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To cite this article: Juan Carlos Revilla , Paz Martín & Carlos de Castro (2017): The reconstruction of resilience as a social and collective phenomenon: poverty and coping capacity during the economic crisis, *European Societies*, DOI: [10.1080/14616696.2017.1346195](https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2017.1346195)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2017.1346195>



Published online: 01 Jul 2017.



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The reconstruction of resilience as a social and collective phenomenon: poverty and coping capacity during the economic crisis

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ABSTRACT

Resilience has recently acquired an unusual degree of strength in social research. The article discusses the theoretical and historical background of resilience in the literature in terms of its individual and collective dimensions and argues that, contrary to individualistic conceptions, resilience should be considered a social process linked to social context. It then considers sociological approaches that help to reframe its conceptualisation based on the analysis of data from central Spain within the framework of the RESCuE project, which puts resilience into place in the context of the present economic crisis. Through the analysis of rural and urban case studies the research identifies the importance of the availability of individual and group resources when it comes to the development of resilient strategies in difficult circumstances. Equally, integration into community networks facilitates greater diversity in resilient strategies that can contribute to the recovery and survival of households.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 11 December 2016; Accepted 31 May 2017

KEYWORDS Resilience; hardship; practice theory; agency/structure dualism; community

The concept of resilience, the capacity of individuals or subjects to recovery having suffered adversity, is gaining an unusual degree of strength in social research. Its current popularity makes it hard to believe that one of the original linguistic definitions was quite negative, meaning to go back on one's word: the act of resiling, meaning to renege on a verbal agreement (see OED 2014). The linguistic leap from this original sixteenth century meaning to its present day definition is an example of how words and scientific terminology are subject to transformation. In the case of scientific concepts these transformations have their origin, or at least they

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should, in the understanding that a distinct meaning can better account for some aspect of reality, or social life in the case of this study.

As much in English as in French the first meanings of resilience in the sixteenth century were related to the withdrawing from a verbal agreement, in the sense of the French verb *résilier* and the English verb to *resile* (OED 2014; Trésor de la Langue Française 2015). In the seventeenth century this came to nominally mean resilience and resiliency, when other meanings began to emerge, such as those related to physics (how sound waves rebound to create echoes) and others more closely related to human behaviour and current definitions. Henry More, in *Divine Dialogues* (1668), used resilience to mean the act of rebounding or recovering from misery and sin thanks to divine providence, whereby sinner's capacity to reach ascetic perfection was tested. Until the nineteenth century this sense also co-existed with alternate meaning in the field of morality that related to the inconsistency of the soul, which could go from one extreme to another, from repentance to sin (Alexander 2013).

In the nineteenth century, however, the meaning of resilience would develop further. Firstly, within the field of material physics the word was used in relation to the resistance of materials to fatigue and subsequently to their elasticity and ability to return to an original shape or form following the application of pressure. The present meaning of resilience probably emerged in French and Spanish in the twentieth century (RAE, 2015), in relation to its use in physics, although parallel developments also saw its application to human behaviour. This occurred for both the individual subject as well as the national collective, which foresaw posterior uses of the word in relation to communal response to natural or other catastrophes: the resilience of the Scottish in their resistance to the English, or the resilience of the Japanese in their recovery from an earthquake in 1857. Hence, the meaning of resilience as recovery from adversity became consolidated in the English language and progressively lost its religious connotations (Alexander 2013; OED 2014).

In much the same way, the purpose of this article is to reorient the concept of resilience so that it better encapsulates how it is related to the social context within which action unfolds, as well as its collective and group nature. A particularly relevant question for the social sciences, in substantive terms, this means a new re-edition of the old and complex relation between agency and structure, or the relation between a subject with agential capacity and the social context in which they live. The article discusses the theoretical and historical background of resilience in the literature and considers sociological approaches that help to

reframe its conceptualisation based on the analysis of data from an urban and rural case study in central Spain within the framework of the RESCuE project.

Individual and collective resilience

In its application to humans and within the social sciences, we could say that both individual and collective focuses of resilience have developed fundamentally as separate entities. With respect to individual resilience, Ionescu (2012) identifies that the first use of resilience in a scientific journal in relation to the human psyche was by Scoville (1942), who remarked on the surprising resilience of children to dangerous situations, in the case of his work, war. His work ushered in a whole field of research on child development in stressful circumstances, where the use of the term resilience was particularly important. Notable work in this area included that of Dorothy Burlingham and Anna Freud (see Ionescu 2012), who studied children's resilience to traumatic experiences. Frankl (1946) also analysed how children could recover from the experience of concentration camps. Although he did not use the term resilience, he is recognised in the literature as an antecedent of this line of research, representative of existential psychology, particularly in relation to resilience and a belief in the meaning of life.

The origin of psychological research on resilience goes back to the analysis of child development in adverse circumstances (Rutter 1971; Werner and Smith 1979). The objective of this branch of research was to explain why some children become well-adjusted adults, who avoid the negative impact of a difficult childhood, while others did not recover so well. Definitions of resilience under this framework are not always clearly stated, but usually refer to the person's response to a risk situation, with a special emphasis on individual variations (Rutter 1987). Manciaux et al. (2001) define resilience as the capacity to project oneself into the future in spite of destabilising events and hardship. On the other hand, Masten (2001: 228) views resilience as 'good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development', while Garmezy (1993) highlights the importance of regaining functioning following adversity.

The literature on the subject has focused on identifying the internal (psychological traits) and external factors (the social milieu) that distinguish resilient subjects from their counterparts. According to Rutter (1987: 317), resilience has come to be understood as a process, not as a

fixed characteristic of the subject, 'those people who cope successfully with difficulties at one point in their life may react adversely to other stressors when their situation is different. If circumstances change, resilience alters'. Accordingly, resilience depends on the interaction between individuals and their social environment, a process that varies on the basis of the nature of the problem, the social context, life stage and also cultural aspects (Manciaux et al. 2001).

However, the methodological emphasis on the subject, and especially on differences between subjects, manifests an individualist orientation that leaves social factors very much in the background. Such approaches personalise the concept and the attribution of success or failure to individuals and not the social context. In this sense, the concept of resilience has become important in our understanding of social problems in much the same way as other social or political concepts that have a tendency to individualise social processes, such as employability, entrepreneurship, etc. (see Crespo, Revilla and Serrano, 2005; Tovar and Revilla, 2012).

In the psychology literature on resilience there is a particular interest in the reaction of individuals to stressful circumstances, such as the loss of a loved one or being the victim of a terrorist attack. Such research limits itself to the compilation of variables that affect resilience, such as the characteristics of the individual's personality or the social milieu that favour resilient or non-resilient responses. Such characteristics include self-confidence and a capacity to face adversity, social support, having valued life goals, subjective perceptions of one's ability to influence the social environment, the belief that you can learn from positive and negative experiences, etc. (Vera et al. 2006).

Although psychological in approach and scope, this perspective is entering into policy discussions on how to empower citizens to be more capable of governing themselves through making better life choices in our risk societies, for instance in issues of international security (Chandler 2013).

Turning to collective resilience, ecological and community perspectives are the two main, sometimes intertwined, components in its development. From the (human) ecology side, resilience is understood as the capacity of an ecological system to absorb changes and survive exposure to adverse circumstances (Holling 1973). Later authors added to this idea by stating that the system must at least maintain its structure and function in order to be considered resilient (see McAslan 2010), as, by definition, ecological systems are dynamic and in constant evolution. Resilience is applied to the study of how humans get through and survive natural catastrophes

such as floods, droughts and earthquakes. As such, the focus is on the survival of the group and not the individual. It is the human community that is considered resilient or not, depending on whether the characteristics of the natural environment and social organisation are favourable or unfavourable (Hall and Lamont 2013). From this perspective, a community can be affected because it is located in a seismic zone, close to the coast, exposed to industrial contamination, or because access to resources and information for much of its population are denied, or due to a government's inability to protect the community (McAslan 2010).

A fundamental element for community resilience is the strength of internal relations, trust and reciprocity, what we could call the social capital of the group, but also economic and human, as well as natural and physical capital. In this line of thought, Camarero and del Pino (2014) propose two distinct orientations within the ecological perspective. Firstly, the external, which analyses the response of the social system to its environment, and then the internal, which looks at responses to changes in the environment within the same social system by its intermediate structures or institutions, such as households, or other examples of social fabric, such as community associations or other collectives.

The ecological perspective on resilience has been criticised on the grounds of this external orientation. As resilience in this sense is understood as the capacity of communities to absorb external disturbances, the emphasis is placed on the continuity of the system. This leads to the de-politicisation of social action, replaced by self-governed individuals, who concentrate their agential capacity on the pursuit of mundane private lifestyle choices (Juntunen and Hyvönen 2014).

However, this ecological perspective permits a distinct, even critical, approach to the concept of resilience that comes from its systemic nature. When an internal perspective is taken, it becomes apparent that the resilience of systems, configured in a particular way, might not necessarily be positive for the system or some of its members. For example, an undesirably configured system (for some or all) can have a great capacity for resilience and adaptation, maintaining conditions of inequality or social injustice. Consequently, the work of those most disadvantaged by the status quo would be to undermine the resilient capacity of the system and try to imagine a different future for the community (Walker et al. 2004). There are two interrelated ways to view how this might happen. The view of authors such as Case (2016) is that resilient communities are effective at creating social change and bottom-up community development processes. On the other hand, authors such as D'Alisa

et al. (2015) have shown that grassroots activism itself acts to develop community resilience because it contests the prevailing neoliberal policies that are undermining people's capacity to cope with adversity due to austerity measures and the retreat of the State. Some authors (Keck and Sackdapolrak 2013; Béné et al. 2014) are distinguishing between three types of capacities characteristic of resilient systems: absorption, the capacity to assimilate external negative impacts without consequence; adaptation, which involves adjustments to offset impacts that would otherwise be greater; and transformation, when it becomes impossible to survive within the current configuration. Subsequently, it is possible to introduce notions of power and inequality, which exist in every social environment, to the framework of resilience. Importantly, it should be taken into account that persistence as much as transformation is subject to conflictive dynamics, meaning that one or other groups within the community benefit depending on the mode of resilience (Pedreño et al. 2015).

Finally, a social ecological perspective can also transform the way of thinking about individual resilience. Resilience is understood as resulting from a series of ecological factors that predict positive human development more than individual traits, depending also on the nature of the specific challenges that the individual is faced with (Ungar 2012). Similarly, the adaptive strategies developed by the subjects have to adjust to the possibilities of social context, such as families, communities and governments, which make culturally significant resources available that can facilitate individual agency.

The ecological and community perspective has developed enormously in the field of disaster management and development cooperation. Much of the interventions on the ground, by organisations such as the Red Cross or *Cáritas Internationalis*, are utilising the conceptual and analytical framework of ecological resilience to develop programmes for the promotion of the capacity of communities to recover from disasters or to improve their situations of deprivation and poverty (see IFRC 2012). Surprisingly, institutions that promote this perspective of resilience in developing countries often apply an individualist concept of resilience when implementing interventions in developed countries.

Ultimately, the concept of resilience has diverse orientations depending, mostly, on the subject of analysis and its use. When directed at the individual, resilience gives place to psychologising approaches that idealise the subjects' capability for survival and also makes them responsible for their own survival capacity in unfavourable environments. On the other hand, when resilience is directed at groups or communities it is better

placed to take into account everything beyond the individual subject, which is of paramount importance (Promberger et al. 2014), such as social institutions and other social formations that contribute to favourable or unfavourable possibilities for community survival and well-being (Hall and Lamont 2013). This also includes the wider social context that acts to favour or prejudice community resilience, and the injustice (or not) that can derive from the prevailing status quo.

Reconstructing resilience

As we have stated, the development of the concept of resilience is dominated by an orientation towards individualist and psychologistic approaches, which is true in both the fields of psychology (Vera et al. 2006) and social work (Guo and Tsui 2010). From our perspective, if resilience is to be properly used as an analytic tool, its conceptualisation should have a greater emphasis on framing it within social action. Even if resilience is related to individual action it is also a group and collective phenomena emergent in a specific social context, that is, specific actions due to specific circumstances. The approach taken within psychological research tends to only acknowledge that the social situation of someone has improved and from there explore the subject's characteristics, through the use of psychological instruments, in order to establish the factors that explain the difference between those that are resilient and those that are not. This perspective is very limited in that it eliminates in large part the complexity of social life. It is not possible to presuppose an end-point of social life and from there 'certify' the existence of resilience. Dagdeviren et al. (2016) refer to this as the problem of intermittency or continuity of resilience that can only be explained by changes in the circumstances of the social environment. Furthermore, neither is it possible to be completely sure of the success of individual actions, as they can be effective in the short-term but not in the long-term, sometimes having unforeseen negative consequences (see Harrison 2013). In this sense, we understand that it would be better to approach these questions from the point of view of the analysis of social action in response to difficult circumstances. Without doubt, this means that resilience is, above all, related to the consequences of action, which brings us back to the distinction between resilience as absorption, adaptation or transformation (Béné et al. 2014).

Given that resilience is related to both individuals and (small-scale) natural social groups trying to overcome difficult circumstances in a

specific social context, general social theory and specifically the sociological perspective, can offer conceptual tools with which to explore this concept. Many sociological theories have addressed the issue of how to explain individual action in social contexts. In other words, how can the agency of individuals be acknowledged when their actions take place in a structured world with specific norms and controls? This is a hotly debated issue within sociological thinking and different lines of theory. In particular, structuralist and materialist theories emphasise how individual action can be constricted by structure and objective conditions of existence. In this sense, the theorisation of resilience within this framework could act as a type of 'stress test' for such theories and for the exploration of a number of questions: how to explain why people, either individually or in groups and in similar structural circumstances, react differently to difficult situations?

There are many possible responses to these questions, but the majority would come from the Weberian tradition of sociology, more specifically from practice theories (Reckwitz 2002). A starting point would be Giddens' structuration theory, which explores individual agency in social contexts. Giddens (1984) proposes that people are purposive agents, capable of reflexively evaluating their actions. Thus, action implies some form of human capacity to 'make a difference' in the flow of social life. However, this clearly takes place within a structured environment where certain rules or schemas (Sewell 1992) must be followed and a limited number of resources condition the possibilities for action. Giddens understood such norms as typifying schemes that guide everyday life. Such schemata are also clearly evident in Garfinkel's (1967) breaching experiments, which explored people's reactions to the breaking of norms that serve to reproduce institutionalised social practice. Thus, structure and agency constitute a duality in that structure exists through the social practice of everyday life, and social practice also takes form on the basis of the structural characteristics of the social context. Within this configuration of structure through social action it is possible to appreciate the possibility that this can also be modified, even unintentionally or unexpectedly, over time. Sewell (1992) relates the transformation of structures mainly with agents' capacity of transposing schemas and with the polysemy of resources.

In relation to resilience, these ideas imply that research in this field should focus on social practice in order to try to understand how subjects and groups configure and respond to their structural position in the context of the norms and resources that structure such practice. In the

case of our study, such practices are those developed by people and households in difficult economic circumstances. Based on these premises, resilience is the contingent and indeterminate effect of actions, or the combination of actions, within the possibilities available to such individuals or groups at a specific point in time, while also allowing for a certain degree of dynamism in how resilience develops. Furthermore, it would also imply certain consequences or effects for the subject and/or group that would be more or less functional for the social system, individual or group concerned.

Naturally, Giddens is not the only theorist concerned with the question of agency. In particular his work has a strong connection to that of the Symbolic Interactionists, such as Garfinkel and Goffman. However, it is not just Giddens's interest in the norms governing everyday life that draws a parallel between both lines of thought, but also their emphasis on the conscious and reflexive activity of the subject in a context that is eminently social in nature. This is also in line with the social character of the self that has been emphasised by Pragmatists and Symbolic Interactionists alike (James 1890; Mead 1934; Goffman 1959).

Pierre Bourdieu's contribution to theory on structure and agency also has important implications for how we view the social dynamics of resilience. Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) began by understanding social practice as the translation of highly structured systems of disposition that become incorporated in subjects as habitus. The habitus works as a structuring structure of social action, principles of perception, action and feeling, and is the product of social position of the subject or group. Within this line of thought, different social positions are associated with different habitus, in that they are the interiorisation of social norms and a cultural universe (Bourdieu 1979). However, social practice is not a mere mechanism for the updating of habitus but the effect of a dialectic relation between habitus and the specific situation through its incorporation to a social field (the wider social setting within which agents and social groups are located). In this sense, it is a renovation of a strategy, in that subjects develop strategies in their struggles to acquire social power or to improve the possibilities of social reproduction of the group. Bourdieu's position has been criticised for over emphasising the unconscious character of habitus (Rafieian and Davies 2016), which reduces, in our view, the interest and possibilities of this strategic stance. Likewise, Sewell (1992) criticises how the notion of habitus drives to a certain determinism.

However, for Bourdieu, social life is a constant confrontation between groups that seek to dominate within different social fields. Perhaps Bourdieu's conceptualisation of agents are somewhat more purposive than those of Giddens, in that they are described as subjects with interests that develop strategies in order to achieve their objectives, those of the group, within logics that are clearly social and a product of the group habitus. Bourdieu's proposal requires us to consider resilience within a community or group perspective, in that it deals with logics of action that are cultural or collective. These logics are tested in different social fields in different situations, which open the way for strategic action.

From these different sociological approaches we can take a number of key points with which to conceptualise resilience. From Giddens, we can take the need to consider actions within a social context that limit the possibility of the subject, and whose actions contribute to its reproduction, but also modification. From Bourdieu we can take the contextual, collective and strategic aspects of the logic of action incorporated into the habitus.

Each of the questions that we outline above were included within the objectives of the research that was carried out within the framework of the RESCuE project, which focuses on the practices of European households in response to the difficult and prolonged economic crisis which started in 2008. Within this context, the objective of this research is to explore the social and contextual aspects of resilience, as well as the need to consider moving beyond individual perspectives in the interests of group and collective viewpoints (see Promberger et al. 2014, for a complete description of the research and its objectives). As such, the analysis sought to address two fundamental questions related to resilience, which can be understood as the working hypotheses of the research. Firstly, how important is social context when considering the types of resources that are available (or not) in the social setting and that help subjects to respond to adverse circumstances? Secondly, to what degree does the group and collective nature of resilience permit us to look beyond individual perspectives in the conceptualisation of resilience?

Methodology

The RESCuE project centres on the practices of resilience of families in situations of difficulty, based on a methodology that examines and compares two distinct geographic contexts: one urban (in the case of Spain, a suburb of Madrid City) and the other rural (a locality in the La

Mancha area of central Spain, located to the south of Madrid City). The case study families were selected from towns or neighbourhoods strongly affected by the crisis or, at the very least, relatively deprived areas of the region or the country. Although nine countries are participating in the research, in this text we only examine the results of the fieldwork from Spain. Both locations are heavily influenced by their geographic proximity and connections to the Madrid metropolitan area and have been profoundly affected by the economic crisis.

The main fieldwork was carried out from October 2014 to June 2015 and employed three methodological strategies to gather data: (a) participant observation; (b) in-depth interviews with experts (4 in the urban setting and 5 in the rural area) that are actively working in the localities with families in situations of vulnerability, such as the parish priest, members of neighbourhood associations, social services and charitable organisations; and (c) two in-depth interviews in 24 households in situations of vulnerability (12 in the urban area and 12 in the rural area). The first interview was biographical in nature while the second was based on conversation around a series of photographs about participant's everyday lives, which they themselves selected and/or took for the project with the aim of representing certain themes proposed by the researcher. This research strategy, which has been described as 'photo elicitation' (Harper 2002) proposes that images can help the interview process as they evoke certain memories, thoughts and situations that can subsequently be discussed in detail during a second interview. So that the research could gather as wide a range of possible discourses on the crisis and household strategies to confront such difficulties a number of criteria were applied to the recruitment process to ensure the maximum level of diversity amongst the interviewees. Based on the overarching criteria of 'households affected by the crisis', participating households were selected on the basis of gender composition, age, household composition and socio-economic circumstances.

The sampling strategy was composed of four different, albeit inter-related, phases: (a) the design of a purposive sampling frame as starting point of the research (based on previous knowledge of the field of research, secondary data sources and existing literature on resilience and poverty); (b) the use of an ad hoc expert-assisted selection strategy; (c) the selection of households affected by the crisis (snowball sampling technique with diversified starting points selected by means of structural criteria); and (d) the development of specific profiles of potential respondents, which were revised as the fieldwork progressed. To make contact with potential

participants, we varied the type of expert depending on the respondent's profile. The experts that assisted in the research included: social services staff, local authorities (especially in rural areas), religious leaders, key informants in migrant communities, etc. Following initial contact, some snowballing was used as a way of complementing the sample.

Resilience in context

The analysis shows that the availability of a diverse range of resources to households is particularly important for resilience. In fact, it would be relatively straightforward to apply Bourdieu's and Passeron's (1970) conceptualisation of capital in its different forms. However, rather than carrying out an exhaustive analysis of the different types of capital that could be influential for resilience, we will consider those that were most influential in the empirical data: economic, (sub)cultural, social and institutional resources. In doing so, we will consider them not in general terms, but in those specific aspects linked to the types of capital relevant to our research approach.

To start, we look at economic resources and the case of families in the rural locality who before the crisis used to make a daily commute to work in construction in Madrid City as semi-skilled labourers. Amongst these families it is notable how the accumulation of capital when work was plentiful has helped them to cover costs when their incomes dropped significantly following the paralysis in the construction industry. In some cases these savings, often in conjunction with lump-sum employment benefit, made it possible for these families to make investments in small local businesses such as a shop, bar or restaurant, that have been successful to varying degrees. This strategy was also employed in the urban area and also with similar levels of success.

Some rural families used savings, and money acquired through other means, to buy small parcels of agricultural land from large landowners who had become disinterested in farming due to lack of economic viability. While they continued to work in construction they hired foreign day-labourers to work the land, but when work dried up in building and other areas, they began to cultivate the land themselves, with occasional help from local casual labourers (often friends and family). The strategy of acquiring land to work has clear limits, as what was not profitable for the large landowners cannot be very profitable for the new owners. As such, the economic benefits of working the land fall far short of replacing the money earned in construction, and rarely go beyond mere subsistence,

with the help of EU grants in those cases where they can comply with the requirements of the common agricultural policy. Additionally, the existence of a viticulture cooperative in the locality has helped somewhat to improve the feasibility of grape cultivation, in that they offer better conditions for members or simply better prices than the private wineries.

These economic resources, related to work in construction and agriculture, come from cultural capital that takes the form of knowledge and skills that are part of the cultural background of the local population. A large proportion of the population in our rural case study lives within a dependent agrarian culture, which is characterised by low levels of educational attainment and scarce social and cultural resources. The population can survive through manual labour as long as there are jobs available. The culture is defined by hard, physical work with a lot of sacrifice that is often justified on the basis of family survival. Despite working in other areas such as construction, knowledge of how to cultivate the land has not been lost; in fact there has been a re-evaluation of and updating of these skills with the arrival of new consumer demands for agricultural products and new cultivation techniques. It is also possible to relate this agrarian culture, closely linked to self-production/consumption and manual work, with the working class culture of unskilled and semi-skilled construction workers. Oliva (1995) recounts how both occupations are closely related in terms of being manual and their capacity to absorb unskilled workers to do hard manual work in crews. We would also add that the capacity of many agricultural workers to construct their own houses with savings is an important part of the social imaginary in this rural community. As such, the change from employment in one form of subsistence work to another was not overly difficult for many families.

Strictly speaking, all the households in the study, rural and urban, come from humble social origins, but some of them had acquired a middle-class status during the consolidation of the democracy in Spain in the 1980s and 1990s when the economy improved substantially. Related to this, we found differences, which could be understood as subcultural, between groups that have more recent experience of living with scarcity, such as immigrants or parts of the autochthonous population, and those that had been living for a prolonged period of time within or close to the middle classes. Those that were more used to living with less appear to have adapted better and less traumatically to adverse circumstances than those who had forgotten what it was like to make do with little. While this does not mean that they have greater possibilities for getting ahead and surviving the crisis, it does indicate that they are better able

to implement strategies such as reducing expenses and taking greater advantage of available resources, including public subsidies. Within these subcultures, it is normally the women who take on the role of managing scarce resources, being less embarrassed to seek help and more willing to mobilise any kind of resource that they have access to.

The third type of resource that affects the possibility of resilience are institutional and legislative, those that are regulated by public policy and the legal framework at local, provincial, regional and national levels. Such resources include benefits due to unemployment or reduced income, and employment programmes and subsidies. In the cases that we studied, access to these resources makes a notable difference to the type of strategies that the households use to improve their circumstances. We have already mentioned how lump-sum unemployment benefit was used to invest in small business ventures, even if such investments did not always work out well due to profitability or other issues not related to the regulatory framework, like the available economic and cultural capital, and contextual factors such as opportunity. However, the inadequacy of public policy supports from the different public administrations is a clear example of how context, political in this case, can have a negative effect, acting to paralyse assistance rather than as a support to help people get by and recover. Consequently, many of the households that we interviewed have had to resort to charitable organisations due to the scarcity of support from public bodies, or because of the impossible conditions attached to acquiring them. Additionally, legal and regulatory intervention in the management of family and individual debts can have a very negative effect on the possibility of recovering from the crisis, as is the case for two of the households in the study.

It is well known, and reflected in some of the cases we analysed, that the Spanish legal framework regulating mortgage defaults leaves families without any possibility of re-establishing their lives, putting them at clear risk of social exclusion. This is not the place to go into detail on the legal problems, but it is pertinent to state that in countries where the legal framework is different those that default on mortgages have greater possibilities for recovery and resilience simply because the legal framework is more favourable to the debtor. The issue of debts acquired by small businesses is another well-known problem area. Many small business owners have become trapped in a disintegrating economic system without being given any possibility of a solution that permits a second opportunity, or to re-start in a more viable market niche.

Finally, the social resources that the subjects have at their disposal also affect subjects' capacity to survive the crisis. In the cases that we analysed, the defence against precarious situations is far greater when subjects are part of, or participate in, collective or group activities. This is true with both the autochthonous and immigrant population, and among younger and older people. For example, information on possible jobs that are communicated through social networks made up of close friends and family, and support from a range of community associations that households participate in, such as anti-eviction associations or cooperative projects that forego individualist approaches in favour of the collective. These collective activities are a source of emotional support in the way that they reinforce a sense of belonging to the community, but above all they show how integration in social networks opens up possibilities that are beyond the reach of the most isolated and socially peripheral households, which happens with some immigrant or autochthonous families that experience discrimination from dominant social groups.

Group, collective or community resilience

As we have pointed out, resilience comes highly conditioned by the social context, but moving the focus of analysis away from the individual also has the benefit of better accessing the complexity of social life, which the analysis of individual subjects tends to simplify. In effect, most of the key factors related to the confrontation of adverse circumstances, be they resources or strategies, are more easily understood when configured in the group or collective and not in individual terms.

To start, the minimum unit for analysing resilience is necessarily the family. Within the research the family is perceived as the key social group and the basic nucleus of interpersonal solidarity on which to base any attempts to get ahead and survive. The family is configured as an essential source of support and care with which to overcome problems and acts as a safe haven in turbulent times. It is also a major motivation for people to continue fighting, particularly when there are small children and other dependents. To this we can add that the contribution of the older generation to the provision of resources often helps their successors stay afloat. This inter-generational sharing of resources is also particularly important at times of crisis when pooling money to start-up businesses or to buy a property. However, this is not to say that the family is only a source of support and not associated with problems or difficulties. In some cases, the family is the only social outlet and source of exchange

and everything is focused on its well-being: food, school performance, social activities, etc. In both the urban and rural case studies, where social activity is overly focused on the family group the possibilities of developing resilient practices are more limited, at the same time as involvement in the community decreases and isolation increases. However, when the family is part of a wider more complex social network (neighbours, friends, community groups, political activities, or religious associations) the density of relations promotes a diversification of strategies and sources of support and information.

This collective dimension leads us to a key element in the analysis of resilience. The level of integration in a community and the diversity of relations mark an important difference in the capacity for resilience. In this sense, the changes that were experienced by the participants in the urban case study provide some good examples. Historically, community relations between neighbours were very important, but the diminishing of this social dynamic has made older residents feel resentful towards newer inhabitants. Many of these new residents are immigrants, who have occupied housing left by previous inhabitants who moved to newer areas of the suburb, or further afield, in search of better quality housing when their economic circumstances improved. In the new build areas the solidarity of the old neighbourhood is not reproduced, despite timid attempts to promote sociability and to improve the social fabric. The combined effect of this dual dynamic, one of reduced involvement in the community along with estrangement between newer and older residents, has led to general contraction in solidarity.

When these developments in social relations are combined with low-density social capital, such as those families who live at the peripheries of the community, some residents experience more severe isolation and deprivation. For example, some immigrant families with particularly weak social ties to the autochthonous community and their own ethnic communities often have no one to turn to when things become very difficult. At the same time, some immigrants are more integrated, either with the local population or they are part of complex networks of compatriots that connects them to their country of origin or even other European countries where relations and friends have settled. Potentially, this complexity gives them access to a greater and more diverse range of resources that can provide viable alternatives for the development of resilient practices. It is also true that time and distance can weaken such networks if they are not adequately cared for, just the same as expatriate networks

in the receiving country can be weakened when immigrants return to their countries of origin.

This type of peripheral positioning, with its attendant negative consequences, is not exclusive to immigrants, but also present amongst the autochthonous population. For example, the interviews carried out with one of the families in the rural area reveal a clear absence of strong ties to the local community: infrequent or no participation in local groups, voyeuristic participation in local fiestas and events, etc. The only relationships that they maintain and that help them to avoid total isolation are with the extended family, such as when a family member put them in touch with the anti-eviction association when they were in clear danger of losing their home. Unfortunately, perhaps due to cultural distance, even the social connection afforded through the anti-eviction association did not seem to have opened the possibility of integration or new relations with the wider community, or any access to material or symbolic resources. Consequently, just as we have seen in other cases, a well-developed social fabric can make a decisive contribution to the creation of connections between the members of the group and the creation of community, at least among those directly involved or who benefit from its activity, and thus the chances of recovery and resilience are improved. This example shows both the limitations of these initiatives and the difficulties encountered when certain populations or groups are isolated or peripheral to the community.

Conclusions

The analysis carried out so far provides firm ground to support our working hypothesis: that the social and collective character of resilience affects the practices that social actors employ when trying to recover from adversity. In line with sociological theory on agency and structure, which we outlined above, practices of resilience are situated within a specific social context that conditions the possibility of action and available resources, which is also affected by the social position of the subjects and groups. As we also mentioned above, this is not to say these factors have been ignored by work that centres on individual resilience, but that its focus has failed to adequately appreciate the contextual and social character of resilience. In this sense, the analysis that we have carried out brings into play the complex manner in which available resources, be they economic, cultural, institutional or social, make certain strategies viable for the subjects or groups, as well as conditioning

the degree of success that can be derived from such practices. The acquisition of agricultural land was a strategy made possible in the rural case study, but as a strategy its capacity for resilience and recovery is conditioned by the limitations of the profitability of agriculture in the present day. This is in line with the ecological perspectives on resilience described above.

Therefore, it is necessary to overcome or move beyond the individual as a unit of analysis in the study of resilience. A large part of the resources that subjects have access to come about because of their membership of groups, be it the family unit, local community associations, ethnic or religious groups. In Spain, the family is the nucleus on which social solidarity is built, and is the primary source for many resources and strategies that the study's participants put in place in their attempts to recovery from adversity. At the same time, the integration of the family to the wider community (or segments of it), with the help of local or more mobile groups, also results in access to resources and strategies that would not be available outside these social networks. Once again, the correspondence with ecological perspectives on resilience is clear.

As such, our proposal is to give resilience an undeniably social and collective content. In doing so, we feel that it is necessary to substitute the perspective of resilience as located in an heroic individual who confronts adversity for one that takes a social and critical perspective. We mean 'social' in the sense that the social context and position of the subjects decisively influences the possibility for resilience. 'Critical' because this position also permits us to observe how social inequality weakens people's prospects for recovery when faced with difficult circumstances and adversity. This makes it necessary to question unjust social structures and collective efforts to transform them, which is to say they must undermine the resilience of the social system that produces such inequality. In this sense, the results suggest that future research should focus on the relationship between resilience and social and political participation, community involvement, community integration, etc.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by Seventh Framework Programme (RESCuE).

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