

Politics and practices of resilience

Introduction

Antoine Le Blanc et Thierry Nicolas

**Édition électronique**

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/echogeo/13480>

DOI : [10.4000/echogeo.13480](https://doi.org/10.4000/echogeo.13480)

ISSN : 1963-1197

Éditeur

Pôle de recherche pour l'organisation et la diffusion de l'information géographique (CNRS UMR 8586)

Référence électronique

Antoine Le Blanc et Thierry Nicolas, « Politics and practices of resilience », *EchoGéo* [En ligne], 24 | 2013, mis en ligne le 10 juillet 2013, consulté le 10 août 2021. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/echogeo/13480> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/echogeo.13480>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 10 août 2021.

EchoGéo est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND)

Politics and practices of resilience

Introduction

Antoine Le Blanc et Thierry Nicolas

- 1 This issue addresses a concept that has been receiving growing interest in geography over the last few years: resilience. The concept is not new strictly speaking, and has been in use in a number of disciplines: ecology (Holling has been using it since 1973 to describe evolutive systems that absorb shocks, as opposed to stable systems), physics (where it refers to the elasticity and plasticity of a material that is subjected to shocks), or psychology (the field that popularized the term in France, with the works of Boris Cyrulnik and others).
- 2 The use of the concept of resilience in geography responds to the fast global socio-economical and technological changes of the last decades that transformed the perceptions and methods of risk management – at least within industrialized societies (Beck, 2001). In particular, the notion became accepted as a new paradigm in geography after the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction in the 1990's, and an MIT conference entitled “The Resilient City: Trauma, Recovery and Remembrance” (Vale and Campanella, 2005). At a time when prevalent theoretical and operational models of prevention had shown their limits, resilience appeared to open new perspectives. The term can be defined as “the capacity of a social system (e.g. an organization, city or society) to proactively adapt to and recover from disturbances that are perceived within the system to fall outside the range of normal and expected disturbances” (Comfort *et al.*, 2010). Resilience could in this sense be seen as a departure from technicist models of management, in that it proposes management methods that constantly adapt to a territorial system's complex evolutions, leaving more space for diverse stakeholders and societal risk factors.
- 3 However, the notion's very scope and its applications are still controversial. It has been criticized for being a concept that can only be understood in retrospect, or that is connected to a specific ideology; others have shown the impossibility of creating policies based on such a poorly defined term, to which a tangle of concepts (resistance, recovery, adaptation, adaptability...) are loosely connected. The relationship between

resilience and vulnerability is in itself problematic, and forms a recurring element in this issue.

- 4 Most of the authors presented here investigate the pair vulnerability/resilience. Béatrice Quenault reminds us that the relationships between the two concepts can range from opposition to inclusion, through to overlap. This diversity of approaches can be explained, amongst other factors, by the aspiration to promote a static, or on the contrary a dynamic conception of resilience. For Bruno Barroca, Maryline Di Nardo and Irene Mboumoua, resilience, in an urban context for instance, appears to succeed vulnerability – because of the transition in cyndinics from an analytical approach to a systemic one. Unlike vulnerability, studying resilience in a city implies looking beyond mere causalities, and considering the organizations and interactions that form urban objects. The main benefit of the notion might be that it makes it possible to correlate the evolution of both research and urban planning practices. Magali Reghezza-Zitt proposes to understand resilience (and vulnerability) through the prism of two traditions that formed in parallel: *risk* and *hazard research*. She stresses the necessity to take timescales into account in definitions of the concept: at the moment when a crisis occurs, resilience refers to actions of resistance to or absorption of the shock; after the crisis and at other points in time, resilience refers to the capacity for adaptation and renewal.
- 5 However, beyond theoretical controversies, this issue mostly aims to interrogate the practices that derive from the concept of resilience on diverse territories. Indeed, the term of resilience first appeared (and spread) in planning documents on different scales. Resilience as a form of risk management is now an essential objective of territorial planning policies.
- 6 This issue shows how the first applications of the concept in urban planning, in France or elsewhere, were not a departure from a technicist approach to risk management: rather, they reused old tools, reinforced technique-based risk management processes, and relied on solutions that focus on random hazard. Beatrice Quenault shows how resilience should imply to better take into account societal risk factors such as the rise of marginalization, inequality and socio-spatial fragmentation, as well as representations of risk. Mathilde Gralepois, Julie Daluzeau and Clément Oger reach the same conclusion with their study of the PPRI (a flood hazard prevention plan) in the Val de Tours area in France, while offering a more radical interpretation: resilience is by definition very difficult to apply in France because it is based on typically Anglo-Saxon paradigms of community and self-organization.
- 7 In addition, this issue highlights a frequently observed paradox between on the one hand the necessity for a local approach to risk management, in order to adapt to the specificities of territories and societies, and on the other hand the reluctance of regulatory and managerial frameworks to delegate this power to stakeholders who are seen as illegitimate or incompetent. Or to put it more radically: if resilience implies for traditional political and administrative risk management institutions to let go of large portions of their prerogative in favor of more diverse stakeholders and of a wide range of actions, what is left of “risk management”?
- 8 The last text in this issue was written by a collective of nine authors. It suggests taking into account the notion of “viability of a system” rather than that of resilience. By developing a specific case study in Guyana, the authors show how bottom up, participative approaches can provide us with a more flexible and relevant

understanding of territorial systems, of the risks (or perceived risks) that affect them and of the responses that can be brought to those risks. This approach is more lateral: it does not start with identifying a hazard but with determining the major values assigned to a territory, in order to define a hierarchy of risk, and therefore of crises and their management – with the aim of safeguarding the system's continuity.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

- Beck U., 2001. *La société du risque. Sur la voie d'une autre modernité*. Paris, Aubier, Alto.
- Cyrulnik B., Duval P. (dir.), 2006. *Psychanalyse et résilience*. Paris, Odile Jacob.
- Comfort L. K., Boin A., Demchak C., 2010. *Designing Resilience. Preparing for Extreme Events*. Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Dauphiné A., Provotolo D., 2007. La résilience: un concept pour la gestion des risques. *Annales de Géographie*, n° 654, p. 115-125.
- Holling C. S., 1973. Resilience and stability of ecological systems. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, n° 4, p. 1-23.
- Vale J. V., Campanella T. J. (dir.), 2005. *The Resilient City. How modern cities recover from disaster*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Reghezza-Zitt M., Rufat S., Djament-Tran G., Le Blanc A., Lhomme S., 2012; What Resilience Is Not: Uses and Abuses. *Cybergéo*, 621, <http://cybergeog.revues.org/25554>

INDEX

Thèmes : Sur le Champ - Sur le Terrain

AUTEURS

ANTOINE LE BLANC

Antoine Le Blanc, Antoine.Le-Blanc@univ-littoral.fr, is a Geography Lecturer at Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale, TVES (EA 4477), PRES Lille Nord de France. He has recently published:

- Reghezza-zitt M., Rufat S., Djament-Tran G., Le Blanc A., Lhomme S., "What Resilience Is Not: Uses and Abuses", in *Cybergéo*, 621, 2012. <http://cybergeog.revues.org/25554>
- Le Blanc A., "La conservation des ruines traumatiques : un marqueur ambigu de l'histoire urbaine", in *L'Espace Géographique*, 3, 2010, pp. 253-266.
- Zwarterook I., Le Blanc A., 2010. *Les risques et pollutions industriels sur le territoire dunkerquois : des perceptions à la concertation*. Issue 2010-07 of *Les Cahiers de la Sécurité Industrielle*, 152, Institut pour une Culture de Sécurité Industrielle, Toulouse, 124 p. http://www.icsi-eu.org/francais/dev_cs/cahiers/

THIERRY NICOLAS

Thierry Nicolas, thierrynicolas@wanadoo.fr, is a Research Officer at Université des Antilles et de la Guyane / UMR Espace-DEV (UMR 228), Centre IRD de Guyane. He has recently published:-

Nicolas T., “L’aéroport de Saba, le porte-avions des Petites Antilles”, in *Mappemonde*, Lieux, 109, 2013 <http://mappemonde.mgm.fr/>

- Nicolas T., “Insularité et développement dans les Petites Antilles”, in Hartog T. (ed.), *La Caraïbe : un espace pluriel en questions*, 2011, Paris, Karthala, Collection « Terres d’Amérique ».

- Nicolas T., “Nissonologie et tourisme : les diversités insulaires au prisme de l’activité touristique”, in Jauze J-M., Combeau Y. (ed.), *Géographes et Historiens dans la compréhension et la gouvernance des espaces et sociétés de l’océan Indien*, Université de La Réunion, Saint-Denis, « Terres et sociétés indocéaniques », 2010.