RESILIENCE
Moving from a "heroic" notion to a sociological concept

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Abstract This paper presents a specific sociological theoretical framework to the concept of resilience. To do so, we reviewed the main theoretical developments on resilience, focusing our attention on the development of a "heroic" perspective of resilience. We point out its several pitfalls, and counter it with a concept of resilience grounded on sociological theory and poverty studies, presenting a definition for resilience, the conditions and characteristics of this social phenomenon, as well as a model of operationalization based on two major dimensions: mobilization of resources and shifting of risks. With this innovative approach we also call for a sociological research agenda for resilience.

Keywords: resilience, poverty, ways of life, risk, crisis.

Resumo Este artigo pretende apresentar a pertinência sociológica do conceito de resiliência. Nesse sentido, são elencados os principais desenvolvimentos teóricos referentes ao conceito em várias disciplinas científicas. É dedicada especial atenção à crítica do que designamos como a perspetiva "heroica" da resiliência, cujos pressupostos limitam fortemente a sua aplicação na investigação empírica em ciências sociais. Em seu lugar, desenvolvemos um conceito de resiliência baseado em contributos da teoria social e dos estudos da pobreza e propomos um modelo de operacionalização do conceito baseado em duas dimensões: mobilização de recursos e transferência de riscos. Concluímos o artigo propondo uma agenda de investigação sociológica para a resiliência.

Palavras-chave: resiliência, pobreza, modos de vida, risco, crise.

Résumé Cet article analyse la pertinence sociologique du concept de résilience. Il énumère les principaux développements théoriques autour de ce concept dans différentes disciplines scientifiques. Une attention particulière est portée à la critique de ce que nous appelons la vision " héroïque " de la résilience, dont les prémisses limitent fortement son application dans la recherche empirique en sciences sociales. À sa place, nous développons un concept de résilience basé sur des contributions de la théorie sociale et des études de la pauvreté et nous proposons un modèle d'opérationnalisation du concept fondé sur deux dimensions : mobilisation des ressources et transfert des risques. Nous concluons l'article en proposant un agenda de recherche sociologique pour la résilience.

Mots-clés: résilience, pauvreté, modes de vie, risque, crise.

Resumen Este artículo busca la pertinencia sociológica del concepto de resiliencia. En ese sentido, son presentados los principales avances teóricos referentes al concepto en varias disciplinas científicas. Se dedica especial atención a la crítica de lo que designamos como la perspectiva "heroica" de la resiliencia, cuyas premisas limitan fuertemente su aplicación en la investigación empírica en las ciencias sociales. En su lugar, desarrollamos un concepto de resiliencia basado en contribuciones de la teoría social y de los estudios de la pobreza y proponemos un modelo de operacionalización del concepto basado en dos dimensiones: movilización de recursos y transferencia de riesgos. Concluimos el artículo proponiendo una agenda de investigación sociológica para la resiliencia.

Palabras-clave: resiliencia, pobreza, modos de vida, riesgo, crisis.

Introduction

The combined effects of economic recession in the aftermath of 2007-08 global financial crisis and the generalized adoption of austerity policies in Europe from 2010 onwards has had a profound impact on peripheral European Union countries such as Portugal, Spain, Ireland or Greece, leading to significant decline in household income and increasing vulnerability to poverty (Matsaganis and Levanti, 2014).[1] This situation is concomitant with a trend of structural weakening of the bargaining power of wage labour, stemming from the transition to a neo-Hayekian political economy of democratic capitalism where the crucial welfare state duties of redistribution and regulation of labour relations are severely curtailed (Streeck, 2013), with an ensuing contrast between growing capital returns and decreasing economic growth levels (Piketty, 2013).

It is against this backdrop that references to resilience have become increasingly visible in political and popular discourse, and one that invariably carries a strong positive connotation. It is particularly recurrent in policy documents on natural disasters, as is the case of the European Commission's document "EU Approach to Resilience", where resilience is defined as "an ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks" (European Commission, 2012).

But the notion of resilience is further stretched to encompass other fields. It has been called upon when dealing with problems such as poverty. This is the case of the United Nations' "Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience" launched in 2013, which "embraces the international momentum to use 'resilience' as a common outcome that integrates poverty reduction, disaster risk reduction, sustainable livelihoods and climate change adaptation, as integral to sustainable development" (United Nations, 2013).

Yet the actual meaning of the concept is far from clear. In one instance, resilience is defined as an outcome of action, in others it appears as an innate ability some people and communities possess, and others don't. Furthermore, the stress on abilities seems to imply voluntaristic overtones, underplaying the role of social structures in how people deal with the consequences of large-scale economic and social shocks.

This article will thus try to offer a different take on the concept of resilience, one that is informed by a sociological perspective. It will do so by trying to answer two key questions: What should be the main pillars of a sociological concept of resilience? And, specifically, how can such a concept bring new insights into sociological studies on the effects of economic hardship on households?

Literature review

The meaning of resilience in physics seems clearer: it refers to the ability of materials to absorb strain energy when it is deformed and to release that energy upon unloading without breaking or being disfigured (J. E. Gordon, 1979). Resilience could thus be understood as the ability of an object to recover its original shape after undergoing some sort of external shock — like a stress ball after being squeezed.

It was the idea of recovering from a shock — particularly an extreme and traumatic one — that was behind the first uses of resilience in other sciences. From the 1950s onwards, psychology turned to the concept as a framework to study the experiences of Nazi concentration camp survivors (Frankl, 1959; Eitinger, 1964). Later it was appropriate in the study of child poverty and child abuse (Werner, 1977) and recovery from loss and traumas (Bonanno, 2004), research lines that are still active and developing into new areas, such as neuroscience (Greenberg, 2006).

By the 1970s, ecology was also importing the concept to study how and to what extent ecosystems are able to regenerate when facing severe disturbances to their equilibrium (such as drought, pollution or overexploitation of natural resources). In ecological research, resilience has been no longer conceptualized as a mere attribute of the materials or subjects, and gained a relational and systemic focus. Hence, resilience is defined as the capacity of persistence of functional relations in a system, in the context of profound environmental imbalance caused by external forces (Holling, 1973).

It is through human geography and studies of environmental disasters that resilience has made its way into the social sciences. These studies have explored how local communities (Wilson, 2012), economic sectors and individual firms (Rose, 2007) have recovered from such disasters, emphasizing how elements such as social capital play an integral part in such processes (Aldrich, 2012) and how these processes are shaped by pre-shock vulnerabilities (Akter and Mallick, 2013) and involve significant environmental, social and economic costs as well as transfer of risks between social actors and between these and the environment (Sapountzaki, 2012).

These perspectives highlight the integration of social structures in the analysis of the conditions for the development of resilience at the group and community level. In this sense, Adger argues that "because of its institutional context, social resilience is defined at the level of community rather than being a phenomenon pertaining to individuals" (Adger, 2000).

The focus of the study of resilience concentrates on the reflective dimension of communities to deal with external shocks in their social structure and bounce back, strengthening their internal cohesion, their resources and sustainability to future shocks. Resilience thus refers to the community's capacity to survive and regenerate with its own resources and means (Mileti, 1999); to the capacity to contain the effects of disasters and resume activities without social disruption (Bruneau et al., 2013), to the role of alternative mediation structures and contexts (spaces of collective participation, such as the church, sports clubs, extended family, etc.) in attenuating the impacts of oppressive systems and in upholding the community's

identity and cohesion (Sonn and Fisher, 1998); or to the capacity of systems to effectively mobilize their natural, social and economic resources in post-shock recovery processes (Paton and Johnson, 2001).

Through the development of the reflective dimension, the focus on learning and resource management capacity in recovery processes, these approaches emphasize the collective agency dimension of resilience, learning processes and creation, (re)distribution and management of resources, thus not limiting resilience to the outcome of activation of an intrinsic attribute belonging to the individual or object.

However resilience also began to take on an additional meaning in human sciences, closer to the second one referred to above in physics: that of "thriving against the odds". This is most evident in medicine and epidemiology, where a resilient individual is one who fails to show the symptoms of a disease or behaviour in a context where most others do (Bonita, Beaglehole and Kjellström, 2006).

This perspective is transported to the approaches of psychology, where the concept is used to explain how individuals are capable of adapting positively to adverse circumstances or contexts (Masten, 2010) or high risk situations or prolonged traumas (Egeland, Carlson and Sroufe, 1993).

The first approaches of resilience-oriented perspectives to poverty phenomena were greatly marked by this second approach, which we will call "heroic". We will take a closer look at this perspective, as we feel that it encapsulates many of the problems faced in the task of bringing the concept of resilience into sociology.

The rise of "heroic" resilience

A considerable number of resilience-based approaches to poverty phenomena are heavily influenced by this latter meaning of a "heroic" notion of resilience. This comparative motive is very much on the backdrop when Davidson claims that resilience is "an increasingly valuable construct facilitating understanding of why some individuals thrive despite traumatic experiences and deprived backgrounds whilst others flounder" (2009: 115). In turn, Batty and Cole emphasize that resilience concerns "those individuals and households who, when faced with various risk factors associated with financial and social exclusion, manage to negotiate these adverse conditions rather than be overcome by them" (2010: 8).

For these approaches then, resilience is defined as a positive *attribute* of individuals or families. This attribute enables them to respond to traumatic events — e.g. job losses, illnesses or the death of a family member — in a creative fashion, building solutions which allow them to eschew their expected harmful consequences and even turning such events into an opportunity for beneficial change. In this "heroic" framework such solutions are built on a predominantly individual basis and take place in settings — such as poor urban neighbourhoods or isolated rural communities — whose features would a priori rule out or severely hinder their realization.

This "heroic" perspective of resilience also focuses heavily on individual everyday practices for creating or harnessing previously hidden or overlooked

resources and restoring self-esteem — culminating in the metaphorical notion of "ordinary magic" presented by Masten (2010). Examples of such practices could be engaging in training and professional reconversion, volunteering, setting up a business or careful collecting of discount vouchers and loyalty points in stores and supermarkets.

Now, this perspective of resilience immediately raises a number of questions from a sociological point of view. Some of these pertain to problems of conceptual nature. The first is conceptual ambiguity. "Heroic" resilience, though being defined as an internal property of individuals, is described through practices. It is thus not clear if resilience refers to the will or effort of the individuals or is instead the result of a set of practices set in motion to cope with socioeconomic hardship. A second set of problems stems from the coupling of normativism with social and ethnocentrism. Emphasis is placed on specific practices without a clear account of the results, costs and pertinence of replicating such practices in different contexts. Moreover, and as Harrison (2013) denounces, many of the examples of practices of resilience put forward in the literature that makes use of a "heroic" concept of resilience seem to have been selected owing more from the ways of thinking and lifestyle of the actual researchers than those of the affected persons and households.

A further problem with this perspective of resilience is analytical triviality. Indeed, it is unclear what being "overcome by adverse conditions" means. Unless one is considering extreme situations — such as death — one will never be completely overcome by conditions, as some sort of adaptation is always going to take place. In this sense, everyone — barring the dead — is resilient.

But the biggest problem with the "heroic" notion of resilience is its non-social character. Indeed, "heroic" resilience seems to ignore the relationship (constraints and resources) between institutions and individuals or social structures and social practices (Dagvidaren, Donoghue and Promberger, 2016).

Furthermore, the problems with the "heroic" version of resilience spill over the borders of strict scientific discussion. "Heroic" resilience is a concept that is uncannily compatible with a neoliberal agenda for the welfare state — a problem already pointed out by authors such as Joseph (2015) or Tierney (2015). Indeed, a "heroic" notion of resilience can become a helpful tool in legitimizing retrenchment in social policies in several ways. Firstly, *by fueling the idea that household resilience is a sort of "hidden resource" to be explored by public policy*. Exploring this "hidden resource" would then be a somewhat costless — or at least more efficient — alternative to welfare state intervention in dealing with poverty and other social risks.

Secondly, by suggesting that risks can be effectively addressed mainly at an individual and household level and with individual and household resources. This stand may result in the downplaying of the crucial importance of the idea of socialization of risks, something that is at the heart of welfare state institutions.

Thirdly, by suggesting that *resilience is an attribute unevenly distributed between human populations*. For starters, this implies the naturalization of social features. On the other hand, particularly in the two extremes of the distribution, it brings with it significant consequences if it were to serve as a yardstick for the design and

evaluation of social policies, since the burden of their success would be transferred to the individuals.

Therefore, by focusing almost exclusively on individual practices and on the "ordinary magic" of everyday practices, a "heroic" concept of resilience may be used to downplay the importance of collective action and public intervention.

From the social and economic studies on poverty to an analytical framework to resilience

Given the numerous problems of the "heroic" definition of resilience, one could be tempted to dismiss the usefulness of the concept for sociological studies of poverty altogether. We defend instead that there is an important place for a concept of resilience in sociology — and particularly for studying poverty and the effects of large-scale economic crisis. But it has to avoid the pitfalls presented above. The best way to do so is to take into account the theoretical and empirical findings of research on poverty (Promberger et al., 2014).

Studies of poverty have long stressed the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon, residing in a complex interaction between a large number of objective factors (such as living conditions) and subjective factors (such as social representations, attitudes and lifestyles). These factors interact along various social layers from the individual to society as a whole. One of the main drivers of the discussion is about addressing not only the description of economic and other material living conditions, but also the active part that the poor may play in relation to those conditions.

The notion of resilience therefore follows a well-established focus of poverty studies on the living conditions of the poorer social classes that goes as far back as Engels' (1993 [1845]) study on the living conditions of the English working class and their relation with capitalist exploitation, or as philanthropic authors concerned with precarious way of living of working classes, such as in Summer's work (1883).

A key feature of the studies on poverty is the idea of its multidimensionality as a comprehensive social phenomenon with multiple interacting causes and with consequences and manifestations in several spheres of social life. First put forward by Walker (1897) when discussing the relation between industrialization, law and some behaviours of the working classes, the question of multidimensionality was subsequently tackled by Rowntree and Lavers (1951), who specified six basic human needs: food, income, clothing, fuel and light, various domestic appliances and personal equipment. Sen (1999) would later propose the inclusion non-monetary indicators to offset their predominance in the construction of poverty indices, reflected precisely in the incorporation of indicators on health (life expectancy, infant mortality) and education, in addition to income. These developments converged to an encompassing definition of poverty as the deprivation of access to income, work, education, health and housing, proposed by Room (1989).

Through the work of authors such as Townsend (1954, 1962) another key concept was developed in the study of poverty, which was to become dominant: that of relative poverty. The new concept was based on the notion of inequality, asserting

that the poor are people, families and groups whose resources are so scarce that they prevent access to standards considered dignified in the societies in which they live. The notion of relative poverty also evokes the idea of social participation. Poverty is not merely the lack of material means, but rather extends to other dimensions, such as those of subjective perceptions and social links and identities (Ravaillon, 1997; D. Gordon, 2000; Levitas, 2000).

In a different theoretical direction, authors such as Paugam (1991) and Castel (1995), blowing new life into the term coined by Lenoir (1974), further developed the notion of "social exclusion" to stress the importance of social relations and their breakdown in a social and economic context undergoing change, particularly the weakening of labour relations and, consequently, the relations of individuals with other social networks and institutions, with impacts on the personalities and attitudes of those excluded. The authors would name this breakdown "disaffiliation" (collapse of social ties) or "disqualification" (loss of relational skills), conducive to social exclusion.

However, all these perspectives pay scant interest to agency, but rather highlight the conditioning, constraints and even some determinism of the paths, status and identities arising from the social, economic and political institutions and structures, where people are perceived, at the very best, as reflexes or products.

In opposition to this view, the concept of "culture of poverty" was used by Lewis (2011 [1961]) in his studies on poor neighbourhoods in Latin America. The culture of poverty is seen as a defense inside these communities with a view to survival and resistance against opprobrium, indignity, discrimination, scarcity and insecurity at all levels and realms of life. Hence, this involves a cultural standard, including values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviour standards, social and family networks, relations with work and the state, structured in the difficult living conditions of these communities enabling them to bear and adapt to these conditions. Hoggart (1970) and Brébant (1984), among others, developed important work in this line of research. However, the concept was criticized for reducing the culture of the poor to a single universal standard and, primarily, for giving way to a certain "racism against the poor", blaming them and their culture for the way they live.

Recently, the proposals by Sen (1999, 2009), inscribed in a more overall movement to go beyond the old dichotomies in social science, focus the problem of poverty not only on the deprivation of individual capacities but also on the absence of opportunities, i.e. on the unfair way that institutions operate such as the market and state.

It is possible, without an undue stretch of imagination, to stress the similarities between this perspective of synthesis and the arguments used by Bourdieu (1979) on the two modes of existence of societies, one objectified on institutions and social fields, and another incorporated into people in the form of provisions and schemes of appraisal which form the *habitus*. Bourdieu's proposal is based on the theory that the system of dispositions and taste preferences incorporated in agents is structured by the objective conditions of existence in which it is generated, but it is simultaneously structuring of these same conditions, in that it produces conduct adjusted to it, without any necessary conscious intentionality. Thus, even without deliberate search, individuals recognize their

living conditions, including the resources and interdictions inscribed in social, economic and cultural structures, and act in a coherent fashion accordingly, through the dispositions producing the action.

We can also assume the existence of resources objectively inscribed in the structures of distribution of the different forms of capital, which the individuals are differently capable of recognizing, preventing some social classes from accessing them. It could also happen that provisions acquired at a given time of the capital distribution structures are activated at times when these structures have changed, producing what Bourdieu called "hysteresis of habitus", creating maladjusted conduct in relation to the objective conditions. This is likely to occur more frequently, for example, in intergenerational relations, in social trajectories that imply changes in social positions or, regarding what is of concern herein, in times of crisis, when the limitation of resources clashes with lifestyles formatted for conditions prior to that crisis. The effects of crises on trajectories are capable of producing situations of this type, leaving agents either more or less capable, sometimes better prepared to perceive risk, at other times disarmed of this capacity to identify adverse contexts and react to them.

As illustrated in the intensive study of biographies of people in situations of poverty (Bourdieu, 1993), the objective conditions of "misery" determined by a dominated position held in the structures of distribution of social, cultural and economic capital, added to the impossibility of reproducing lost living conditions, are incorporated by the poor in the form of provisions and schemes of appraisal generating lifestyles of survival which, in turn, interfere in the processes structuring those objective conditions, according to whether they point towards conformism or to an individual reaction of "insubordination". In fact, provisions and schemes of appraisal include attitudes, preferences, tastes, capacities and inhibitions, values and representations adjusted to the poverty of the social networks, economic means and cultural skills that people can use to their avail. This means that individuals, even the poorest, develop an active relationship (of nonconformity or conformity) with their conditions of existence, a "lifestyle" which varies according to these conditions (volume and type of capital possessed) and "ways of life" which reflect internalized dispositions and preferences.

Ways of life can thus be defined, on one hand by the interaction between a set of structurally designed resources and constraints, and on the other hand by the system of regulated activities and lifestyles adopted by the agents (Curie, Caussad and Hajjer, 1986). The concept of "ways of life", combining "objective" and "subjective" dimensions of poverty, can be of extreme usefulness for the scientific research on poverty. It can work as a mediating element that articulates the resources and constraints associated with a specific position in the social structure, underlined by the socio-economic conditions underlined by the concepts of relative and absolute poverty, and the systems of everyday life practices, evaluations, representations, social and cultural references and strategic choices of families and individuals in the context imposed by those constraints as proposed by the culturalist traditions. This view can thus help finding a way of integrating the notion of resilience into social theories on poverty.

Building up a critical notion of social resilience

A critical definition of resilience

Benefitting from this theoretical framework, we can put forward a critical notion of resilience. Resilience should be understood as one of the different possible processes by which the poverty ways of life mediate responses to systematic social and economic stresses — such as mass unemployment, severe deteriorations of working conditions or large-scale retrenchment of social transfers and social services — and how, in turn, these ways of life are impacted by these responses. The family is a particularly pertinent unit of analysis for capturing these processes, since the family is the basic framework for accessing and sharing resources, defining strategies and incorporation of basic values which orient actors' behaviour. The result of resilience processes is open-ended, potentially leading to either transformation — whether improvement or degradation — or reinforcement of pre-existing ways of life.

Resilience should thus not be understood as an attribute that is inherent to some families or individuals but as a process in which several features of the natural and social worlds are called into play. Indeed, a key point in our perspective is that resilience practices are neither created nor operate in a social or environmental void. Like any type of human action, the space of possibilities for resilience is shaped by both the social structure and the natural environment, even if such practices may in the long run influence and transform the latter two.

The existence of an external shock of systemic nature in social structures is another distinctive feature of resilience processes. These processes are activated not only when individuals, families or groups undergo a shock which alters and constrains their objective conditions of existence, but when this shock also causes the reconfiguration of social structures, namely in three areas: in the allocation of the existing resources; in the distribution of risk; and in its power structures. Thus, social structures are not of a static nature, whose transformation arises from the action of social agents in processes of resilience. On the contrary, they are also affected by the external shock and consequent effects, creating a new and unique social and economic context for individuals and institutions alike.

We thus propose a dynamic perspective of the structural context and also a reflexive agency by those affected by changing hardship conditions. When looking at social resilience as a process which implies the reconfiguration of mechanisms of adaptation of the income and resources generated by individuals and families and their consumption needs in a scenario where the social structures themselves also undergo a process of reconfiguration, as a result of systemic socioeconomic stresses, we are able to establish a unique and qualitatively distinctive dimension for this phenomenon in view of the coping strategies or other forms of response to shocks which drastically affect the living conditions of individuals, simultaneously conferring pertinence to their study in the current context of crisis.

Resilience processes comprise two major dimensions: the mobilization of economic, cultural, social and natural resources; and the shifting of risks in time and space.

Main dimensions of resilience processes

Having defined the concept of resilience and its scope, we should now turn to the operation of resilience processes in more detail. In our perspective, resilience processes comprise two major dimensions: the *mobilization of resources*; and the *shifting of risks*.

Mobilization of resources

Resources that are relevant to resilience processes can be classified for analytical purposes into four major groups: economic, social, cultural, and environmental. *Economic resources* include, among others: financial resources provided by access to credit and availability of savings; non-mercantile economic phenomena like gift and redistribution networks and self-production practices; or technical means of production, such as agricultural tools, industrial machines or computers.

In turn, *social resources* refers to networks of kinship, friendship and acquaintances; collective action instances, such as political parties, trade unions, interest groups or NGOs; and public resources, such as public facilities, public services and welfare provisions.

Cultural resources refers in this context to informal or codified knowledge — such as science, technology or law — as well as the diversity of beliefs, values and attitudes present in a society.

Finally, *environmental resources* include basic life-supporting resources such as arable land, water or air; raw materials such wood, metals or stone; wildlife such as fish, game or plants; full ecosystems such as swamps, forests, rivers or seas; organic requisites and outcomes of agricultural practices such as seeds, livestock or crops.

Mobilization of resources then refers to *the forms by which such resources are made available for resilience processes and how they are effectively used*. It follows from this definition that differences in the constitution and operation of a social structure and diverse relations of said structure with the natural environment add up to very different degrees of access to resources and also very different ways for societies, institutions and individuals to make use of them. That is to say, resilience processes are heavily influenced by prevalent social inequalities and power asymmetries within a society.

Shifting of risks

The second main dimension of resilience processes is the shifting of risks in time, space and across the social structures and the environment. Taking inspiration from Luhmann (1993), we will define risk as an eventual situation that entails a loss of some kind for someone and whose actual occurrence is at the same time uncertain and avoidable by human action.[2]

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2   It could be argued that some geological phenomena of severe disruptive potential, such as earthquakes or volcanic eruptions would fall outside this definition of risk, as their occurrence is not a result of human action. However, we contend that the consequences of such phenomena over societies, institutions and individuals can be influenced to a large degree by social artefacts — such as patterns of settling, spatial planning, building regulations or civil protection mechanisms.

By social risks, we take those risks that are related to the workings and inter-play of economic, political and cultural systems in a society and with the environ-ment. In the case of resilience, we are interested in the social risks associated with the specific types of shocks mentioned above in section "A critical definition of re-silience". We will group these risks thematically, for a matter of easier presentation and illustration. However, it should be noted that there is not an exclusive corre-spondence between types of risks and types of shocks. On the contrary, large-scale shocks are likely to affect societies, institutions and the environment at multiple levels and thus to give rise to risks and losses of multiple types. Having this caveat in mind, we will consider in our reasoning: *socioeconomic* risks such as unemploy-ment, labour precariety and poverty; *physical* risks such as hunger, physical and psychological violence and physical and mental health decline; *political* risks, such as organized discrimination of social groups; and *environmental* risks, such as pol-lution, erosion of arable land, lack of water and climate change.

Also following Luhmann's notion of "strategic distribution of risk" (1993: 29), we will take *shifting of risks* to mean the substitution of a specific immediate risk — the *primary risk* — by another risk — the *secondary risk* — distanced from the current context of decision across time, space and/or the social structure. Thus risks can be shift across a person's lifetime, within and across institutions.

Risk can also be shifted within institutional spaces. The family provides two classical examples of this. In contexts of mass unemployment — such as those in Southern Europe after the 2008 crisis — pensioners become the mainstay of their families, through money transfers, food gifts and payment of bills for children who either lost their jobs or suffered significant wage cuts. In this case, one can see the primary risks of hunger, lack of housing and indebtedness of children (and grand-children) being shifted to parents and grandparents, and converted into a second-ary risk of poverty for the elderly. Child labour provides another example, albeit in the opposite direction. Parents who send a young child to work as a means to in-crease family income may be trying to avert the primary risk of hunger. Yet, the for-feiting of education and the psychological and physical strains placed by work upon a growing child generate enhanced secondary risks of poverty and illness for the child in his/her adulthood.

An interesting insight by Luhmann is that the very nature of the secondary risk may actually increase the chances of the primary risk actually occurring. Emigration is a good case at point. A decision to emigrate by an individual or a family can be made to avoid the primary risk of low wages and unemployment in one's home country. Yet, in most destination countries, immigrants are precisely one of the groups that is more vulnerable to extreme forms of exploitation at work (ILO, 2015). Thus, emigration can be seen as creating a secondary risk taking place in a different space — from the country of origin to the destination — and time of the primary risk.

In all, shifting of risks will likely occur along the lines of major social structur-ing processes, such as class, gender, age or race. For instance, risk-shifting practices such as budget juggling may operate by disproportionally burdening women with housework or with a lower share in the distribution of food in the family (Harrison, 2013). Overreliance on social networks — such as those based on kinship or

acquaintances — to compensate for lowering wages or lost access to services puts at increased risk those who are outside such networks — such as refugees, internal migrants or newly arrived immigrants (Hossain et al., 2011).

Relationship between resilience dimensions

Yet the relationship between resilience processes, on the one side, and social structure and the environment on the other side, is a double edged sword. Resilience processes, like all types of human action, actively contribute to the reproduction and transformation of the social structure and environment. On the one hand, resilience processes draw on finite stocks of resources that may not be easily (or not at all) replenished or whose exploitation may imply significant personal, social and/or environmental damage. On the other hand, they can make use of power relations and mechanisms of social inequality, thus contributing to their reinforcement.

This can be illustrated with a few examples. A family's home budget adjustment efforts may result in a less varied diet — such as switching from fresh fruit and vegetables to ready-made meals or "junk food" (Griffith, O'Connell and Smith, 2013). This may have the undesired consequence of declining future health among family members. Increased reliance on extended family networks to provide for services hitherto supported by paid or state-provided services — for instance, childcare — may lead to burdening extended family members and result in increased tensions and eventual breakdowns in family relations (Pleasence and Balmer, 2012). The same goes for natural resources: illegal tapping of groundwater by families to make up for the deterioration of public water supply in drought affected areas may result in further ecological degradation and aggravation of water shortages (Sapountzaki, 2012).

Finally, and as becomes apparent in the examples discussed above, it is important to take into account that both dimensions of resilience processes are often interdependent and can be mutually reinforcing in practice. Thus, mobilization of resources frequently entails the shifting of risks, such as in the case of pension-dependent elderly supporting their children or grandchildren through financial transfers, themselves incurring increased risk of poverty. Likewise, the ability to shift risks often entails the mobilization of resources. One example is emigration. In itself a risk shifting strategy, it often implies the mobilization of kinship and acquaintances networks both for travelling (e.g. for funding) and for support on arrival in a new country (e.g. for housing or finding work).

In sum, a critical perspective of resilience seeks not only to identify and describe coping practices in crisis contexts at individual level but to identify their place in wider social and environmental resilience processes. This implies looking at resilience at the same time as: (a) an outcome of ways of life, (b) an element of their reproduction, but also (c) a potential source for their transformation.

Conclusions

In this article, we have developed a critique of a "heroic" notion of resilience that has been dominant on the application of the concept to social phenomena, such as poverty. In its place, we propose an alternative, sociologically-grounded, definition of resilience. Such definition does away with the notion of resilience as an attribute unevenly distributed between individuals that manifests itself through individual practices for coping with hardship. Instead we look at resilience as a complex and multilevel process through which societies, institutions and individuals respond to sudden and large-scale environmental, social and economic shocks. The key insight that this sociological perspective brings to the resilience debate is the shift in focus from the individual to the social and from individual actions to the creation of conditions for them to take place.

On the basis of this assumptions, we believe that a sociological research agenda on resilience is fully justified. On the one hand, sociology should not give up the fight for the meaning of concepts in the public sphere. This the more so, when a particular version of the idea of resilience — the "heroic" notion — is being pushed forward to legitimize the retrenchment of the welfare state and the reprivatization of risks — that is, the shifting to the individual of risks that were previously dealt with through collective means.

On the other hand, sociology requires more adequate concepts to deal with the workings and social consequences of phenomena stemming from abrupt and large-scale shocks. In this vein, a sociological agenda for resilience should proceed along two different but related paths: the identification and study of actual resilience processes; and the study of the role that different institutional configurations play on resilience processes. To do so, this agenda will have to rely strongly on a comparative outlook, as this will point out to the effects of different configurations of the social structure have on resilience processes.

One prime example for study of resilience processes — in fact, the one that led to our initial attempts to develop the concept — was the Great Recession that followed the 2007-08 global financial crisis, coupled with the experience of widespread austerity policies devised to answer it after 2010 in Europe. Indeed, this coupling of a major economic crisis with a major policy shift constitutes a prime example of a major multi-layered shock in several European countries. Economically, it generated long periods of economic depression or stagnation leading to surges in unemployment and poverty. Politically, it was used as an opportunity to press for the retrenchment of social transfers and public services.

If we look at the level of a particular institution, the family, identifying resilience processes implies understanding how ways of life were reconstructed or reinforced in response to the Great Recession and to austerity. From a sociological perspective, this requires proceeding along three lines. The first is to identify which resources were used and how they were mobilized for this reconstruction, as well as the reasons that led to the non-use of similar resources in similar contexts. The second is to identify, in the course of the deployment of these strategies, which risks were shifted and to whom, as well as which other new risks may have

replaced them. Particular attention should be given to the shifting of risks through life courses, as often the consequences of a decision are only felt several years later. The third is to study how families ascribe meaning both to the shocks and the transformations in the ways of life themselves, paying specific attention to how they perceive their future and that of their family.

In conclusion, one should stress the pertinence of this research agenda by underlining that the relevance of a sociological conceptualization of resilience extends further than the scientific field and encompasses the public policy realm. As seen above, a sociological perspective on resilience may provide the grounds for social policies and local development policies targeting poverty. Indeed, resilience is neither a "good" nor a "bad" process from a policy standpoint. What matters from a sociological standpoint, is that resilience is only worth promoting inasmuch as it actually transforms a way of life to the point that poverty factors — and their interplay — are lessened or no longer at work.

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