

Call for Papers

Political Action, Resilience and Solidarity

An inter-disciplinary, inter-institutional workshop

Event organisers:

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In association with:

- Centre of Integrated Research in Risk and Resilience, King's College London.
- Research Centre in International Relations, Department of War Studies, King's College London.
- Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance, The Open University
- Centre for the Study of Democracy, Westminster University.

Location: King's College London.

Thursday the 18th and Friday the 19th of September 2014

The concept of resilience first appeared as a means to articulate how complex ecosystems are able to meet the challenges of radically shifting environmental conditions whilst retaining their key functionalities. Thinking in terms of resilience is deemed to offer an advance on previous approaches to risk-management in that it is concerned with fostering the adaptive capacities that are innate to any system. Inasmuch as resilience allows a system, community or agent's inherent openness to the unexpected to become a source of beneficiary adaptation, it has garnered attention in a wide number of fields, from socio-ecological systems to psychology, disaster risk management, urban and national infrastructure design, post-conflict development and public health planning. Across these fields, the concept of resilience increasingly frames the possibility of spaces for policy action, offering a heuristic device under which the defining problems of our era of supposedly unalloyed uncertainty and insecurity can be addressed.

Contemporary debates around resilience have centred on the political content of the concept. Whereas in socio-ecological literatures, the concept has retained a broadly positive

connotation, as a means to conceptualise sustainable resource management, in its wider usage, resilience is subject to critique as informing a conservative, indeed pacifying rationality of governance ("resilience from above"). Resilience seems to bypass any suggestion that extant (social, economic, political and ecological) circumstances might be subjected to a wider or structural critique.

In this context, resilience is often contrasted with explicitly political concepts like solidarity. Whereas resilience seems to suggest adaptation and immunisation in the face of complex unalterable forces, solidarity offers a means to challenge and alter extant conditions. By contrast with resilience, however, the concept of solidarity suffers from significant under-theorisation in contemporary literatures. What does it mean to "act in solidarity" with something or someone, and how is this related to the performance of political subjectivity or citizenship? What does it mean for activists in Tahrir Square to stand in solidarity with government employees in Madison? We suspect that the concept must be more than just an affective unification of a group of otherwise disparate actors. Indeed, rather than being diametrically opposed concepts, solidarity seems a precondition for community resilience ("resilience from below"). In this sense, perhaps it is at the intersection of solidarity and resilience that effective political action can occur.

Equally important is the intersection between resilience and democratic citizenship. Resilience often refers to policies that aim at making citizens able to cope with sudden changes in their life through, among other methods, taking therapeutic measures; informing them what to do in times of disaster; and supporting critical infrastructure so important activities can continue. Yet, this understanding of resilience eschews the idea that coping with depletion of rights requires new rights claims. Rights to housing, care, political participation, and so on, are mostly ignored. Resilience policies become in their effects 'managerial'. They tell citizens what to do and they avoid the fundamental democratic questions about what social, economic and political rights and lives citizens demand. At this intersection between rights claims and resilience, resilience from below -- what people do in response to crises and precarity -- attains democratic political rather than managerial significance.

This collaborative inter-institutional and interdisciplinary workshop is concerned to examine and problematize the distinct genealogies and interaction of the concepts of Resilience, Solidarity, and democratic citizenship with particular focus on the problem of political action or agency. It aims to explore the ways in which community resilience may be associated or contrasted with the mechanisms underpinning social and political solidarity and with new rights claims. A number of related concepts, such as identity, acts of citizenship and political agency, are clearly of relevance in this context. As such, we invite paper abstracts of no more than 300 words that speak to the workshop theme in the broadest sense. Possible

areas for discussion include:

Activism

Affect

Citizenship

Conflict and post-conflict reconstruction

Development

Disasters

Ethics

Group psychology

Identity politics

Public health

Political theory/philosophy

Radical Democracy

Revolutionary politics

Social Movements

Socio-ecological systems

Transformative communities

Urban Infrastructure

Please send paper abstracts by June 20th to nicholas.michelsen@kcl.ac.uk