality of a system or an individual but has to be conceived as an analytic of governance, or resilience-thinking as Chandler puts it (2014), to enable governing to become more reflective and adaptive. This is a core argument of this volume: As an analytic of governance, resilience ought to be seen as a form of “self-governance,” which places the emphasis on the “local” and the “person” in *inside-out* processes of learning and capacity-building to help a self-referential agency to find its own equilibrium (Luhmann, 1990), through the use of ideational, institutional and material resources, internal ontological security seeking (Flockhart, 2016b) and external assistance as necessary.

Defining resilience in these wider terms—as a self-reliant system of governance—however posits one of the biggest challenges of the resilience-building process—of how to deliver good (externally-driven) governance to systems in distress while prioritizing “the local,” and “working within, not against [or outwith] the system” (Luhmann, 1990, p. 183). How to enable self-governance, without making external intervention embarrassing or implausible (Chandler, 2019)? How to grow strength and capacities into strategic capabilities premised on a qualified understanding of choice and freedom (Sen, 1985)? These capabilities do not come naturally in a dynamic and changing world; neither can they be exported or be externally engineered to encourage resilience-building. Enabling local communities and real people to actualize their own potential in ways *they specify*, and for external governance to support them in this process, remains one of the biggest challenges for the policy world today, and for the scholars—to stop resilience from becoming a ready-made solution for security-predicated measures in the interests of the established power configurations.

Resilience, order, and governance in times of change

The question of why resilience is important for IR takes on a new quality when viewed as an analytic of governance to cope with, and adapt to, change. The presence of change has of course always been an inevitable part of life, but in modern societies, the extent of change is expanding, and the speed of change is accelerating (Beck, 1992), with important implications for not only order and governance, but also with far-reaching emotional consequences for the individual person and for traditional cultures and identities. As suggested by Chandler (2019), our planet has entered the Anthropocene, which is a geological epoch in which all the planet’s ecosystems are marked and impacted by human presence and by (damaging) human activity, causing complex systems to be disrupted with systemic risks and unpredictable consequences to follow. A resilience-thinking approach in IR is important because there is now more than ever a need to investigate how modern societies characterized by accelerating and emergent change in the context

of the Anthropocene can best be governed in the face of disturbances, surprises and uncertainty.

The challenges presented by the VUCA world combined with the realization that human activity is now the determining factor for planetary well-being and that limiting the damage of human activity is likely to be at odds with traditions and aspirations for traditional conceptions of the “good life” makes for an exceedingly complex political puzzle. The reality of the VUCA-world is that people must cope with and adapt to the effects of globalization, shifting power patterns, multiple and paradigmatic changes in technology and science, widespread social and demographic change and of course to the ever-looming prospect of catastrophic climate change. Each of the many ongoing change processes interact in complex and unexpected ways and all have significant impact on our lives as human beings and on our political systems, policy planning and governance structures. The important point is that the on-going change processes undoubtedly cause deep uncertainty and even anxiety that lead to political demands for a return to what is perceived as a better past. Yet, the change processes encountered in the VUCA world are largely processes that cannot realistically be controlled or stopped. The best that can be hoped for is that the worst consequences of the on-going change can be anticipated and mitigated and that governance structures can be reformed and adapted to allow them to meet the challenges and risks that inevitably will occur. In this light, the suggestion that it is possible to “take back control” or to return to a better past to be “great again” appears to be an astounding untruth delivered to fragile people who already feel unsettled and anxious because of the impact and disruption flowing from the VUCA-world.

Unfortunately, those who promise to “take back control” or to “make things great again” do precisely the opposite of what is required for building or maintaining resilience as a quality. Like King Canute refusing to accept the certainty of the rising tide, they refuse to accept the inherent dynamism, complexity and connectedness of the modern world and choose to instead encourage (a futile) resistance to it, which are likely to be followed by yet more frustration and bewilderment. Moreover, the increasing influence of right-wing illiberal nationalist voices working consciously to reinforce a belief that the privileges of the West, gained (or taken) over the past centuries are permanent, even natural, rights, have created a political environment that portrays traditional constituencies in the old industrial democracies as victims, threatened by a variety of actors, who used to be cast as victims, but who are now seen as threats. The result is a new form of politics, that can best be described as “the politics of threat,” which focuses on a range of “others” in a way that is worryingly reminiscent of past political moves to forge a sense of resentment and blame. The politics of threat create a widespread perception that traditional livelihoods and values are under attack

and that the established shared vision for the “good life” has become unattainable. The question that arises is what happens to resilience as governance when threats and contestations appear to undermine the foundations on which the perception of the “good life” rests, and when simple, but ultimately unworkable, solutions are offered to complex problems.

The worry is that the current developments are likely to be detrimental to the necessary conditions for facilitating the self-governing processes to undertake adaptive behavior in a rapidly changing environment that will ensure resilience as a quality. Indeed it is likely that the feeling of resentment and the politics of threat will increase in the coming years as the feelings seem destined to be further fueled by the continuation of shifting power patterns, where rising powers are, understandably enough, claiming a more prominent role in global governance, whilst a number of “spoilers,” which in some instances include Russia, and certainly include “would be powers” such as transnational religious movements challenge the legitimacy of the existing liberal international order and its governance structures. In such an environment, a narrative of failure and the construction of threatening “others” is much easier to sustain than a narrative of success and opportunities for cooperative governance. In this environment, traditional governance processes and institutions can more easily be cast as the cause of the many crises and challenges rather than as essential cooperative fora for meeting the many challenges and responding to the inevitable crises. Therefore, although it is widely acknowledged in resilience-thinking that practical policy-making need to be about enabling real people, real communities and existing governance institutions to adapt to the new emerging reality of a multi-order world (Flockhart, 2016a), in practice policies that seek to maintain the status quo and even to return to ways of the past, are likely to have greater political resonance with disaffected constituencies in domestic politics.

The many changes and challenges arising from the VUCA world are issues that lie within the realms of traditional disciplinary concerns of IR, and which might usefully be addressed through the lens of resilience-thinking. However, IR as a discipline has traditionally engaged in a practice of “line-drawing” between what is regarded as relevant and not relevant for the discipline (Smith, 2004). Under the practice of line-drawing, the traditional IR discipline had for long a tendency to bracket domestic politics and saw the individual (“the local” and “the person”) as outside the realms of IR disciplinary concerns. Although a softening of this stance certainly has taken place, the shadow of the discipline’s origins still means that matters related to the security of states are rated above the (ontological) security of the individual and that issues within the range of so called “low politics” receive less attention than “high politics” issues (Barnett & Sikkink, 2008). However, with the recent rise of right-wing populism and the explicit connection between the economic consequences of globalization and the widespread sentiment of

having been left behind, it seems that the discipline as a whole has accepted that the domestic level, and even “low-politics” issues such as economics and identity can no longer be ignored (Stengel, MacDonald, & Nabers, 2019). Indeed, Brexit and the election of Donald Trump have forcefully shown that “the global” cannot be fully understood without also scrutinizing the processes of self-governance at both “the local” and “the person” levels. In a world, where the impact of globalization and climate change is unequal and where conceptions of what constitutes the “good life” increasingly differ, there is therefore a growing need to forge a new understanding of how the world could and should be governed going forward, to become more responsive, reflexive and cooperative. Resilience may well be a useful conceptual tool for the IR discipline to better understand the emerging challenges to global order—including its domestic and individual sources—and to ponder how to ensure the transition to new and reformed governance structures that can deliver a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable form of global order.

From global order to local ownership and human emotions

The third important theme in this special issue is the question of where and how resilience is constituted. This question brings us to a focus on “the local” and “the person” in terms of the impact of emergent change and external policies on local communities and on real people. Confusingly however, “the local” is both the problem and the answer at source. We depart from the traditional line-drawing in mainstream IR theories by fully integrating “the local,” and “the person” through processes of capacity-building and ontological security seeking as driving forces for self(re)organization. We argue that resilience as a quality cannot be constituted by external agents from above or from outside but is a quality that necessarily has to be constituted through a self-determination and self-governing processes from within, in social domains ranging from the inclusive, almost universal, social domain such as the Global International Society (GIS) and the liberal international order to more exclusive and “gated” local/national communities such as states, organizations and families, right down to the level of the individual.

A recurrent theme in this special issue is the understanding that a major cause of the governance crises today arises from the disconnect between “the global” and “the local,” and the neglect of the role of the latter in shaping and defining the strength and adaptability of global order in the face of adversity and risk. This could be rectified with the introduction of resilience-thinking by prioritizing the needs and the aspirations of “real people” and local communities in a self-referential manner. If well-delivered, it alters the dynamics of governance altogether, whereby external governance becomes not at all about exporting, monitoring, and directing of how better to respond

to the needs of volatile and vulnerable communities. Instead, it decenters to focus on the problem at source and deal with it inside-out and bottom-up, at “the local” and “the person” levels. Governance then becomes less about justifying and legitimizing intervention under the rubrics of “local ownership” and more about supporting local and personal capacity-building and generating freedom of choice-turned-capabilities. This volume redefines the meaning of “the local” by placing emphasis on the “ownership” as a performative act of the local communities, bottom-up and inside-out, and not as something that is exported from outside, interiorized and re-packaged as local.

We acknowledge that tying together “the global” with “the local” and even with “the personal” raises several methodological questions about precisely where resilience is constituted. For this reason, we turn to a Weberian ideal-type approach (Flockhart, 2020) which sees resilience as constituted within ideal type social domains. The advantage is that although ideal-type social domains come in all sorts of sizes, forms, and degrees of inclusion or exclusion, the use of ideal-types, allows us to assume a degree of likeness in the essential constitutive elements of them all. The ideal-type approach posits a social structure based on power patterns, which define and articulate the domain’s identity, norms and its vision of what constitutes the “good life,” which is expressed through the articulation of narratives and the performance of practice in domain specific formal and informal institutions. At the heart of any global or local arrangement, and even within the individual person, is a reflective notion of the “good life” underpinned by normative beliefs and century-long traditions that shaped the ways of life for local communities and individual human beings. Arguably a resilient entity, regardless of whether it is located at the global or the local level, needs to be able to sustain a belief that the achievement of the “good life” is *possible*—if not within the lifetime of the current generation, then at least for future generations. The shared conception of the “good life” in any social domain is therefore a *motivational* way forward for a collective entity, perhaps besieged by hardship, but always striving for the betterment of life. Change and external policies that somehow challenge the belief in the eventual realization of the vision for the “good life” is bound to have a detrimental impact on the resilience (as a quality) of the entity.

So, what makes global and local communities more resilient and responsive to change, and how may this knowledge help to build more sustainable regional and global orders? To answer this question, we posit the need to look at how real people feel about and react to change. This brings us to the personal level and the psychological dispositions of humans as the ultimate site for the constitution of resilience. All communities, whether a state, an organization, a social movement, a family or a professional network are composed of people with feelings, complex emotional processes and psychological dispositions. Unfortunately, and as persuasively argued by

Giddens (1991), the demands of modern life are essentially at odds with basic human dispositions, as the modern world with its accelerating and paradigm-shifting change, require human beings to constantly cope with and adapt to a never-ending stream of disruptive events and processes of change. We are particularly struck by the relevance of the observation that although we live in modern and complex societies, humans have barely changed since the stone age. The paradox now is that while “stone-age (wo)man” is programed to find change deeply unsettling because it upsets the cognitive stability and disrupts deeply embedded practices (habits) and belief systems that are essential for survival in “the state of nature,” the reality is that change is what characterizes the modern world. As a result, what Bourdieu (1998) called the *habitus*—the cultural capital that consists of deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions gained through the accumulated experience of life—is in a constant process of change with severe psychological and emotional consequences that may affect the ability of people to take the kind of adaptive action that is needed for maintaining resilience as a quality. The special issue adds in this way to the resilience-thinking literature by emphasizing and exploring the link between the psychological preconditions for agency as found in the literature on ontological security and the undertaking of the self-governing processes we argue, are essential for the maintenance of resilience, as a quality, and its delivery as an analytic of governance.

More than a buzzword, less than a silver bullet

This special issue asks: “What is resilience and how is it practiced?” “why is it so important?” and “where and how is it constituted?” Although it would be presumptuous of us to claim that we provide “the answers” to these big questions, the contributions to this special issue nudge us towards a better understanding of resilience and they show why resilience should be embraced by the IR discipline as a tool for understanding the many different challenges facing the EU and the wider global international society as a part of the new global governance agenda. Although the contributors to this special issue were not asked to consider the importance of resilience for the IR discipline, the articles making up this special issue, nevertheless show the usefulness and potential of the concept, not just for EU-related research, but indeed for the wider IR discipline at a time where the realities of living in a VUCA world appears to challenge many established disciplinary practices and assumptions. However, although the articles that follow converge around the usefulness of resilience as a concept, they also warn us of the limitations of resilience-thinking and the impossibility of ever fully claiming to have achieved it.

The contributions in this special issue explore resilience from both a practitioner, and a theoretical/conceptual perspective and apply resilience-thinking to empirical cases of policy-making to understand how the nexus

between resilience as a quality and as a governance analytic could be sustained. The special issue starts with articles by two of the most prominent voices within the IR discipline on resilience: Tocci (2019), whose role as both a scholar and a practitioner and as the main voice in the formulation of the EU Global Strategy arguably led to the spike in resilience-related articles in EU studies, and Chandler (2019), who has been the most influential IR scholar on theorizing resilience as a governing framework that goes beyond the constraints of neoliberal thinking to enable “the local.” The two opening articles by Tocci and Chandler provide a broad background of the development of resilience as both a theoretical and practical policy concept, and they each address what resilience is and where and how resilience is practiced and assess its potential for EU and global governance studies and policy. However, despite their similar understandings of the essence of resilience, Tocci and Chandler arrive at very different perspectives for the future. Tocci (2019) sees the possibility of a future where resilience lives on to give rise to a broader, and possibly a newer, rules-based international system emphasizing the possibilities of resilience for overcoming operational silos and dividing lines between the internal and external, the secure and the vulnerable as well as the global and the local. The optimism of Tocci is however, countered by Chandler’s much more negative assessment of the use of resilience as governance. Chandler (2019) argues that under the auspices of the Anthropocene, the assumptions and goals of resilience become problematized because the Anthropocene is held to close off the possibility of the spatial or temporal displacement of problems because attempts to resolve problems through focusing upon enabling and capacity-building inevitably speed up the process of resource depletion and hasten the occurrence of tipping points in climate change.

A more optimistic, though still concerned, perspective is presented in the next two contributions by Flockhart (2020) and Korosteleva (2019), as they move on to engage in applied theorizing of resilience, primarily as an analytic of governance with a focus on “where and how” resilience is constituted. In Flockhart’s case the empirical focus is on the liberal international order as an example of a site where resilience is constituted through a myriad of self-governing processes conducted by individual agents, who are always engaged in seeking ontological security. In Korosteleva’s case, the focus is also on the question of “how and where” resilience takes place, with “the where” conceptualized as “the local,” as not only a recipient of “resilience promoting policies” but also as a tool for “self-governance.” The remaining articles by Joseph and Juncos (2019), Bargues-Pedreny (2019), Anholt and Sinatti (2019), and Petrova and Delcour (2019/2020) each turn to empirical investigations of policy applications to the practice of a resilience-thinking perspective. Each of the empirical contributions address the “what resilience is and how it is practiced” question, highlighting different aspects and tensions

arising from facilitating resilience as a quality and realizing it as an analytic of governance applied to the peace-building processes (Bargues-Pedreny, 2019; Joseph & Juncos, 2019), humanitarian-development policies (Anholt & Sinatti, 2019) and the neighborhood policy in the east (Petrova & Delcour, 2019/2020).

What is resilience and how is it practiced?

All the contributing articles address the question “what is resilience?,” as most start out by offering their understanding of the concept. In many ways this is the “easiest” question addressed by the special issue as once the question of the nature of resilience is (somewhat) settled, the more difficult question is how to use resilience as a governing strategy. Perhaps not surprising, Tocci (2019) delivers a clearly articulated perception of what resilience is and why it was originally seen as useful for the EU. Curiously part of the attraction of the term was precisely its ambivalence and the different prevailing perceptions of its meaning that made resilience so attractive as a policy tool. Tocci certainly delivers the most optimistic view of how thinking in resilience terms may provide a way towards innovation in both practice and theory and her focus on the intersection between policy and theory highlights the possibilities afforded by ever closer links between the academy and the “real world” of practical policy, which leads her to an optimistic assessment that resilience provides a new momentum to EU governance to allow for a “more joined-up approach” across policies, actors and institutions, including by connecting European values and principles (“principled pragmatism”) with the wider world and policy domains.

Korosteleva (2019), also provides a clear perception of what resilience is, but she argues that part of the problem of arriving at a clear understanding comes from what Tocci sees as a benefit—the way resilience is presently understood by many policy actors, scholars and practitioners, as something that is primarily about finding new ways to externalize and legitimize conventional power technologies in an attempt to create dependable autonomies to reduce risk and vulnerabilities, without paying much heed to “the local” and understanding how “resilience” as a quality really works. This is indeed a view that is echoed in several of the empirical investigations. For example, Joseph and Juncos (2019) draw our attention to the necessity of rethinking intervention into complex social and political environments to more fully accept that some, probably most, problems cannot be fully resolved in the way that has hitherto been assumed within liberal peace-thinking. Although Joseph and Juncos see a positive potential in using resilience-focused governance strategies, they highlight some of the tensions in the EU’s resilience approaches such as the tension, indeed contradiction, between the EU’s adherence to principled pragmatism and the acknowledgement of the importance of

systemic complexity and non-linearity. They conclude that the EU's idea of, and approach to, resilience in peacebuilding remains somewhat muffled and that the potential contribution of resilience to peacebuilding therefore remains unfulfilled at the EU level.

A similar concern about the tension between what resilience is thought to be and how it is put into practice within the area of peacebuilding/intervention is the theme of the contribution by Bargues-Pedreny (2019), who examines the shift away from liberal peace in both critical (theoretical) understandings and resilience policy approaches and highlights that resilience policy programs and critical understandings are similarly enthused by the feeling that "peace is always more." The article connects peacebuilding and resilience by conceptualizing resilience as open-ended and reflexive programs of governance for less intrusive and locally owned forms of state-building. Bargues argues that resilience programs can enable a more context specific engagement with areas of limited statehood and that international interventions require ever more locally-sensitive initiatives and technologies to assist practitioners to make sense of high volumes of information and accurate representations of space. However, the article cautions that conceiving peace as "lacking" presupposes that resilience policy approaches are permanently in the wrong and reinforces a pervasive skepticism suggesting that resilience as an idea can neither be properly implemented or achieved.

Anholt and Sinatti's (2019) article also considers what resilience is and how it is practiced by the EU in its governance shift to resilience-thinking. They focus on the EU's recourse to resilience through its proclaimed strategy for "building resilience" in refugee-hosting states. Anholt and Sinatti demonstrate how the EU has turned "building resilience" (as a quality) into a cost-effective (rather than a governing) way to reduce needs and vulnerabilities and enhance local ownership as a way of achieving policy coherence across different policy domains whilst at the same time achieving policy- and security objectives, ultimately aimed at limiting migration. The authors argue that in practice the EU's understanding of resilience as a quality that can be generated outside-in, translates into a focus on national economic growth and refugees' economic self-sufficiency, thus primarily responding to the policy priorities of the EU. They conclude that resilience for the EU is still more about "promoting a particular form of governance" based on EU strategic security interests, which see resilience-building as a refugee containment strategy, rather than as a concept and a practice locally owned.

The question of what resilience is and how it is practiced is also addressed by Petrova and Delcour (2019/2020), who focus on the practice of resilience as both a quality and as an analytic in the case of the eastern neighborhood. Notably, the authors argue that while resilience as a strategy to cultivate more self-reliant communities may be particularly suited for the currently volatile, crisis-prone and contested environment in the wider neighborhood,

there is little evidence to show that this new narrative in EU thinking effectively translates into more innovative and adaptive practices of governance on the ground. Petrova and Delcour, through their empirical analysis of sectoral priority areas of trade, mobility and good governance, expose tensions between the EU's broader understanding of resilience and local ownership as generated by local agency, and the narrower operationalization of these concepts in practice. These tensions expose a gap in EU thinking and policy practices, being primarily a derivative of the embedded path-dependency and the unaltered top-down nature of EU governance. As the authors conclude, EU *modus operandi* in the eastern neighborhood has so far failed to embrace resilience as a new guiding principle to enable local communities to take charge of their future, premised on essentially local notions of the “good life.”

The impression left by the empirically based contributions on what resilience is and how it is practiced by the EU, show not only a lingering tension between declarations of what resilience is, but also in how it ought to and is actually practiced. Moreover, the rather critical discussions of EU resilience-based policies in the empirical chapters seem at odds with Tocci's (2019) more positive policy assessment and insistence that resilience never was a cunning ploy to manage populations from afar. The gap between the EU “inside view” and the “outside” empirical contributions is however narrowed as Tocci concedes that the political developments since the publication of the EU Global Strategy has necessitated that the EU shifts focus from facilitating resilience externally to a greater focus on forging internal resilience and underpinning the resilience of the multilateral system.

Where and how is resilience constituted?

Where the empirical chapters of the volume primarily are concerned with how resilience strategies are *practiced*, we also ask “where and how” resilience is *constituted*. This is a question that is addressed conceptually, empirically and theoretically in the articles by Tocci (2019), Chandler (2019), Korosteleva (2019), and Flockhart (2020). Each of these contributions focus in different ways on where and how resilience is constituted, and on what impediments might lie in the way of achieving resilience both as a quality and as a self-governance strategy. A common theme among these articles is the issue of agency, as resilience necessarily must be forged by real people who are able to activate their agency to undertake action when the situation so requires—either in their capacity as private individuals who can vote and voice their opinions, or in their capacity as individuals who act on behalf of a variety of organizational/social entities such as states, local communities, global—even planetary settings such as the Anthropocene, international organizations such as the EU, or composite entities such as the liberal international order. The

bewildering array of social settings where resilience is constituted is sought to be simplified by Flockhart (2020), who sets up an ideal-type social domain as a basic conceptual representation of the sites where resilience is constituted through what she argues are universally applicable self-governance processes designed to at all times maintain ontological security through stable and legitimate power and identity patterns, a strong and sense-making narrative and appropriate formal and informal institutions. In the article in this special issue, Flockhart (2020) addresses the question of *how* resilience is forged within ideal-type social domains by engaging with the literature on ontological security to ask what it is that makes agents sometimes unable or unwilling to undertake the necessary adaptive action in the face of change and other external influences. The article demonstrates a plausible link between resilience and ontological security, as ontological security appears to be a pre-condition for agents' ability to invoke their agency in the self-governing processes that are believed to be essential for resilience.

The use of an ideal-type social domain as the site for the constitution of resilience, arguably allows for comparison between different self-governing processes and for zooming in on specific aspects of the process, which appears a suitable next step in the process towards a more general understanding of the characteristics of, and conditions for, successful resilience-building. Such an approach is also undertaken by Korosteleva (2019), who revisits the site of resilience by insisting on bringing the individual and "local" communities back to the center of discussion. Korosteleva argues that generating resilience externally is not a sustainable way forward, delimited by the denial of agency to "the local," and in this way, negating the very meaning and potentiality of resilience as a "self-referential" social system that thrives on its deviations in search for its own equilibrium (Luhmann, 1990). Korosteleva explores the tensions in the current (neo-liberal) thinking and policy practices, to argue that the best use of resilience would come with its understanding as a self-governing social system—that is, "where governance is no longer a matter of intervening" (Chandler, 2014, p. 27). This doubtlessly would enable communities to take ownership of their capabilities in the pursuit of the "good life" at every level—from the local to the global, essential for making future governance more responsive to change and better attuned to the needs and aspirations of the people.

The conceptual contributions by Korosteleva (2019), Flockhart (2020) and to some extent also Tocci (2019/2020), are inspired by Chandler's resilience-thinking, even though they each reject what Chandler sees as an unbreakable link between resilience and a neoliberal agenda for maintaining the status quo. Moreover, Chandler's (2019) identification as "the where" as the Anthropocene, brings him to the disheartening conclusion that in the Anthropocene, crises cannot be viewed as just another problem to be "solved" or "bounced-back" from thorough ever more sophisticated and

technology-based capacity-building and modernization. For Chandler, modernity is therefore not only a false promise of salvation but is a process that inevitably will bring us closer to the brink of destruction (Latour, 2013; Stengers, 2015; Tsing, 2015). The problem is that resilience assumes that problems are “external” and can be met with policy solutions to maintain and enable our existing modes of being in the face of shocks and perturbations. However, as there can be no “external” in the Anthropocene, resilience represents an additional undermining of planetary systems and represents therefore a fight with the Anthropocene rather than the necessary starting point to accept its limiting conditions. Resilience, as something that ultimately takes place in the Anthropocene cannot therefore be the hoped for “silver bullet” for enabling capacity building and sustainable governance in local domains.

The next step for resilience-thinking in EU studies and IR

The contributing articles in this special issue certainly highlight the potential afforded by a greater emphasis on resilience as both a quality and as an analytic of governance, but they also display the difficulty of arriving at “answers” about how to proceed and that even relative agreement on “what resilience is” does not lead to agreement about where and how resilience is constituted and practiced, and if, and if so why, resilience is important. The empirical chapters signpost possibilities for a wider application of resilience-based studies and they clearly indicate many of the tensions and contradictions between resilience as a policy tool and an analytic of governance. To be fair, the empirical chapters in this special issue represent only a small fraction of the many possible substantial issues that could have been addressed, but this only suggests the possibilities for further exploring the benefits and limitations of resilience thinking in many issue areas that are directly relevant to IR more broadly. Moreover, from a policy and practical perspectives, the empirical chapters demonstrate the difficulties in establishing resilience strategies that can provide the foundations for policy making and point to how tensions abound when turning to the implementation of resilience as a governing *modus operandi* because “old habits die hard,” and because when shifting away from understanding resilience as a quality to be generated through capacity-building to it becoming an analytic of governance to enable the growths of resilient systems from within, the question of *how* to do so in practice, has not yet been answered.

As is often the case, we must acknowledge that it is often easier to ask the questions than to provide the answers. Perhaps the most we can hope to achieve in a special issue such as this is to contribute to illuminating the scope of the concept, its tensions and further needs for analysis. We hope that together the contributions can move the field towards more productive, specific and useful ways to not only study resilience, but also how to use the

concept, as both a quality and an analytic of self-governance processes, for improving our understanding of a broad range of issues that are of key importance in the IR discipline. Moreover, whilst we are not suggesting that all resilience research must utilize both forms of resilience explored in this introduction, we hope that the special issue will contribute to overcoming the existing divide between research that is focused on functional crisis management through maintaining the practical capabilities necessary for entities and systems to be prepared for crises and to be able to bounce back after disruptive events, and research that sees resilience as a form of (self)governance, which, as suggested by some authors in this special issue, undoubtedly could be (ab)used as a tool for sustaining neoliberal practices, but which might also be useful for qualifying global attempts to build sustainable and cooperative governance in local systems and policy domains.¹

This special issue is only the beginning of a long journey of discovering resilience as a quality and as an analytic of governance and to make it useful and relevant for contemporary debates about many important issues of adaptation and survival, which are at the heart of EU studies and the broader IR discipline. The articles in this volume all show that resilience is an essential aspect of “real” people’s lives both as a quality of an entity and as an analytic of (self)-governance from the individual person, to states, organizations, policy domains right up to the Global International Society. As such, resilience-thinking reaches into not only issues related to the EU and a particular neoliberal agenda for policy-making, but it encompasses much wider processes related to governance, order and change at a time where both local and global governance structures are in flux and where the international system appears to be in a process of transformation. Moreover, by emphasizing the connectivity between the local and the global and by specifying that all entities no matter where they are located, are subject to the same conditions for being and becoming resilient, we suggest that resilience as an analytic of governance can contribute to a better understanding of our increasingly complex and connected world (European External Action Service, 2016). We hope to show that resilience is more than simply being able to bounce back after a crisis, and that once this is accepted, that the concept holds a considerable potential for drawing together seemingly distant issue areas and processes of change and adaptation. This special issue therefore inaugurates a quest for a better understanding of governance, order and change—by linking the global with the local and by bridging the gap between theory and practice. We hope thereby to generate the kind of debate that is surely needed to see us through to a more sustainable and resilient future.

Note

1. We are grateful the reviewers for this article for pointing this out.

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