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# **GAME CHANGER?** **PLANNING FOR JUST AND SUSTAINABLE** **URBAN REGIONS**

## Track 17: Risks

### RISKS - Planning for adaptive capacity: disasters, uncertainty, long-term problems, preparedness and responsiveness

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A crisis or an accumulation of crises? Which crisis(es)? For a long time now, the word has seemed empty, tired of being used to justify a widening gap between promises of development on the one hand and the stark reality that nothing is going according to plan. There is always a trigger for crises, a primary cause deemed paramount that causes events to fall (Walter Benjamin). It is a war that triggers an oil crisis, a speculative bubble that bursts, a virus that spreads, a storm that breaches a dyke and causes flooding... a shock that can be localised or global, with significant consequences in a circumscribed area or worldwide. However, this explanation of the root cause overlooks the regular waves of transformation that herald the rise of perils. The more perceptible signals of climate disruption and resource depletion are all warnings. The crisis, intended to be brutal and sharp, is then stretched out into a slow slump that feeds the comments of declinist experts and essayists.

Are we still in crisis? Or are we in the midst of a long and profound transformation that affects every aspect of our ordinary lives: our social ties, our relationship to the body and gender, and our historical, economic and geopolitical reading? So much for the social fact; our relationship to the planet, to territories, to ecosystems, to biodiversity and to life itself, for what concerns our relationship to the Earth.

This task invites contributions on the topic of Risk, namely on planning for adaptive capacity. For instance, proposals can deal with topics like the conditions and limits of planning, uncertainty in collective decisions and radical uncertainty, emergent crises like the recent pandemic, environmental disasters like flooding, etc.

Propositions are welcomed that shed light on theoretical principles, methodological approaches and empirical work. They can address, for instance, questions like: Given that we now face long-term transformations, how can we organise and pool our capacities to mitigate the consequences of our daily lives and adapt our practices? How can we even

retain the ability to define common objectives instead of being tossed about like corks on the water? How can we express and prioritise, organise and adapt our systems (economic, institutional or social) to cope with the disaster, the evil that is coming (Pierre-Henri Castel), without abandoning the conditions of fulfilment, solidarity, freedom and transparency that forged our present. How can we express the problems that are already there or will be there in the future, perceptible in the long term and the context of diplomatic, economic and health uncertainties and threats? How can we finally take action on the ground? How can we define planning that will be useful in times of storm, i.e. capable of identifying our capacity to adapt? What diagnoses can we make, and what lessons can we learn? What tools can we use to overcome the uncertainties? Finally, is there a dimension required to carry out this planning?

## Territorialising Resilience Through Planning. Some Preliminary Insights

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*Coming back to the centre of the European Union (EU) policy discourses during the COVID-19 pandemic, resilience has re-emerged as a widespread concept in the European lexicon to deal with rapid and slow on-setting events that increase the vulnerability of cities and their populations. In the context of emergent global crises, such as geopolitical shocks and energy instability, the fragility of supply chains in specific economic sectors, the growing of inequalities, and the overarching challenge of climate change and biodiversity collapse - one of the key policy messages we constantly hear is the need for systemic transition and long-term transformations heading to resilience and beyond GDP. Despite this increased interest in enhancing resilience in scientific research and policy discussion, there remains to be a shared understanding of what it means. The first round of understanding the resilience concept at the EU scale follows the 2011 economic crisis. It interprets resilience in a “bounce back” perspective, framing the capacity of European regions to return to pre-shock growth levels. However, a more complex understating of resilience is now emerging, asking European regions to withstand and adapt to the interplaying environmental, social and economic crises that Europe faces and “bounce forward” to the transition towards renewed sustainable systems. Following this knowledge, territorial resilience can displace current policy paradigms and induce a lasting shift in institutional innovation, cultural norms and community values, namely supporting planning for adaptive capacity. On this path, the 2020 Strategic Foresight Report puts forward resilience as a “new compass for EU policies”, clarifying that achieving resilience is becoming an increasingly important part of European policy, besides competitiveness and territorial cohesion. At the same time, some recent works have highlighted that the costs of this transition will be unevenly spread and will likely leave left-behind regions further behind, potentially resulting in severe social/political resistance to climate policies. In this scenario, there is still a mismatch between the conceptual definition of territorial resilience and how to practically operationalise it within territorial governance praxis to face some forward-looking trends affecting the EU’s capacity to manage climate change and other environmental challenges, technological transformations, pressure on democracy, as well as shifts in demography. Starting from this broad framework, the contribution aims to present the first results of the ongoing project ESPON TERRES “Territorialising Resilience: Transforming Europe for an Age of Crisis”, which focuses on the largely unexplored nexus between the conceptual understanding of resilience and the role that the concept can assume in allowing European regions to strengthen absorptive, adaptive and transformational governance capacities in the context of long-term multi-crisis trajectories. More specifically, the contribution concentrates on avoiding framing resilience as an “empty signifier” but as a transformative framework to stimulate the capacities of territories to cope with and prepare for permanent current and future crises. In a broader sense, it is about how resilience can provide a valuable lens for guiding the EU Policy Framework and Agenda, supporting the radical shifts in planning cultures, rationalities, and norms, including a prospective reprioritisation of socioecological values and institutional capacities.*

**Keywords** : territorial resilience, adaptive capacity, crises, urban and regional planning, EU policy