


## Dialogue, Debate, and Discussion

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### Renaissance of Resilience: A Buzzword or a New Ideal?

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The COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented public health crisis in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, demonstrates how risks are unequally distributed among different socio-economic groups, how bureaucratic systems can be ineffectively adapting to the fast-paced changing dynamics, and how multi-level governance frameworks may lack coordination between national and regional sectors. The pandemic does not cause the unjust prerogatives to quarantine, testing kits, and even potential vaccines. The injustice, ineffectiveness, and a lack of coordination existed before the pandemic and are more noticeably presented by this public health disaster. No hazards are ‘natural’. The coronavirus may originate from nature, but the adverse effects are mostly generated and magnified by current socioeconomic orders.

The elderly (Armitage & Nellums, 2020), gender-based violence victims (Chandan et al., 2020), people living with disabilities (Pereira-Sanchez et al., 2020), immigrants (Keller & Wagner, 2020), and children in poverty (Lancker & Parolin, 2020) are more exposed to the increased morbidity and mortality. Globally, low-income and middle-income countries are at higher risks of the pandemic’s negative effects, worsening existing structural inequalities, such as food security (Health, 2020; Hopman, Allegranzi, & Mehtar, 2020; Kelley et al., 2020).

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, when uncertainty becomes the new normal, the notion of resilience has frequently been mentioned among researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners from various fields, including public health, urban planning, emergency management, and economics. Is such renaissance of resilience useful in the face of the pandemic?

### ANOTHER BUZZWORD OR THE NEW INSIGHT?

In the past few decades, there have been incoherent definitions, interpretations, and analytical models proposed to understand, apply, and assess the notion of resilience and its related concepts (Béné et al., 2018; Berke, Malecha, & Cooper,

2019; Chuang et al., 2018; Pizzo, 2015). The majority of such efforts focus on quantifying indicators to technically guide practitioners and policymakers to achieve resilience as a goal, paying insufficient attention to the complexity, informality, and unpredictability of social dynamics; these linear quantitative approaches also fail to explore the core value of resilience, including justice and inclusiveness (Fainstein, 2018; Weichselgartner & Kelman, 2015; Wisner, 2016). Critical scholars object to the notion of a faster or stronger rebound as the value of resilience in the aftermath of disturbance (Coaffee & Clarke, 2017; Davoudi, 2012). For example, facing the current pandemic, the engineering notion of resilience, quickly 'returning to normal', is problematic; ongoing changes have instead become the new normal.

Meanwhile, the disturbance can be an opportunity to address systematic weaknesses and create innovative solutions (Folke, 2006). Specifically, the potential of transformation, from individuals to transnational organizations, is not fully realized when the political aspect of resilience is mostly ignored (Elmqvist et al., 2019; Tschakert, van Oort, St Clair, & LaMadrid, 2013). Under this light, resilience would not be truly achieved when financial, political, and social resources are concentrated on so-called risk reduction without recognizing that risks have been disproportionately generated through structural inequalities.

Thus, the transformative notion of resilience systematically emphasizes the capacity for proactive learning, the ability to self-correct and innovate, and adaptability to change in anticipating uncertain and complex future (Allen & Holling, 2010; Berkes, 2007; Mehmood, 2016). In this way, resilience is not only a goal for the one-time test; it should also be considered as long-term systematic thinking and process for any organization when climate hazards, changing international relations, and unpredictable technological innovations become the new normal.

## THE MULTI-LEVEL AND MULTI-FACETED RESILIENCE

Scholars and practitioners increasingly understand that resilience is a multi-level, multi-faceted concept involving various dimensions, including politics, economics, and social development (Chelleri, Waters, Olazabal, & Minucci, 2015; Di Gregorio et al., 2019). For instance, countering the pandemic requires joint effort from multi-level governments, enterprises, academic institutions, and citizens to act on a crisis filled with unpredictability. Among them, coordinated efforts among different communities have been crucial for relocating limited health services (Julia et al., 2020); country responses remarkably vary due to distinctions in institutional structures, cultural orientations, political systems, economic conditions, and geopolitical factors (Weible et al., 2020). However, community, municipal, provincial, and country responses are intrinsically linked, reflecting the connected socioeconomic structures.

Specifically, policymakers who devise and implement country responses have to consider a great variety of socioeconomic indicators in addition to lowering the

number of infected cases and fatality rates. The cost-benefit analysis is conducted based on different priorities of different organizations. In China, Korea, and Singapore, there have been different levels of rigor or even aggressive control measures applied to contain the rapid spread of the virus; some of the extreme efforts are controversial (Kupferschmidt & Cohen, 2020). For example, the coronavirus contact tracing system is viewed to carry the risk of privacy invasion but critical to preventing further community transmissions. In a more neoliberal context, maintaining or restarting the economy is the priority for policymakers, more crucial than public health considerations.

### **THE IDEAL OF RESILIENCE: FACING PRECARIETY AND COMPLEXITY**

There has been insufficient attention to the maldevelopment embedded in existing socioeconomic orders that structurally reproduce injustice and disproportional risks, such as racial and ethnic disparities in health care. Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic manifests the injustice rooted in existing structures, instead of creating messy systematic problems. More tragically, some politicians exploit the situation for political gain instead of solving societal problems along with this unprecedented crisis.

The ideal of resilience, as both a process and goal, transforms barriers into strengths, emphasizing socioeconomic injustice in the face of precarity and complexity. In the globalized era, the COVID-19 pandemic is an urgent crisis facing all humankind, exposing different organizations' disadvantages, and testing their governance mechanisms. The pandemic is not a battle between capitalism and socialism, not a divide between the East and the West. There should be coordinated actions, instead of empty talks and blame games.

More importantly, the pandemic offers an opportunity for different organizations to transform their technological, social, economic, and political structures to save lives, avoid socioeconomic crises, and even obtain new strengths to address justice and inclusiveness. Thus, the ideal of resilience, not getting back to normal but ongoing anticipatory learning and organizational innovation, is critical in guiding such response, adaptation, and transformation. Resilience is not necessarily a buzzword, a dead end; it is urgently needed to embrace the renaissance of resilience for inclusive collaboration and transformative innovation at the time of crisis.

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