

> Angeliki Paidakaki

Social resilience cells

Exploring new governance models for the European cities of our present and our future

Abstract

Driven by a motivation to update, renew and advance the vision of sustainable development, Angeliki Paidakaki sets out to explore alternative paths towards socially optimal sustainability. She looks at new governance models with greater potential to foster urban citizenship and satisfy people's needs. To support her analysis, she introduces the concept of 'social resilience cells', urban societal groups of various kinds involved in the provision of social services, with the aim of meeting as yet unfulfilled needs among different groups in society.

> Introduction

Europe is currently going through some strenuous times. A combination of debt crises experienced in several European countries, an increasing number of environmental risks, as well as the recent massive flows of migrants and displaced people mostly from the Middle East, has resulted in a growing dissatisfaction of basic human needs for an increasing number of people. Trapped at the same time in a world system dominated by aspirations for economic growth and fixing over-indebted economies, Europe has been losing its strong social face, and consequently put the vision of sustainable development in jeopardy. The increased socioeconomic and spatial inequalities witnessed in various European cities speak volumes of our failure to remain consistent

on our sustainable development commitment; namely the satisfaction of our current needs without compromising the ability of future European generations to meet their own needs. This failure calls for an urgent need to update, renew and advance the vision of sustainability.

In this paper, I make an effort to address this challenge by bringing the often neglected socio-institutional dimension of sustainable development back to the sustainability discourse (see Parra 2013; Mehmood and Parra 2013; Parra and Moulaert 2011). More specifically, I try to explore alternative paths to move towards socially optimal sustainability outcomes by looking at new governance models that hold better potential in fostering stronger urban citizenship and responding to the satisfaction of human needs. This exploration

focuses specifically on crisis periods, triggered by either a natural hazard, and/or an economic failure, and extreme social distress.

This governance dynamic is explored through the spectrum of social innovation, an approach to development with three core dimensions: 1. the satisfaction of human needs (content dimension); 2. changes in social relations, especially with regard to governance that enables the above satisfaction (process dimension); and 3. an increase in the socio-political capability and access to resources to enhance participation and citizenship (empowerment dimension, Moulaert et al 2005; Gerometta, Haussermann and Longo 2005). I treat social innovation as an instrument that reinforces the social view of sustainability because it promotes the sociopolitical integration of individuals and social groups, and stresses the importance of access to needful resources for enabling the satisfaction of human needs (Nussbaumer and Moulaert 2007). This approach involves looking at governance mechanisms not only as an outcome of policy alternatives, but also as processes and results of power relations between social groups pursuing the governance of society and socio-ecological communities (Miquel, Cabeza and Anglada 2013). This brings to the surface a less explored field in sustainability scholarship: namely the need to design socially optimal governance models of heterogeneous, (ant)agonistic, and dynamic communities.

In order to analytically explore these alternative governance models, I hereby introduce and develop the concept of 'social resilience cells' (SRCs). SRCs are urban societal groups of various kinds (profit-oriented, socially innovative, radical) involved in the provision of social services (housing, education, health) with the aim of meeting unsatisfied needs (material, socio-cultural, and political - in terms of empowerment and cultivation of citizenship) for different groups of society (Paidakaki and Moulaert 2015). These social groups have their own language and defend their discourses and practices based on their own common values, needs, and aspirations. Some SRCs are more powerful compared to

others in terms of recognition, access to resources, socio-political and socio-cultural networking, and facilitation of their needs (for example through policy orientations and legislative frameworks; *ibid*).

The (a)symmetry of power relations among these groups guides the implementation of a 'city's resilience' - as well as its 'sustainability paths' - with a particular set of actions and initiatives being largely accommodated, while alternative ones could either be wasted away or highly contained. This potential societal loss partly reflects the insufficiency of market-inspired models of governance, which put emphasis on reflexive risk calculation, accountancy rules and quantitative evaluations of performance (Lévesque 2013; Dean 1999; Burchell 1993, cited in Swyngedouw 2005). This governance model undermines the democratic values, the multiplicity of identities and social relations along with the common good and the obligations of civic responsibility (Giroux 2006), which could lead to a failure in tapping into the developmental potential of all the SRCs active on the ground.

This failure further calls for the need to build stronger analytical connections between the preexisting and emergent post-crisis bottom-up actions on the one hand, and the top-down socio-institutional arrangements on the other. This 'bottom-linked' dialectic between the micro and macro approaches to urban development reveals the need for socio-institutional transformations that could better correspond to, and enhance, the quality of 'resilience' of a diverse and dynamic 'landscape' of actors on the ground. The new role of an inter-level state should be investigated with the aim of exploring new ways through which sustainability can be pursued and materialised.

> Capturing the micro-resilience dynamics: a housing system perspective

Over the last decade, the term 'resilience' has become the new buzzword in academic and policy spheres alike. Various definitions have been developed, policies designed, and strategies engraved; all inspired by either the 'bounce-back' or the 'bounce-forward' interpretation of resilience. The former interpretation considers resilience as the capacity of a system to return to its original functions in a timely manner after the strike of a shock (Holling 1996, p. 31, cited in Davoudi et al 2012). The latter interpretation surpasses the 'resistance to change' perspective of the former, and takes on board the social complexity, the adaptive evolution and the ability for transformation of urban human systems (Lorenz 2013).

What is currently being investigated in the academic world, but still remains uncovered in the policy domains, is the answer to burning questions, such as: Bouncing forward in which direction? Whose transformative capacity is enhanced and whose is undermined? To answer these questions, we first need to capture the existence of unbalanced power relations embedded in human systems, in which the most powerful actors may sanction alternative opinions and actions by consolidating a position of superiority with reference to their own hegemonic social construction of 'resilience' (also see Kuhlicke 2013; Davoudi 2012; Cannon and Müller-Mahn 2010, cited in Davoudi et al 2012). This means that the more influential SRCs - the well-organised, well-funded and highly articulate ones - might have better chances to survive in the system, while the less influential and underfunded ones might remain either contained or doomed to extinction.

In order to give a more tangible meaning to the notion of SRC, I take a housing system perspective. I argue that the housing system is a stage on which people set forward various transformations and, hence, resilience trajectories. Some groups deal with housing deficits as an opportunity for progress in the functioning of the community, starting from discussing housing alternatives to bringing up

the questions of human rights and changes in socio-political relationships (Boano and Hunter 2012; Johnson 2011; Satterthwaite 2011), while others look at it as an opportunity for (re-)triggering the processes of wealth accumulation. These different perspectives are taken up by three broadly-defined types of SRC: the pro-growth, the pro-equity, and the pro-co-materialising.

More specifically, the more powerful pro-growth SRCs consist of powerful urban actors (for-profit developers) working inter alia with realtors, bankers, utility companies, and investment companies to generate and extract exchange values (Bull-Kumanga et al 2003). These SRCs define housing problems by material standards, and housing values are determined by the material quantity of related products, such as profit or equity (Turner 1980). Houses are, hence, treated as commodities ready to become the object of a profitable transaction in the free market (Pais and Elliot 2008).

On the other hand, we observe the generally less powerful pro-equity groups (non-profit developers) working inter alia with neighbourhood associations and civic groups to accomplish the mission of housing affordability. These SRCs advocate primarily for use values and a qualitatively richer housing market, and maintain an interest in preserving and improving the local quality of life (Pais and Elliott 2008; Davoudi et al 2012). A closely-related group consists of organisations engaged in co-materialising initiatives, placing emphasis on housing production and/or ownership as a collective activity and not as an end product. Either connected to ideological inspirations or triggered by exclusion from housing due to financial insolvency, these groups undertake responsibility for their own social reproduction and housing provision. Their mode of organisation usually manifests itself in homeless people's cooperatives, community land trusts, and squatter movements (Biel 2012; Satterthwaite 2011)

> Governing diversity: a bottom-linked approach

The diversity and heterogeneity of housing actions cannot go unnoticed when urban policies and programmes are designed. The governance of this societal diversity presents itself as a core European challenge. In the following lines, I make an effort to start theorising the governance of SRCs by using a ‘bottom-linked development’ compass. This ‘bottom-linked’ compass “serves to designate socially creative strategies that in governance terms are neither strictly ‘bottom-up’ nor ‘top-down’, but where there is a positive interplay across governance levels between public institutional initiatives from ‘above’ and active and empowering involvement from ‘below’” (García et al 2009, cited in Andersen et al 2013, p. 204). Hence, the aim is to build better connections between the heterogeneous actions on the micro level and the socio-institutional arrangements on the macro level, in order to look for governance mechanisms that can better facilitate the continuity and sustainability of all local actions in a more socially just way. The micro level of development is theorised by bringing the literature of social innovation into dialogue with the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach to urban development.

When embracing the ABCD approach to strategise urban development, the emphasis is put on capacities and abilities rather than shortcomings. The ABCD approach starts with the assumption that the majority of SRCs have assets, skills, capacities, and networks; and that effective community development begins with the identification of those SRCs, the building of relationships with and within communities, and the use of assets and relationships in achieving the visions and plans emerging from the process (Kunnen, MacCallum and Young 2013). The rationale of such an approach is to put stress on revealing and comprehensively recording and understanding better all the available assets by answering questions, such as: a. what are the (new) claims expressed by the various SRCs?; b. in what ways are these claims materialised?; and c. what instruments do SRCs seek in order to empower themselves?

(ibid).

At the same time, the power imbalances among the various SRCs also need to be taken into account. The role of the state herein is crucial in developing such democratic public institutions that could normalise antagonisms and facilitate the continuity of all social actions that evidently work. This can be achieved by stressing a bottom-linked approach to development, giving an equal share to the virtuous cycle of solidarity, experimentation, and reflexive learning, triggered by the crisis conditions and expressed through the (re) production of SRCs.

As Hiller states (2013, p. 171), “an ontology of difference opens up the possibility for change to stimulate differentiation and to create new social forms [...], which can also liberate us from the hegemonic claim that There Is No Alternative to the neoclassical market system”. Reality says that there are various market systems (growth-oriented, social, cooperative) co-existing within spatially-bounded ‘multiple communities’ of interest with potentially conflicting loyalties and orientations, which the state - in the role of the tertius - is urgently called upon to govern (Kunnen, MacCallum and Young 2013). This translates into the need for the state to gain a deep understanding of the various forces played out in cities and adapt its institutional structures in order to exercise social justice in the allocation of rights to the urban development experimentation for all. Precisely due to its legislative and executive powers, the state, as we explain in the following section, holds the potential for reaching a socially optimal development praxis by normalising the establishment of respectful and productive frameworks (see also Kunnen, MacCallum and Young 2013).

> Bringing the state back in

The ordinarily expected role of the state is to achieve its political objective of delivering social justice in terms of access to basic services, such as health, education, and housing. This objective has always centered on the individual. What has changed over the

years is the role of the state in the provision of these services. Since the 1980s, the state has largely rolled back from its responsibility to directly provide social services and, as a consequence, has allowed room for private actors - for-profit and non-profit - to fill this vacuum. Especially in moments of financial, environmental, or social crises, a diverse landscape of new local actors emerges and aims to become the new protagonists in social service delivery (Martinelli 2013).

Despite its shifted role, the state still holds a very powerful position in orchestrating development. The current challenge for the 'neo-welfare' state pursuing a 'developmentalist' agenda is to exercise social justice in the ways it deals with the various SRCs, which attach different development values to social issues (Miquel, Cabeza and Anglada 2013). This equal treatment is not only a matter of ethics, it is matter of pragmatism and need. There are instances when non-profit SRCs become the main or sole provider of social services for the poor, but often remain inadequately funded or understaffed. On many occasions, the devolution of the responsibility for social services to local governments has occurred without adequate financial transfers from the larger levels of administration, which adds to the problematic phenomenon of some SRCs remaining under-capitalised (Martinelli 2013). This reflects the absence of an inter-level design of governance that promotes a bottom-linked perspective. Central governments should clearly: a. frame socially innovative initiatives in national legislation and offer incentives and deep subsidies to attract and maintain interest; b. design programmes that may favour particular income groups and individuals, including the neohomeless, migrants, and refugees; and c. develop policies that promote all types of housing property ownership tenure, including cooperatives and mutual housing (Schwartz 2015; Olshansky and Johnson 2010). Similarly, on the European level, EU programmes need to be redesigned with the aim of not only sufficiently funding, but also regulating, providing institutional room and legitimacy to all the actors involved in the provision of social services (Martinelli

2013).

> Conclusions

Placing the magnifying lenses closer to the heterogeneity of the manifestation of resilience, the role of the European city is significant in sketching socially and democratically 'healthier urban bodies'. If the long-term stress due to the housing deficit, for example, is purposefully or unintentionally ignored, then the post-crisis city will barely survive for the wellbeing of its few 'healthier' limbs. However, if the long-term stress is addressed by supporting and bolstering the conscience and self-confidence of all SRCs, the urban community as a whole will develop a strong immune system, capable to better respond to the capacities and needs of the majority of its limbs (Paidakaki and Moulaert 2015). This denotes that the 'ideal sustainable and resilient' city can only be materialised when all SRCs are equally recognised and adequately funded with the aim of testing and unfolding their transformative capacities.

Seen from this perspective, the support of all SRCs can be seen as a broader vehicle, through which sustainability can be achieved for different groups of society. A deeper understanding of these various forces played out in the localities, as well as the provision of such an inter-level socio-institutional framework that fosters the 'resilience' potential in the various SRCs, I argue, may incubate sustainability in the most socially optimal way. This incubation, I further argue, holds the potential to reconstitute sustainability as a still relevant European objective that can be re-mobilised in order to address the complex and multifaceted crisis realities currently witnessed in various cities and nations across Europe.

References

- ANDERSEN J., DELICA K. and FRANDBEN M.S. (2013) 14. From 'book container' to community center In F. Moulaert, D. MacCallum, A. Mehmood, A. Hamdouch, E. Swyngedouw and S. Gonzalez (eds.), *The International Handbook on Social Innovation: Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, UK
- BOANO, C. and HUNTER W. (2012) *Architecture at Risk (?): The Ambivalent Nature of Post-disaster Practice*. *Architectoni.ca* 1.1, 1-13
- BULL-KAMANGA, L., DIAGNE K., LAVELL A., LEON E., LERISE F., MACGREGOR H., MASKREY A., MESHACK M., PELLING M., REID H., SATTERTHWAITHE D., SONGSORE J., WESTGATE K. and YITAMBE A. (2003) *From everyday hazards to disasters: the accumulation of risk in urban areas*. *Environment and Urbanization* 15, 193-204
- DAVOUDI, S., SHAW K., HAIDER L.J., QUINLAN E.A., PETERSON D.G., WILKINSON C., FUNFGELD H., MCEVOY D., PORTER L. and SAVOUDI S. (2012) *Resilience: A Bridging Concept or a Dead End? "Reframing" Resilience: Challenges for Planning Theory and Practice Interacting Traps: Resilience Assessment of a Pasture Management System in Northern Afghanistan Urban Resilience: What Does it Mean in Planning Practice? Resilience as a Useful Concept for Climate Change Adaptation? The Politics of Resilience for Planning: A Cautionary Note*. *Planning Theory & Practice* 13.2, 299-333
- GEROMETTA, J., HAUSSERMANN, H., and LONGO, G. (2005). *Social innovation and civil society in urban governance: strategies for an inclusive city*. *Urban Studies*, 42(11), 2007-2021
- GIROUX, A. H. (2006) *Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class and the Politics of Disposability*. *College Literature* 33.3, 171-96
- HILLIER, J. (2013) 12. *Towards a Deleuzian-inspired methodology for social innovation research and practice*. In F. Moulaert, D. MacCallum, A. Mehmood, A. Hamdouch, E. Swyngedouw and S. Gonzalez (eds.), *The International Handbook on Social Innovation: Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, UK
- JOHNSON, C. (2011) *Kernels of change: civil society challenges to state-led strategies for recovery and risk reduction in Turkey*. *Environment and Urbanization* 23, 415-30
- KUHLCHE, C. (2013) *Resilience: a capacity and a myth: findings from an in-depth case study in disaster management research*. *Natural Hazards* 67.1, 61-7
- KUNNEN, N., MACCALLUM D. and YOUNG S. (2013) 21. *Research strategies for assets and strengths based community development*. In F. Moulaert, D. MacCallum, A. Mehmood, A. Hamdouch, E. Swyngedouw and S. Gonzalez (eds.), *The International Handbook on Social Innovation: Collective Action,*

Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, UK

- LEVESQUE, B. (2013) 2. Social innovation in governance and public management systems: toward a new paradigm? In F. Moulaert, D. MacCallum, A. Mehmood, A. Hamdouch, E. Swyngedouw and S. Gonzalez (eds.), *The International Handbook on Social Innovation: Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, UK
- LORENZ, F.D. (2013) The diversity of resilience: contributions from a social science perspective. *Natural Hazards* 67.1, 7-24
- MARTINELLI, F. (2013) 26. Learning from case studies of social innovation in the field of social services: creatively balancing top-down universalism with bottom-up democracy. In F. Moulaert, D. MacCallum, A. Mehmood, A. Hamdouch, E. Swyngedouw and S. Gonzalez (eds.), *The International Handbook on Social Innovation: Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, UK
- MEHMOOD, A. and Parra, C. (2013) 4. Social Innovation in an unsustainable world. In F. Moulaert, D. MacCallum, A. Mehmood, A. Hamdouch, E. Swyngedouw and S. Gonzalez (eds.), *The International Handbook on Social Innovation: Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, UK
- MIQUEL M.P., CABEZA M.G. and ANGLADA S.E. (2013) 11. Theorizing multi-level governance in social innovation dynamics. In F. Moulaert, D. MacCallum, A. Mehmood, A. Hamdouch, E. Swyngedouw and S. Gonzalez (eds.), *The International Handbook on Social Innovation: Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, UK.
- MOULAERT, F., MARTINELLI, F., SWYNGEDOUW, E. and GONZALEZ, S. (2005). Towards alternative model (s) of local innovation. *Urban studies*, 42(11), 1969-1990
- NUSSBAUMER, J. and MOULAERT F. (2007) L'innovation sociale au coeur des débats publics et scientifiques, dans J.-L. Klein et D. Harrisson (eds.). *L'innovation sociale*. Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 71-88
- OLSHANSKY, B.R. and JOHNSON L.A. (2010) *Clear As Mud; Planning for the Rebuilding of New Orleans*, American Planning Association Planners Press, Chicago / Washington DC
- PAIDAKAKI, A., and MOULAERT, F. (2015, July). Does the post-disaster resilient city really exist? A critical analysis of the heterogeneous transformative capacities of housing reconstruction 'resilience cells'. In *5th International Conference on Building Resilience* (pp. 1-23)
- PAIS, F.J., and ELLIOT R.J. (2008) Places as Recovery Machines: Vulnerability and Neighborhood Change After Major Hurricanes. *Social Forces* 86.4, 1415- 53

- PARRA, C. (2013) 9. Social sustainability; a competing concept to social innovation?. In F. Moulaert, D. MacCallum, A. Mehmood, A. Hamdouch, E. Swyngedouw and S. Gonzalez (eds.), *The International Handbook on Social Innovation: Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, UK
- PARRA, C. and MOULAERT, F. (2011) Why sustainability is so fragilely social... In: S. Oosterlynck, J. Van den Broeck, L. Albrechts, F. Moulaert and A. Verhetsel (eds.) *Strategic spatial projects: catalysts for change*. London: Routledge (RTPI series), pp. 163-173
- SATTERTHWAITTE, D. (2011) Editorial: Why is community action needed for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation?. *Environment and Urbanization* 23, 339-49
- SCHWARTZ, F.A. (2015) *Housing Policy in the United States*, Routledge, New York
- SWYNGEDOUW, E. (2005) Governance Innovation and the Citizen: The Janus Face of Governance-beyondthe-State. *Urban Studies* 42.11, 1991-2006
- TURNER, J. (1980) What to do about Housing - its part in Another Development. *Habitat International* 5.1/2, 203-211