

Resilience in Flux: Unraveling the Shifted Policy Narratives and Norms of Urban Planning in Toulouse, France

Változó ellenállóképesség: A megváltozott szakpolitikai narratívák és normák feltárása Toulouse városfejlesztésében

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the policy narrative of climate change associated with a specific term, 'resilience', which has surfaced in environmental public action in Europe over the past decade and has become an important and popular concept in contemporary urban planning. Mobilizing a qualitative methodology through forty-two semi-structured interviews, this study explores how resilience, gradually institutionalized, has evolved into a key term in managing uncertainty within the field of urban planning. It highlights that urban planners, as the key actors responsible for implementing resilience principles, diverge from the scientific foundations of resilience as articulated by generations of scholars across various academic disciplines. This departure occurs through the narrative and cognitive efforts of urban planners. The exponential mobilization of the resilience concept, driven by its demonstrated relevance in scientific research, has led to its broad application, but this can result in interpretations and uses that stray from its original theoretical underpinnings, potentially being exploited for political purposes. This work acts as a vector for norms that lead planners to oscillate between the logics of depoliticization and politicization. The bureaucratic handling of ecological issues, which is being newly established through the institutionalization of the term resilience, challenges existing political narratives. It also marks a gradual shift in planning work towards more norms and a pursuit of expertise and performance in public action. The article highlights that the adoption of the concept of resilience by public officials is not as dependent on current societal issues, such as climate change and the rise of social mobilization, as it is on a robust and burdensome context of environmental reform. Resilience is increasingly becoming the keyword of the neo-managerial wave and the bureaucratization of environmental issues, rather than a political social movement driven by civil society. This new model relies on both public and private, national and international expertise, clearly demonstrating the power of an administrative term and the narratives associated with it in transforming the work of planning.

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KULCSSZAVAK: ellenállóképesség; politikai narratívák; nyilvános cselekvés; politizálás; depolitizálás



ABSZTRAKT: E tanulmány azt az éghajlatváltozással kapcsolatos politikai narratívát vizsgálja, amely egy konkrét kifejezéshez, a rezilienciához (ellenállóképességhez) kapcsolódik, és amely az elmúlt évtizedben bukkant fel az európai környezetvédelmi diskurzusban. A kvalitatív módszertant alkalmazó kutatás negyven félig strukturált interjún alapul: azt elemzi, hogy a fokozatosan intézményesített reziliencia (ellenállóképesség) hogyan vált a bizonytalanság kezelésének kulcsfogalmává a várostervezés területén. A fogalomból és annak neo-menedzsment ihlette közintézkedésekben felülről lefelé történő bevezetéséből kiindulva azt kutatja, hogy a tervezési közpolitikák miként mennek át fokozatos orientációváltáson a franciaországi Toulouse városában. A végrehajtásukért felelős szereplőkre, a várostervezőkre összpontosítva bemutatja, hogy a tervezők narratív és kognitív munkája eltér a reziliencia (ellenállóképesség) fogalmában rejlő olyan elvektől, mint például a kockázatsökkentés, a bizonytalanság és a kiszámíthatatlanság: valójában olyan normák vektoraként működik, amelyek a tervezőket a depolitizálási és politizálási logikák közötti ingadozásra készítik.

Introduction

‘Where does this widespread, increasingly oppressive, and increasingly shared feeling of widespread backwardness come from, reinforced by the constant injunction to adapt to evolve? ‘Evolution’, it is said, calls for ‘mutations’ enabling us to ‘survive’ and ‘adapt’ to a new ‘environment’, now described as unstable, complex, and uncertain, and in relation to which our societies are constantly accused of ‘falling behind’.¹ (Stiegler 2019)

The pervasive sense of societal backwardness, intensified by calls for adaptation in the face of evolving environments, is a topic explored by the philosopher Barbara Stiegler (2019). Stiegler argues that humanity, thrust into the Anthropocene era, faces unprecedented maladjustment to an increasingly unstable and unpredictable environment, a departure from the historically stable conditions of evolution. Nevertheless, the theoretical frameworks of sociological reasoning have long offered few tools for studying the question of uncertainty and unpredictability. According to Michel Grossetti, some sociologists have got into the habit of ‘reasoning as if they did not exist, thus giving the impression that what happened was bound to happen, either because the structural trends were in that direction, or because the will of the actors led to it’ (Grossetti 2004, 3.). If the predictability of social situations is the result of our ongoing activity of coordinating and ordering, unpredictability has a particular significance in today’s societies, where it has become common to observe a growing interest in risk and security, in all areas and at all levels of social activity. Ulrich Beck was one of the first to perceive this progression and to note a change in society: the question of the distribution of wealth produced by industrial society has now been overtaken by the question of the distribution of risk (Beck 1992). Risk has thus become the paradigm of modern societies, known as ‘risk societies’, entering a new social configuration: it is no longer the idea of progress that regulates society and guides the future, but the general principle of uncertainty and unpredictability.

Against the backdrop of environmental risks and climate emergency, public action, as highlighted by Milet (2022), grapples with uncertainty. The sociology of public action has a keen interest in the actions taken by a public authority (alone or in partnership) to deal with a situation perceived as posing a problem (Eymeri-Douzans, Pierre 2011; Neveu 2015). As well as dealing with social issues on a case-by-case basis, public policy is a 'collective action that contributes to the creation of a social and political order' (Lascoumes, Le Galès 2012, 7.). The literature emphasizes that public policies are as much about implementation as they are about decision-making (Barrault-Stella, Weill 2019; Boily, Savard 2017; Dubois 2023; Hassenteufel 2011) and narratives. Various authors such as Deborah Stone (1988), Emery Roe (1994) and Claudio Radaelli (2000) develop the notion of 'policy narrative'. These are causal stories that establish links between specific causes and anticipated effects, while setting out the constraints, parameters and issues that need to be considered by stakeholders in order to enable decision-making in a context characterized by significant uncertainty. These narratives have an ideological dimension in the broadest sense: they embody various beliefs and values. They include an obviously oriented description of the problematic situation on which action must be taken, carefully selected arguments to explain the causes of this situation, predictions about the misfortunes that await us if nothing is done, and proposals for an appropriate public action strategy. That said, they are designed for and in action, making them inherently programmatic (Stone 1989).

Taking those researches into account, this article looks closely at the emergence of a policy narrative on resilience, presenting it as a 'solution' (Neveu 2015) to uncertainty in the environmental sector. The central idea of this article is based on the line of research that there has been a gradual evolution in the discourse surrounding environmental public action: it has shifted from emphasizing mitigation and adaptation to risks (Jennings 2011) to a focus on resilience (Reghezza-Zitt, Rufat 2015). This transformation reflects a distinctive perspective where resilience asserts itself as the key concept that dominates the whole. The investigation of the gradual shift within the policy narrative is articulated around a focus on a particular domain of public action, namely that of environment in spatial planning. In this context, space emerges as the vector of an innovative linguistic reconfiguration. As Patrick Hassenteufel wrote, 'public action is subject to a permanent process of politicization and depoliticization. Depoliticization takes place through a variety of procedures, including, first and foremost, technicalisation. (...) Depoliticization also involves the production of a political consensus on the basis of principles that are presented as neutral but are more often than not polysemous and ambiguous.' (Hassenteufel 2011, 182-183.). The points I have made and the lines of research I have detailed lead us to formulate the following research questions: how can the growing enthusiasm for the notion of resilience in planning public action be understood as a

manifestation of politicization or depoliticization of environmental issues? To what extent does the adoption of resilience lead to the imposition of a new model based on expertise, while at the same time encouraging a neo-managerial standardization of the professional practices of the agents involved, and what impact does this have on the political nature of planning decision-making?

A social history of resilience

The term ‘resilience’, rooted in the Latin *resilio*, meaning ‘a return to the past and the ability to resume’, has experienced a resurgence across various fields (Barroca, Duchemine 2017), and has won acclaim and has been taken up by both civil society and the scientific community. In a recent article, several geographers used sampling to study the occurrence of the expressions ‘resilience’ and ‘vulnerability’ in the vocabulary of urban planning and development (Barroca, DiNardo, Mboumoua 2013). They conclude that 2005 was a decisive year for the use of the term ‘resilience’, to the point of talking about a ‘resilience fad’ (Djament-Tran et al. 2011).

Resilience had already enjoyed great success in the early twentieth century with the development of studies in physics. The French engineer Georges Charpy developed a method known as the Charpy test, or ‘Charpy notched impact bending test’, designed to measure a material’s resistance to fracture. This initial use of the term gradually faded over time. In the 1970s, the term resurfaced in botanical ecology, and was used to describe the return to equilibrium of ecosystems after a shock (Holling 1973). In the 1980s, resilience was embraced in psychology and psychoanalysis. A resilient individual was defined as one who has overcome a personal trauma and achieved a ‘stable personal balance’ (Bowlby 1983; Cyrulnik 1999).

Today, the concept of resilience appeals to political and administrative actors. Its use is spreading rapidly in the language of public action (Pelling 2010). In 2009, the United Nations General Assembly designated 13 October as the date for commemorating the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction. From this year onwards, France has chosen to rename the event National Resilience Day, with the slogan: ‘All resilient in the face of risk’.

The conceptual journey of this notion is reminiscent of the notion of ‘governance’ a quarter of a century ago, crowned with the success it subsequently enjoyed. In 2006, the book *Resilience thinking: sustaining ecosystems and people in a changing world* by Brian Walker and David Salt (2006) was a great success: the authors suggested that the concept of resilience had stabilized and could now be associated with thinking within the social sciences. For instance, the notion of ‘resilience’ has been used extensively in discussions on climate change and sustainable development (Chardonnet-Darmaillacq et al. 2020). Political science

has shown particular interest in resilience through the analysis of public policies and institutions (Capano, Woo 2017), making resilience a key term in spatial planning policies (Allen, Massey, Cochrane 1998; Jessop, Knio 2021). This has led to the concepts of resilient urbanism and resilient planning in the context of climate change.

However, because it is used in so many fields of knowledge (economic policy, international finance, psychology, urban planning, public health), its profusion of uses contributes to maintaining a theoretical vagueness (Archambaud, Lallau 2020). For Rob Hopkins, resilience is the capacity of a system to absorb change while retaining the same capacity to react (Hopkins 2008). Conversely, for David Woods and Erik Hollnagel, resilience calls into question the reaction capabilities of the system affected by the change, to the point of forcing the transformation of the system (Hollnagel, Woods 2006). Despite this, resilience has become a linchpin in contemporary risk management strategies, with its conceptual stability questioned but its significance highlighted (Gilbert 2013).

Methodology

The data presented in this article come from an ethnographic and sociological study carried out between 2021 and 2023 within the local authority of the Toulouse Metropolis. With a population of around 500,000, this metropolis occupies a prominent position in the national ranking of French cities. The metropolis is governed by a right-wing municipality, the mayor is Jean-Luc Moudenc. Recently, its public policies have undergone a shift with the introduction of a sustainable development plan. The study, carried out as part of a doctoral thesis, explores the ways in which resilience is narrated and practiced by planners, who are civil servants of the metropolitan institutions. The methodology combines three types of sources commonly utilized in ethnographic approaches to studying bureaucrats at work (Buton 2013). The first one comprises documents (internal notes, drafts, summaries, reports, speeches) produced by the agents as supports and means of producing environmental public action. The second includes direct (sometimes participatory) observational moments of actors, particularly in meetings or working groups. Finally, the third type involves semi-structured and biographical interviews (n=42), which complemented the other two sources and uncovered elements of trajectories that could explain ways of thinking about the environment and acting within the institution. These interviews delved into the planners' personal experiences, professional roles, and perspectives on resilience in urban planning. The content of the interviews, transcribed and analyzed using Noot software, focused on how the concept of resilience is integrated into planning processes, the challenges faced, and the strategies employed to overcome these challenges.

As for the sociological background of our interviewees, 88% of the urban planners have a 5-year higher education qualification. 35% of them are graduates of urban planning institutes, 23% are graduates of an institute of political studies / Sciences Po and 16% are graduates of engineering schools. 19% of the respondents had completed a preparatory class and 9% had stopped their studies after a two-year degree. The median age of our interviewees was 44.4 years, with a slight over-representation of men (58% compared with 42% of women). 29% of the respondents' parents are civil servants (13% elementary, secondary and high school teachers and 16% local authority employees), 31% have intermediate occupations, 16% are executives and higher intellectual occupations and 18% come from working-class backgrounds. These planners, some of whom (16%) are active in associations, belong to the 'intellectual fraction of the new middle classes' (Dubost 1985) whose growth rate over the last fifty years has been linked to the expansion of the public sector and the development of higher education.

These sociological data reflect a particular fringe of the civil service, namely the 'middle management' fringe of planners. In attempting to define this category, it should be noted that the term, like 'senior civil servant' or 'senior administration', is more akin to the vocabulary of administration than that of the social sciences. Little studied, indeed little theorized, its occurrences can be found in the jargon of the professionals we met, so much so that we can question its nature as an 'indigenous category': this is how the agents define and characterize themselves. However, the 'middle manager' is categorized by two distinct schools of thought. The first one is of North American influence, based on work in management science: middle managers are those occupying hierarchical positions between the executors and the directors within an organization (Izraeli 1975; Uyterhoeven 1989). This work explores the link between the intermediate position of the agent and the performance of the work. The second is French, and is supported by researchers in political science and in sociology of public action. Olivier Quéré (2020) defines middle managers 'in a nutshell': they are not senior civil servants, the upper fringes of the 'senior management' of the civil service, the 'programmatic elites' (Eymeri 2001; Genieys 2008) of public policy who have a direct influence on political decisions or on the definition of objectives to be pursued. Nor are they front-line staff, who have little or no hierarchical responsibility and are not directly involved in the construction of 'formalized organizational routines' (Dubois 1999). They are 'agents in the middle' who operate within a space of constraints and objectives that are already highly predefined, and who are characterized by 'translating general political and administrative guidelines into specific rules, tools, action plans, routines or organizational schemes designed to structure and regulate the work of front-line professionals' (Barrier, Pillon, Quéré 2015). So, to take up the contributions of these two literatures, we can say that the specificity of these middle managers is that they are involved in both supervisory and supervised

relationships, which make them particularly exposed to the tensions and contradictions of hierarchical management styles. These are relevant arenas for observing the neoliberal state in action: the analysis of middle managers provides a better understanding of the institutionalization of the notion of resilience. They have no influence on the choice of words used to describe strategic orientations; rather, they are subjected to the notion of resilience.

In the following chapters, we delve into a comprehensive exploration of three distinct narratives of resilience, each juxtaposed with the perspectives gleaned from interviews with the key actors. First, we undertake an in-depth analysis of the power inherent in resilience, exploring its emergence as a neo-managerial norm in the context of planning reform. Secondly, we examine the discourse surrounding resilience, highlighting its role in planning policies and the risks associated with its depoliticization. Finally, we investigate resilience as a catalyst for systemic change within planning policies, emphasizing the crucial importance of reinjecting political dimensions into the concept.

Resilience as a neo-managerial norm

This section presents the emergence of resilience as a neo-managerial narrative in the context of planning reform, highlighting how it is shaped first by legal prescriptions and subsequently by the mandate for expertise within the public sector. Over the last decade, sociological research of spatial planning has focused on the bureaucratic treatment of environment, exacerbated by the introduction of a range of new legal standards (Lascoumes, Bourhis 2000). It appears that law becomes a factor defining the boundaries of the thinkable and the practicable of collective action, both in the political game and in social space. The social practices of law, ‘organized around texts and discourses [...] are no less an integral part of collective relations: they mobilize actors and involve public and private institutions in the constitution of material and symbolic resources’ (Dumoulin, Commaille 2010, 63.). It is only very recently that the term has become juridically significant: the eponymous Climate and Resilience Act of August 2021 is a sign of its gradual institutionalization in government discourses. This shift towards the legislative framework has significant repercussions for the bureaucratic handling of planning. Through the law, planning is given a dimension that needs to be controlled, based on the use of figures and efficiency and performance indicators. Whether through measures restricting urban sprawl or constraints on building in non-constructible areas, planning is gradually undergoing a shift towards the same neo-managerial treatment observed in other sectors of public action, such as the hospital and social sectors, which have been the subject of in-depth studies by political science (Belorgey 2010; De Gaulejac 2014).

Some authors have developed theories of institutional change in varying degrees and modalities (Hall 1993; Muller 2005). These studies are often highly critical, particularly of the spreading doctrine of new public management (Hood 1991). This concept advocates the borrowing of precepts and recipes from the private sector by 'public management' and the extension of market logic in order to deal with the structural crisis of the welfare state (Dardot, Laval 2010) and its consequences for public finances. New Public Management has consisted less in limiting the state than in strengthening it in the service of neo-liberal policies that relay the pressure of global competition (Hibou 2012). This 'neo-liberal turn' of the 1980s, which gradually spread its effects to the public sphere, is the product of a long process of elaboration since the Colloque Walter Lippmann (1938), where key liberal thinkers gathered. This intellectual lineage continued with figures like Hayek and Friedman, particularly through the Mont Pelerin Society, founded in 1947 (Chambat 1990).

The new forms of public management that have resulted, are well documented by the sociology of work, which includes the movement towards the 'expertise' of public action (Delmas 2011). These dynamics are profoundly transforming the ways in which institutions act, the forms of their autonomy and the power relationships they maintain with political and social actors. In Toulouse Metropolis, this neo-managerial shift is even more evident in the rapid emergence of the concept of resilience as a new planning standard, driven by an extremely strong rise in expertise. For instance, in Toulouse, there has been a transformation in the way jobs and positions are called: in the research we have met several 'resilience project managers', 'climate project managers', 'impact managers' who explained to us that job titles are very recent and are part of a transformation of the language of public action through political display:

'In February I'll be twenty years with the town planning agency. I joined in 2003 in a regulatory planning role. I was involved in thinking about local plans and working on the Territorial Coherence Scheme. But my approach was mainly regulatory, and I was hired to put a bit of 'green' into everything, so I had to take account of biodiversity, natural risks and so on. Then my job changed, and I moved away from the regulatory approach to become an environmental officer, with the title of 'ecology and climate change'. Two years ago, we reworked the agency's projects, integrating four key areas. At that point, I became the focal point for one of them, 'resilience and adaptation to climate change'. Since then, I've been in charge of studies in this area.' (Interview with an urban planner from the town planning agency)

Alongside the transformation of job titles, in-house skills are also evolving towards greater expertise. Specialized and expert departments are springing up

around specific themes (water, climate, biodiversity, planning, etc.) as a way to professionalize government bodies. Together with the ‘technocrats’ of the Fifth Republic (Eymeri 2001), experts are now an integral part of the new technical bureaucracies. In local planning departments, where ‘resilience’ policies are gradually taking hold, certain agents who are experts in their field are taking over the public policy arena. Among them are those who advocate the controlled application of resilience, sometimes in an excessive way. The meaning they give to resilience is essentially legal and ‘rational’. These agents are led to believe that the controlled application of standards and procedures would make them ‘efficient workers’:

‘At the end of the year, when we look at our figures, we tell ourselves whether we’ve succeeded or not. When I looked at mine, I said to myself : ah that’s great. I’ve made it. And I never thought I’d be so efficient.’ (Interview with a planner from the planning department)

The desire for professional recognition translates into a constant search for efficiency. It is as if the value as civil servants is understood in terms of the dynamics of performance. However, constant competition within institutions can exacerbate forms of conflict at an individual level.

‘In the legal department, we are constantly being judged. We are seen as a department that can impose constraints. Now, with the Climate and Resilience Act, we have the regulatory tools to say no to a project that is not resilient. As a result, we can be seen as a rather inconvenient service for project developers. We ask them to carry out additional studies to ensure that there are no environmental risks. The project may then be delayed by three or six months. If we didn’t ask for it, the project would be completed more quickly, but it wouldn’t stand up.’ (Interview with an instructor from the planning department)

By feeling that they belong to an institution, an agency or a group, some public agents define their identity more in terms of their membership than in terms of the purpose of a public service. This instructor considers that he respects the laws, procedures, and rules of the civil service. He reminded several times during the interview that ‘*everything in the environmental code must be applied*’. He clings to the rules and procedures in the form of a passive, ‘ritualized’ hyperconformism in the sense of Robert K. Merton (1968), as it gives him security, a certain amount of power and control over reality, the field and the issues.

With work organizations increasingly driven by cost control and internal competition for resources and skills, the imposition of a term as connotative as

resilience in legal regulations can lead to a neo-managerial management of space. Its reformers advocate the adoption of new forms of expert organization (agencies, mergers) and the dissemination of new instruments (management control, performance indicators, benchmarking), fueling depoliticization and modifying the processes of producing expertise (Christensen, Laegreid 2006). When it comes to 'resilience', methodology and standards of action can take precedence over concepts.

'Today, we are still talking about the same issues and saying the same things: resilience, adaptation, sobriety, nothing has changed. Well... if I am completely honest, the only difference is that the law follows us. In the 2000s, there were no local urban plans or climate plans. There were no thermal regulations for buildings. (...) The climate issue is now better integrated into regulatory and planning documents.' (Interview with a planner from the planning department)

These experts do not attribute such a strong meaning to the word resilience: for them, the notion is an additional standard to be applied and instructed. Every practice is taken as a performance, and every indicator carries a value and a standard of what the work should be. According to Philippe Bezès, 'the recipes of new public management are so legitimizing that they constitute an alternative language to legal knowledge' (Bezès 2012).

This initial look at resilience and its practical meaning for the planners involved reflects the transformation of planning public action towards a neo-managerial management of public problems. The result can be a loss of meaning in words, conflicts of use between professionals who do not share the same principles and, undeniably, new forms of depoliticization.

Depoliticizing novlangue of resilience

This section presents a second narrative of resilience, focusing on some actors' measures and discourses, which contribute to the depoliticization of environmental issues. As resilience within planning departments is still a relatively new term, its novelty makes agents dubious about its use. Let us remember that the specificity of this term lies in its top-down imposition. The concept of resilience was in fact developed within international institutions and organizations (Djament-Tran et al. 2011). National governments seized on the term even before it entered common parlance. It was introduced into legislation, official speeches, and political programmes. Although it has its origins in psychological and physical research, its current authority has been conferred outside the scientific and academic community (Boucart 2015).

At the local level, the managers of planning departments occupy a prominent position in the application of the term ‘resilience’, being directly involved in its dissemination within their departments. By virtue of their particular position, it is expected that they fully embrace the meaning of the concept. However, our analysis reveals a dissonant logic, with local actors seeing the concept of resilience as devoid of content and misleading yet using it for other reasons which need to be explained. Moreover, it should be emphasized that these agents play a role in depoliticizing the planning sector by instrumentalizing the term resilience.

‘The term resilience is important, but at the same time it's a total trap. This type of term is so open-ended semantically that it quickly becomes meaningless. It encompasses concepts that are far too broad.’ (Interview with the director of the planning and environment department)

‘Today, resilience is all the rage because it allows us to do something different. When I'm planning a project, I know what to say. I know that these days you have to use the right words. I know that I have to insist on the adaptability of my project. And if I can put ‘resilience’ in there, I've hit the jackpot.’ (Interview with a planner from the planning department)

Whatever the policy instrument used, it seems that what counts is the mobilization of a catchy term in the context of planning and environmental crisis. This is a rather interesting research finding insofar as the literature on public action has shown that instruments are often poorly coordinated and juxtapose heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory modes of intervention (Lascoumes 2022). Planning and environmental issues therefore raise particularly rich questions about public decision-making because they mobilize agents with contradictory positions, leading to many non-decisions and hesitations. To counter these practical obstacles, it seems that some planners are investing in the production of knowledge on resilience as an area of experimentation in their fields. It is instructive to note that planners, who are essentially strategists, are depoliticizing the planning issue by mobilizing the concept of resilience, an intrinsically political issue linked to the environmental and climatic emergency. They use a fashionable term within the framework of bureaucratic and professional logics, sometimes by emptying it of its substance. These practitioners are helping to maintain the tension between ‘political resilience’² and ‘strategic resilience’. The interviewees emphasized what they call ‘*the schizophrenia of civil servants*’. They explain that they make a very strong distinction between their personal convictions and the discourse they hold in the professional sphere. Faced with the state's injunctions and the myriad of measures presented to them, the defense posture of these agents is to display the ‘two bodies’ (Kantorowicz, Genet 2020) of the civil servant³.

'What I'm telling you is really confidential. It's my personal opinion, not my opinion as a civil servant. I'm talking to you as a person. And what's more, it's my duty, if I'm ever a bit decent with my two children, to take this kind of stand.' (Interview with a planner from the planning department)

'I'm not going to talk about degrowth in my department the way I'm talking about it with you. Or at least, I wouldn't have the same conversation. I wouldn't have the same exchange we've just had with project developers or with my hierarchy.' (Interview with a manager from the planning department)

These two extracts allow us to question the relationships between individuals and institutions. While the starting point of our analysis is individual, it questions the way in which concrete actors invest in, translate, and commit themselves to resilience, we do not postulate that these individuals act independently of the contexts of action and institutionalized rules. Agents in the planning process embodied in institutions and rules are concrete individuals with fallible consciences at the same time: they can play with the rules to a certain extent. In this way, they sustain the permanent tension between 'institutional conformity and personal commitment' (Dubois 1999, 175.). The respondents emphasized that *'the texts often contain exceptions and derogations'*. Sociology of public action has shown that there is an irreducible gap between the work prescribed, the task that corresponds to the objectives to be achieved, and the work performed, the activity that corresponds to what the worker actually does to achieve them (Lascoumes 1990). Managing this gap relies on the ingenuity and creativity of each individual to bridge it (Joas 1999). The actual work required to approach the expected performance is never simply the application of the institution's prescriptions. What we found is that there are dysfunctions, hazards and disruptions that force professionals to do things differently. Because of the variability of the context and the means of working, but also because of the inevitable contradictions between the different dimensions of the prescription, the respondents demonstrate their inventiveness and know-how and constantly create new working methods to deal with what has not been foreseen. For Michael Lipsky, it is the arrangements that make public policy work (Lipsky 1980). Without this human work, no public action would be possible, and no job satisfaction. The margin of autonomy enjoyed by agents on the ground is what prevents the whole system of public action from collapsing.

Tinkering actors are then not deviant or culprit, but on the contrary professionals who enable the system to hold together. They sometimes seek to circumvent the rules because their professional practices clash with institutional attempts to standardize resilience. On the other hand, they understand that in

the context of the regulatory impasse, resilience can be seen as a free pass to obtain funding and procedural agreements from municipal officials. It is because they see resilience as a catch-all word, full of injunctions, that they allow themselves to use it as they please. In a way, these New Public Management agents, who have learned to be generalists, are paradoxically politicized, but in a different way. We call it ‘functional politicization’: ‘Administrative staff are encouraged to take account of the constraints specific to the political arena, to anticipate requests from political staff, to invest personally in projects, and to take responsibility for their decisions in the design and implementation of public policies’ (Bongrand, Gervais, Payre 2012). It is understood that the boundary between depoliticization and politicization is more permeable than initially implied: depoliticization of planning and public work by using the term ‘resilience’ concerns environmental issues while (re)politicization of planning process seems to be vague and even contradictory. It is driven by the logic of power relations in the state bureaucracy, even though committed planners use the term to act for the environment.

Resilience as a means to politicize the climate issue

Lastly, this section presents a narrative of resilience that emphasizes its potential to politicize the environmental and climate issues. Using the concept of resilience can mobilize support for environmental and climate action, turning it into a political tool for public actors who employ it. Framing resilience as a new policy narrative may offer avenues to address and mitigate some structural aspects of climate change without necessarily overestimating its capacity to overhaul the entire system. Institutions with territorial authority, through rules and compliance, face inevitable politicization as decisions encounter public opinion, civil society and politically mobilized citizens (Petiteville 2017).

The field survey highlights the work of certain planners, for whom the consideration of resilience is guided by a collective awareness of ecology and the environment. Interviewees often emphasize their academic and life experiences, showcasing their logical paths to planning and environmental public action. The case of Stephan (52), an Energy-Climate-Resilience project manager, exemplifies this perspective. Growing up in a farming family in the high mountains, he left law studies and joined the civil service due to personal convictions. After his serve, he passed the competitive entrance examination for administration and obtained a position in a housing department. Later, he changed the roles and became responsible for the local application of laws relating to the Grenelle Environment Forum in 2007. For him, the civil service, and more specifically environmental public action, is a ‘vocation’.

'I became a civil servant out of personal conviction. I couldn't see myself enriching a boss. I didn't want to work so that he could afford his big SUV. They didn't call it an SUV back then, they called it a big car. It was beyond me. I was twenty years old. I was much more idealistic than I am today. I could never have worked so that he could afford a holiday in the Bahamas.' (Interview with Stephan, planner from the planning department)

This planner expresses his appreciation for the word 'resilience'. For him, this new word for the governance of uncertainty and risk is an integral part of the ecological transition *'for the better'*.

'It's a term that means a lot to me, it's an important term. We need to talk about it as a matter of urgency (...) Resilience is the way in which the system works. When I say that, I realize that it sounds a bit like "we have to keep doing the same thing even if everything collapses". Resilience is the way in which we change the system so that it doesn't make things worse and, at the same time, so that it adapts. Above all, it's the way in which we form a society together, the way in which we continue to live together.'

He has a clear and restrictive vision of resilience: either a project complies with the standard of resilience and its implementation is therefore authorized, or a project does not comply and should not be undertaken. This vision is shared by other planners for whom the environment is an area where knowledge is often lacking because it is incomplete or controversial. Consequently, they employ a relatively stringent application of the term 'resilience': if it is vague, overused or uncertain, they condemn it. They are fighting for a more *'precise'* use of the term, understood as *'political and scientific'*, so that *'it does not fade away'*.

'In major public policies, it's true that I find the term resilience is used indiscriminately.' (Interview with a planner from the water cycle department)

'Most policies are falsely resilient, and that's a mistake. They respond to immediate needs: 'Are you hot? I'll get you an umbrella'. It hides everything else, all the unpleasant things that need to be done for climate and environmental policy to work.' (Interview with a planner from the planning department)

Faced with the separation between the strategic development, steering and control functions and the operational implementation functions, the agents involved in planning policies are gradually positioning themselves as experts in their field of competence to *'keep up'* with the reformed institutions. For these

agents, knowledge, including resilience, serves a political function. ‘We’re here to give political advice’, explains a planner. Resilience can act as a politicizing force for ordinary individuals, insofar as they are not political professionals (party members, elected representatives, senior civil servants, etc.). Some researchers see the shift from the singular to the collective as an indicator of the politicization of individuals, with the collective or the constitution of a ‘we’ equivalent to both the number and the subject making the statement (Aït-Aoudia, Bennani-Chraïbi, Contamin 2011). William Gamson proposes a grid based on three dimensions: moral indignation against injustice (injustice frame), identification with an ‘us’ as opposed to a ‘them’ (identity frame) and the feeling of being able to remedy the situation and change the conditions that create injustice (agency frame) (Gamson 1992).

By taking a stand against the empty and uncertain use of the term ‘resilience’, some planners are politicizing themselves with an indignant ‘we’, helping to construct a highly political policy narrative of the climate change. The use of the notion of resilience is emerging as a strategic tool enabling planners to politicize the climate issue within their field of intervention. Frequently perceived as marginal agents, or even stigmatized as the ‘*token ecologist*’ within their departments, these professionals often feel a compelling need to transcend their conventionally assigned role. Resilience, as a malleable concept, offers an opportunity for these agents to assert their influence in a more meaningful way within the decision-making process. The political mobilization of resilience is thus positioned as a deliberate strategy, enabling planners to circumvent their perceived marginalization and to play an active role in the political debates surrounding climate change. This political appropriation of resilience reveals a socio-political dynamism within the Toulouse metropolitan area. It redefines the role of planners and contributes to transforming environmental policies.

Conclusion

To conclude, our sociological exploration into the dynamics of resilience within the context of planning public action has provided valuable insights into the complex interplay between environmental issues, political processes, and professional practices. The increasing enthusiasm surrounding the concept of resilience serves as a nuanced manifestation of both politicization and depoliticization of planning work within the realm of environmental concerns. Understanding how this enthusiasm aligns with, or challenges existing policy narratives, enriches our comprehension of the evolving landscape of planning.

Our primary finding indicates that the adoption of the concept of resilience by public officials is not as dependent on current societal issues, such as climate change and the rise of social mobilization, as it is on a robust and burdensome

context of environmental reform. Resilience is increasingly becoming the keyword of the neo-managerial wave and the bureaucratization of environmental issues, rather than a political social movement driven by civil society. This new model relies on both public and private, national and international expertise, clearly demonstrating the power of an administrative term and the narratives associated with it in transforming the work of planning. It is however essential to acknowledge the limitations of the study, including a relatively small sample size and the qualitative in-depth study approach. For this reason, I emphasize the need for further research with broader and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of findings in this complex and evolving field.

Notes

1. All the translations, including interviews carried out in the research, were made by the author.
2. The political aspect of the term 'resilience' is theorized by Rob Hopkins in his *Transition Handbook* (2008). He argues that framing environmental issues in terms of resilience can shift the discourse from technical and scientific debates to political and societal discussions. This politicization can galvanize communities and individuals to take collective action towards sustainable practices and policies, making resilience not just a goal, but a movement that encompasses social, economic, and environmental dimensions.
3. Ernst Kantorowicz, who wrote an essay on medieval political theology in 1957, describes the way in which kings governed: they constantly maintained the tension between their earthly, mortal body and their political, immortal body. The study highlights the forms of differentiation between the person of the king and the continuity of the royal function.

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