

A Reflection on Resilient Urban Economies

Tatiana A. Thieme¹

Introduction

In December 2016 the British Academy hosted a workshop which brought together thought-leaders and scholars, city planners and business practitioners to debate questions related to changing urban economies, and to critically engage with a concept that has circulated widely in recent years across policy, business, and academic realms: the notion of ‘resilience’.² This reflection piece draws on the lively discussions that took place during the workshop, where the group of participants collectively expanded (and challenged) the notion of resilience and its economic indicators, calling for alternative vantage points and different vocabularies. The aim here is not to list a set of prescriptive recommendations about how to attain or make resilient urban economies. Rather, ‘resilience’ is presented as a point of departure and opening, reflecting on what assumptions undergird its meaning and association with the urban in different contexts. Some of the questions raised here include: Why does resilience matter to urban economies and on whose terms? What is presumed by resilience and what pathways are imagined and privileged in different economic settings? To what extent does the notion of resilience allow us to rethink how urban economies work or could work, and conversely in which ways is resilience appended to familiar paradigms of urban industrialisation, growth, and linear economies?

Cities currently represent a microcosm for global challenges and opportunities at large. The world’s cities occupy just 3% of the Earth’s land (UNDP 2015) but represent 60–80% of energy consumption and 75% of carbon emissions. The first speaker of the day, William Day (PricewaterhouseCoopers), opened the conversation by raising a fundamental paradox noted by many scholars and practitioners alike: that the key challenge to achieving sustainable urban futures will be to harness the dynamic opportunities for inclusive prosperity whilst moving towards a low-carbon economy. This is anything but obvious. According to the United Nations, 95% of urban growth in this century will happen in the ‘developing’ world, where access to key goods and services will be unevenly distributed, with large percentages of urban populations experiencing

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² For the workshop programme and a list of participants, see Appendix.

insecure access to land, housing, remunerated labour and basic services. At the same time, as Sophie Watson (Open University) and Caroline Knowles (Goldsmiths, University of London) affirmed during the discussion, across industrialised cities of the global North familiar forms of welfare provision and security related to housing, labour and healthcare are being eroded.

While cities have long been the sites of diverse economic actors and activities, now more than ever, how and where people work, how businesses start and grow and how value is defined and measured, are being shaped by resource constraints, emerging risks and increased precarity (real or perceived) across geographies. Against this backdrop, the patchwork of different economic logics, transactions and scales challenges mainstream understandings of work, economic opportunity, productivity, terms of employment, modes of consumption and production, access to services, and urban competitiveness. Individually and collectively, cities are at once sites of crisis, struggle, and uneven development, but also places of countless social and economic experimentations, innovation and possibility. Notably, the spaces, working cultures and rationalities of urban economies (from the corporate to the informal, the skilled self-employed to the on-demand gig economy) are increasingly plural and often exist side-by-side.

This reflection paper is structured in the following way: the first section examines how the conceptual construct 'resilience' has circulated in recent debates concerning city futures, and how programmes and interventions focused on building resilient urban futures have been styled and justified. As the vibrant workshop discussion highlighted, it is worth examining why the term 'resilience' has garnered the purchase that it has across policy, business and academic accounts related to cities. The second section raises four themes in particular to challenge but also affirm the value of thinking in terms of resilience. These are: (1) focusing on forms of ignored urbanisation and invisible economic activity; (2) rethinking how value is defined by focusing on alternatives to innovation (including repair); (3) paying attention to whose voices and agency are included in the vision for resilient futures; and (4) pointing to existing coping strategies and experiments worth harnessing and developing along with emphasising forms of inequality and unevenness. This paper then concludes by suggesting that resilience can in some cases imply a return to, or continuation of, unsustainable growth-based economies, yet in other cases it conversely offers an apt metaphor for garnering momentum towards alternative economic futures based on logics of solidarity and reciprocity.

The Backstory of Resilience

Across academic and practitioner fields, ‘resilience’ has in recent years infiltrated urban research and policy accounts to reflect both the challenges and opportunities facing urban futures. Theories of resilience had been used since the 1960s, particularly in psychology and ecology, referring to dynamic and persistent systems of positive adaptation to disturbance or adversity. It therefore makes sense that this term would be (re)deployed today to imply adaptation to uncertain and volatile circumstances facing various urban ecologies and economies. Indeed, resilience aptly articulates the adaptation to potential shocks across both environmental and economic systems through the spreading of risk and diversification of opportunities for survival. As the workshop participants demonstrated in their own interpretations of the notion of resilience from respective social, economic and ecological fields of expertise, in relation to cities the notion of resilience has become a logical composite of social and ecological processes in the face of uncertain and risk-laden futures.

One of the persistent predicaments with ‘resilience’ that was raised at various moments during the workshop discussion was its potentially nebulous but loaded connotation. As a term, resilience can be positioned as a set of promoted normative dispositions that may adhere to particular kinds of economic ideologies (either capitalistic or post-capitalistic), and can, therefore, be used as a legitimising discourse for particular kinds of urban planning or investment. In other cases, it may instead purport to be descriptive of practices perhaps invisible or under-represented in the mainstream, pointing to existing strategies of adaptation that may be spontaneous, improvised or ad hoc. In all cases, it is important that resilience not be interpreted as referring simply to technical processes of renewal or recovery. It is crucial to identify how the notion of resilience is put to use, given that its application is contingent on particular vantage points, value judgments and interests that depend on who defines resilience and to what ends.

In the past decade, myriad networks and initiatives have been built around the notion of urban resilience. Perhaps the most influential global frameworks and benchmarks for advancing policy, action and research related to sustainable urban futures are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 11 stands out as focusing specifically on ‘Sustainable Cities and Communities’ and aims to ‘make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’ (UNDP 2015). While this framework has provided a ground-breaking vision for *improving* the urban commons, ambiguity persists in relation to how these goals should be achieved, by whom and with what funds. Nevertheless, research, practitioner and policy networks echoing the SDGs on cities continue to use the notion of resilience as a rallying point for sharing technical

expertise and best practices across cities to prepare for risks associated with uncertain and volatile urban futures.

The C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group has built a global network aiming to connect people working in cities across the world who are facing similar challenges associated with climate change, but dealing with unique infrastructures and stages of progress in addressing climate change. Notably, the network includes 80 of the world's largest cities (representing one quarter of the global economy), with funders and partners including Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Clinton Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the World Resources Institute and corporates such as Siemens and MasterCard. Ambitiously, the network's central mission is to drive urban action to simultaneously reduce greenhouse gas emissions and climate-related risks whilst continuously increasing the health, well-being and economic opportunities of urban citizens. Similarly, 100 Resilient Cities (100RC), pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation since 2013, focuses on helping cities prepare for and adapt to the physical, social and economic challenges of the 21st century 'in both good times and in bad' – from earthquakes, fires and floods, to high unemployment, inefficient public transportation systems, violence and crime, and chronic food and water shortages. 100RC defines resilience as the 'capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience'. The articulated aim is two-fold: help individual cities thrive, but also help build a global shared practice of resilience amongst diverse stakeholders, in addition to urban citizens themselves.

In the academic sector, large investments from various research councils demonstrate a growing commitment to studying and defining the terms of resilience. Projects related to urban infrastructures and their shared dependencies on ecological systems include the Blue-Green Cities Research Project, funded since 2013 by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and based at the University of Nottingham. This interdisciplinary project brings together scholars specialised in a range of flood-related environmental modelling and risk management, urban drainage infrastructure, environmental economics, and stakeholder engagement. The aim of the Blue-Green City approach is to bring water management and green infrastructure together by protecting natural hydrological and ecological processes whilst ensuring that resilient and adaptive measures are put in place to deal with potential flood events. Blue-Green urbanism emphasises the value of facilitating the connection between blue and green 'assets'.

One of the workshop participants, Nicola Headlam, was a Research Fellow at another notable ESRC-funded initiative: called the Urban Transformations Network based at the University of Oxford, which sponsors an interdisciplinary portfolio of research projects engaging with various urban challenges and opportunities; including smart

data and market enablement, improving infrastructures of public services and eco-urbanisation in China, possibilities for alternative urban governance and innovation in the face of austerity, everyday urbanism in India, participatory urban design leveraging digital technologies, and the connections between mobility, segregation and inequality in London and São Paulo. Stakeholders include communities, businesses and local authorities.

Some universities have set up research labs and ‘hubs’ to better capture and understand the relationship between past and present urban environments and social practices, from the mundane streetscapes to grandiose architectural forms and their respective impacts on urban experience and the everyday city. Two notable UK research hubs are the UCL Urban Lab and LSE Cities. The UCL Urban Lab has since 2005 pioneered university-wide dialogue, teaching and research engaging with a wide range of urban issues cutting across disciplines from engineering to film studies. Topics include housing, urban ecology and urban metabolisms, change and crisis, imagination and design, and data and place. LSE Cities is an international centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), privately sponsored by Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft – Das Internationale Forum der Deutschen Bank, which carries out research, educational programmes, and outreach activities in London and abroad focused on how to make cities ‘fairer’ and more ‘liveable’ for future generations of urban dwellers. Another notable university centre is the African Centre for Cities (ACC), based at the University of Cape Town, headed by director Edgar Pieterse, who presented on the third panel at the workshop. Founded in 2007, the ACC has become an important catalyst for interdisciplinary research and teaching programmes focused on promoting and building scholarship reflecting on the processes of urbanisation across African cities, and aiming to provide systemic responses.

The examples outlined above remind us of the importance to consider the actors involved in funding particular programmes, the sectors involved in supporting, promoting and justifying the need for these initiatives, and the missions and narratives driving the justification for their continued investment and attention. As Ash Amin (University of Cambridge) pointed out, it is important to decipher how the economic base on which resilience is built differs across settings and institutions. Furthermore, the discussions often turned to whether the capacity and imperative to ‘innovate’ is tied to particular places or people whose existing practices might either be harnessed or displaced. As Justin DeKoszmovszky (University of Cambridge) observed, while resilience may assume a quest for returning to an imagined (ecological or economic) stability, the question is *what* version of ‘stability’ is implied here, and is it even possible to return to this state of supposed stability? As certain programmes promoting resilience demonstrate albeit implicitly, the call for adaptation to shocks and mitigation of risk can infer continued (or a return to) economic growth and techno-optimism. As new imaginaries for urban futures consistently emphasise notions of ‘innovation’ to both address urban problems and risks whilst promoting prosperous and inclusive

cities for all, an underlying question raised during the workshop discussion was, for whom is this innovation, and what exactly is new?³

If the ‘new’ is indeed a break with established and dominant customs, then it is worth reflecting for a moment on what we are breaking from exactly. As many scholars have noted, the economic policies that have dominated since the early 1970s have increasingly privileged market-based approaches over state provisioning due to various forms of deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation. This has happened both in countries where a strong welfare state has been increasingly hollowed out, and in countries where weak or absentee states have legitimised their lack of public provisioning in order to accommodate foreign investment and free-trade policies. Although capitalism, per se, has existed as an economic system since the 15th century, economic theories that have dominated the last four decades have been interrogated by a range of actors. Indeed, unsustainable economic models have not only been criticised by the intellectual Left but also increasingly by forward-thinking practitioners such as the private sector ‘intrapreneurs’ present at the workshop: William Day, Justin DeKoszmovszky and Maggie de Pree (League of Intrapreneurs). As a result, unlikely alliances and productive dialogues have emerged across economic networks calling into question dominant ‘Chicago School’ economics where reducing regulation on big business in particular has exacerbated ‘markets without morals’ or regard for long-term well-being of people and the planet.

As many across sectors have argued, neoliberal agendas (including recent austerity measures since the 2008 financial crisis) have exacerbated the anthropogenic impact on environmental systems, increased social and economic inequality, and further accentuated the roll-back of public investment and provision. However, whilst even those in the private sector speak about the importance of tending to diverse needs and recognising that rapid inequality has been a feature of urban industrial capitalism, the imperative of growth often remains a question. As reflected in the workshop, the points raised tended to centre around the imperative to decarbonise the economy, to improve co-ordination and planning in urban development to meet the diverse demands of a rapidly growing urban demographic, and to pay attention to creative business design and diverse economies rather than privilege industrial models. At the same time, plural economic activities were celebrated as valuable contributions to urban economic development, from informal and small-scale enterprises to on-demand economies harnessing digital platforms and peer-to-peer networks. A question that remained unsettled (though extensively debated) throughout the workshop was to what extent the calls for resilient urban economies and resilient urban futures challenged or

3 For more on the proliferation of urban initiatives championing ‘resilience’ and the questionable and hidden effects of the construct, see: www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/jan/27/what-makes-a-city-resilient and www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/tom-slater/resilience-of-neoliberal-urbanism.

extended paradigms of economic growth, where continued and increased production and consumption define the viability of an economic value proposition, and where large cities and scalable ventures acquire the most attention and investment. The next section outlines 4 themes that emerged from the workshop deliberations related to these very questions: 1) Ignored urbanisation and economic activity; 2) How value is defined (innovation vs. repair); 3) Who is involved in defining the terms of resilient urban futures; and 4) Existing experiments and urban enterprise built on (but going beyond) survival and making do.

Rethinking Resilience

Ignored Urbanisation and Economic Activity

It is now well established that just over half of the world's population is categorised as living in urban areas, and that the world is urbanising at a pace and scale never before experienced; especially given the second wave of urbanisation that has seen the greatest concentration of urban growth happening in the global South, particularly in China, India and across some African countries such as Nigeria. Although 'mega-cities' with more than 10 million inhabitants are predicted to increase in number, as Ravi Kanbur (Cornell University) and Rubbina Karruna (UK Department for International Development) reminded the group during their presentations, the majority of urban growth is likely to happen in smaller secondary cities. This also means that processes of urbanisation are and will continue to happen along the rural-urban continuum. An emerging policy imperative stresses the importance of re-allocating public investment from 'mega-cities' to secondary towns for poverty reduction and equitable development. This is a crucial reminder that value cannot be placed predominantly on the 'mega-cities' and 'mega-industries', but instead considerations of infrastructure, urban planning, finance, legal and policy frameworks, and civic involvement will require attention at every scale of urban settlement and growth, including paying attention to the rural left-behind 'other', where small towns are also experiencing either forms of ignored urbanisation or otherwise involuntary degrowth as the agricultural sector fails to offer viable livelihoods for the younger generation.

As was evident during the Habitat III summit (from which Rubbina Karruna had recently returned), and echoed in the urban agendas set by development agencies (such as the UK Department for International Development and others) the key priorities are starting to include urbanisation processes in secondary towns and rural areas. This may provide a constructive shift away from the artificial rural-urban binary, and instead encourage policy and research focus on the gradations along the rural-urban continuum. Additionally, the focus on development and poverty reduction has gone beyond infrastructural efforts

to deliver or upgrade housing and infrastructures. In the past two decades, financial inclusion has become a significant development priority for cities (and indeed small towns), particularly given the aims to commercially bridge the formal and informal sectors, large business enterprises and small businesses. Efforts have included ‘banking the unbanked’ and facilitating remittance flows across rural-urban and cross-border diaspora. Micro-finance and mobile banking services have harnessed innovative business and digital platforms to reach the urban precariat and/or largely informal sector enterprises particularly in ‘developing’ or ‘emerging’ markets.

As Justin DeKoszmovszky pointed out, one of the recent priorities has become access to inclusive (private and public) financing, particularly for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) often left behind especially in the aftermath of economic crises. While SMEs constitute the majority of employment and GDP in most markets, they have been most severely affected by the draw-back of traditional banking institutions (particularly outside of big cities), and continue to be most at risk of displacement in contexts of urban regeneration and redevelopment. At the same time, where there are advancements in access to certain urban services and celebrations of more ‘inclusive’ models, we also need to recognise that development, progress and value are anything but linear. Take, for instance, the example of access to financing, which comprises a spectrum of potential offerings and formulations, as some of the world’s lowest income households are becoming ‘bankable’, whilst in other countries like the US we are seeing the ‘unbanking’ of customers falling on difficult times and seeking alternative financial services. In addition, the focus on ‘working cities’ has not only emphasised opportunities for new job creation, but also finally incorporated an important feminist economic argument that seeks to recognise the vast amount of work that takes place outside adequately remunerated and secure spheres of employment.

Redefining and Recovering Value

One of the forms of under-valued labour evoked during the workshop was that of repair. In many ways, the notions of repair and maintenance pose an important, if often unglamorous, counterpoint to the constant refrain of ‘innovation’ that usually accompanies discourses of resilience. Ugo Vallauri’s experience as founder of The Restart Project offered a compelling case for not only paying attention to repair, but perhaps even finding glamour in it! The Restart Project aims to encourage and train lay bricoleurs to become repair technicians of their own ‘broken’ electronics. This project represents a growing citizen-led repair movement that echoes broader ‘Do It Yourself’ urban initiatives across cities that have taken their inspiration from the vibrant repair economies often present in low-income neighbourhoods where users extract as much value from things before they allow anything to become ‘waste’. Though this DIY repair movement is encouraging (25% of things that come to The Restart Project can be repaired and subsequently reused rather than discarded), these sorts of citizen-led initiatives are

limited in their ability to shift the maker's culture of mainstream linear 'take, make, waste' economies where the imperative of manufacturing new products still underpins dominant industrial paradigms. The real challenge might, therefore, be to bring back local economies of repair, encourage better and more systematic re-use, and rethink how manufacturing can be done so the barriers to repair are not increasingly high. This means also considering how to bring back affordable spare parts into circulation, and how to allow for a more open process of extended networks of support to ensure that revitalising the skills of repair (and peer-to-peer repair training) come hand in hand with a product's life cycle including designing products with their repair in mind.

In many ways, repair is an appropriate metaphor for alternative forms of value creation and ways of 'doing the economy.' In this context, resilience might include having to cope with constant break-down of technical systems, and developing the skills to repair and maintain objects and infrastructures at risk of *disrepair*. In this light, we could imagine that chasing the chimera of incessant innovation prevents us from paying attention to the urgent need to develop skills that would adapt to (and fix) disruptions and interruptions in an era of protracted instability. But as the group discussion highlighted, instead of supposing that we have to choose between techno-optimism and a nostalgic praise for maintenance, could we not perceive maintenance and repair as innovation in itself? The countless grassroots examples of circular economies taking place across low-income urban areas urge us to rethink value patterns in an age of urbanisation that requires the decoupling of carbon emissions (unlike the first wave of urbanisation that depended on, and accelerated, carbon intensive modes of production).

These enthusiastic calls for bringing repair back into fashion were tempered by Nandini Gooptu's (University of Oxford) important point related to aspirations. One of the significant challenges is that rapidly upwardly mobile new middle classes in countries of the global South (e.g. India) might very well seek to distance themselves from the virtues of repair, re-use and thrift. These are practices associated with survivalist urban economies in many places, and here we are reminded of the prevalence of uneven development across most cities. For example, the 'landscapes of luxury' (gated communities, malls, corporate compounds, etc.) sit side-by-side some of the poorest neighbourhoods that have undergone continued dis-investment. In that context of uneven development, it becomes difficult to convince aspiring middle classes of the necessity of making less resource intensive consumer decisions. Ultimately, adapting to volatile economic times involves recognising the challenge of measuring use and exchange value whilst recognising the very subjective and diverse assessments of value itself. This brings us to the issue raised by several workshop participants related to whose voices and whose terms are taken into account when envisioning pathways for resilient urban futures.

Whose Voices and Whose Agency?

While resilience can be a useful allegory for the recovery and adaptation to ecological or economic adversity, discourses of resilience risk providing an ahistorical and apolitical picture that privileges particular kinds of expert knowledge. It is therefore worth bringing back questions related to power and agency, and asking whether growth-based resilience can ever be inclusive. The workshop included a very useful discussion turning to the places and people who have tended to be excluded from mainstream urban processes, institutions and debates, but whose agency and disaffection have become manifest in alternative and often unexpected forms. If, for example, disaffected groups excluded from mainstream economic systems have been left out, opportunities for political mobilisation, making a living, and belonging, may include extreme or populist religious or political movements. As Kate Meagher (London School of Economics and Political Science) cautioned, “we need to engage with people who are excluded and who are imagining their own place and futures in ways that may not be pretty.” As others also pointed out, resilience and its presumed ‘inclusion’ may often mask the realities on the ground, where one’s resilience may come at the expense of another’s dispossession.

Volatile economic times do not only affect the poorest of the poor or those working in the informal sector, as Sophie Watson stressed. Difficult and uncertain economic times greatly affect the pathways to social mobility across the world, as an increasing number of people who may have self-identified as ‘middle class’ are experiencing in-work poverty, insecure employment prospects, and the inability to attain former markers of middle class mobility such as affording to buy a home or pay for child-care. While much of the economic, sociological and policy attention on class formations since the 1970s, and in particular in relation to urban development, has tended to focus on the middle classes and the working poor as separate social categories, shifting (and even reverse) social mobilities amongst the ‘missing’ middle, the ‘emerging’ middle, or what could be called the *nouveau* precariat, require increasing attention. Keith Hart (University of Pretoria) called for more democratic forms of participation in dominant economic institutions and more attention drawn to the persistent absence of social protection of urban markets; a demand that transcends class, rural-urban, and North-South divides. And yet, as many activist scholars drawing on post-colonial approaches have noted, along with the questioning of power relationships and calling for more democratic forms of participation, it is equally vital to document and harness local economic knowledges that have shaped existing people-centred coping strategies in the face of persistent resource constraints.

Harnessing Existing Economic Experiments

The focus in urban business, policy and planning to date has tended to be on the world’s largest (if not ‘mega’) cities, on the ‘leading’ and largest business actors, on formal

government structures and planning, on industrial design and, on the other end of the spectrum, mega-slums and extreme poverty, on urban inequality and insecurity. This makes sense given the magnitude of resources and impact that larger institutional, ecological and demographic systems can mobilise. However, much less attention has been paid to small towns, small and medium enterprises, the people-centred circular economies outside industrial design and resource recovery, the urban conditions of poverty, precarity and inequity that blur the lines between waged work, the ‘extra bit on the side’ and periods of stagnation amongst under-employed youth and migrants alike, and the changing cultures of work and leisure that both hinge on, and are exacerbated by, increasingly precarious urban environments. The aggregate impact of these smaller, less visible, more fragmented, often less measurable urban practices and places is often greater than their larger, more spectacular counterparts. So here the importance of paying attention to what is already happening despite adverse conditions becomes just as progressive and politically important as ‘calling out’ what is missing, what forms of support are absent and what kinds of exploitation are perpetuated. Along with vulnerable economies and poor quality services, there are across risk-prone urban areas diverse work opportunities that are under-documented but growing nonetheless.

Inherent in the practices of ‘making work’ (rather than ‘finding a job’) are emerging working cultures, economic knowledges and modes of place-making that call for a reconsideration of the relationship between urban dwelling, making a living, and belonging. More work is required to document these existing experiments that pose various contradictions of modernity; they may perform a sense of temporariness (and sometimes extra-legality), but in reality persist and become in some cases permanent. They may be based in urban areas that are cut-off from mainstream urban services (think Detroit or Delhi), and yet the use of information communication technology means that youth in particular may be hyper-connected to social media and mobilise across multiple networks of protest and also shared cosmopolitanism. Ultimately this is a story involving agency amongst youth who hustle in multiple directions at the same time, constantly diversifying opportunities and mitigating risks accordingly, and who, as Edgar Pieterse suggested, “have a ferocious appetite for social media and for being at the right place at the right time”. If there is a case to be made for paying closer attention to the experiments ‘from below’, there is also a case to be made for better understanding how individuals across economic spaces in risk-prone conditions cultivate the skills to be flexible, agile and frugal in the face of uncertainty. In effect, the ability to deal with risk and ‘complex asset portfolios’ (as Caroline Moser has suggested) is often associated with the likes of investment bankers, and yet the risk associated with urban environments and economies lying outside formal institutions of support (including insurance) is arguably much greater, albeit at smaller scales, than within the formal financial sector. Therefore, as well as to pay closer attention to the forms of dispossession that arise from adverse conditions, it seemed clear by the end of the workshop that it was also crucial to recognise and even learn from the diversity of local economic knowledges and expertise in dealing with risk and recovering from adversity.

Conclusion

While ‘resilience’ has become a kind of buzzword in recent years, as Abel Shumann (OECD) argued, there is no doubt that its allegorical meaning has effectively elicited enthusiasm, investment and stories that both take into account risk-laden urban realities and possibilities for imagined futures. Some participants were encouraged by the recent hybrid economic models already in place that seemed to recognise the respective lacunae of sectors and actors increasingly endeavouring to collaborate in new ways. As William Day pointed out in his example of certain social enterprise ventures focused on the delivery of basic urban services in under-served communities, the responsibility and role of the local state in providing urban services is paramount and cannot be left off the hook, and yet local municipalities are often under-resourced. The private sector has undeniable competencies, but should not be tasked with certain welfare provisions such as health care. NGOs are critical local actors with access and understanding to grassroots needs and contexts, but they cannot operate at scale.

Other participants were more unsettled by the conceptual construct of resilience, perceiving in the term a set of normative and ulterior motives including the unquestioned aims of continued economic growth. Here there was an expressed preference, at least intellectually, for imagining radical departures from capitalist economies. And yet, in some cases, the notion of resilience is being used to refer to alternative economic experiments that challenge capitalist models. For instance, building on J.K. Gibson-Graham’s feminist critique of political economy, calling for alternative ways of representing and enacting economies, a current project titled *Strengthening Economic Resilience in Monsoon Asia* seeks to document the modes of sharing, reciprocity and resource pooling that provide vital forms of recovery and relief in the aftermath of ecological and economic crises. Here we see the potentially progressive and radical pathways the call for ‘resilient economies’ might put in place and the alternative economic practices being harnessed in the name of resilience. At the same time, as the animated discussion throughout the workshop conjured, remaining critically engaged when claims to alternative economic logics are made is crucial. As the work of Lizzie Richardson (University of Durham) on ‘sharing’ or ‘collaborative’ economies shows, for instance, it is sometimes unclear whether these peer-to-peer digitally mediated economies offer a radically new way for individuals to reconfigure use or exchange value, engage in ‘independent’ work, or create different cultures of consumption.

Similarly, urban livelihoods are increasingly being re-worked, rendered at once more flexible but more insecure across both formal and informal economies, and between private and public spaces. Whether someone is a street hawker in Taipei or Lagos, a migrant worker in London, or a home-maker renting out the under-utilised spare bedroom on Airbnb, recent celebrations of entrepreneurship and apprenticeship

would argue that everyone is a potential ‘self-starter’, and should be ready to work all the time or spend ‘free’ time finding new contracts, or other work to supplement part-time work. Welfare itself is no longer a safety net for the unemployed. Welfare is reconfigured, away from state responsibility as social problems are increasingly individualised. If the various economic experiments taking place in cities today are contingent on shortages, crises, and necessary frugality, we need to continuously question what sorts of typologies of urban economies provide levers for more equitable but also creative forms of urban development and living.

Given the state of volatile urban futures related to erratic environmental systems, changing labour markets, housing crises and unpredictable patterns of crime, a key question posed by Ash Amin in his closing remarks was: ‘How do we deal with risk and rapid urban change?’ Along with the pressing need to prepare for and anticipate risks, cities also face the significant challenge of transitioning away from unsustainable modes of extraction, production and consumption, whilst continuing to build positive urban models of prosperity. Although cities have always been sites of uneven and unequal investment and development, the animated contributions during the workshop discussion emphasised the significant risks to privileging investment in certain cities, urban areas and sectors, whilst disinvestment persists in others.

To close, I wish to briefly acknowledge two recent provocative academic papers engaging with some of the questions raised in this reflection piece. The argument made by MacKinnon and Driscoll Derickson (2012) suggests that perhaps a focus on *resourcefulness*, rather than resilience, offers more openings for rethinking how work is made, how different forms of value are created, and how people claim their place in urban life. More recently, Deverteuil and Golubchikov (2016) suggest that resilience might be a metaphor for change, rather than a persistent continuation or return to the status quo. It is clear that stories engaging with the notion of resilience may infer the ability to disrupt and question current systems, perhaps redefining the terms of the economy all together. But it is also possible that resilience might be about recovering or providing a renewed appreciation for the modest pursuits of ‘keeping things going’ and attributing virtue to durability, repair and maintenance. Given that there are competing and highly subjective values at play, then perhaps it is all the more vital to resist homogenising perceptions of value, and instead find more effective ways to tell diverse stories of urban resilience and resourcefulness. This is an opportunity to more than ever advocate for a politically engaged research ethics, considering how to better harness the analytical capabilities of urban citizens who might not hold formal positions or voices of expertise and power, but whose economic knowledge and own vocabularies are integral to envisioning and making urban futures. As Keith Hart noted at the workshop, this cannot be the work of experts alone.

Appendix

Resilient Urban Economies Workshop

5 December 2016

Venue: British Academy, 10-11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH

Programme

12.30 – 12.40

Opening Remarks

Professor Ash Amin, Foreign Secretary and Vice-President, British Academy

12.40 – 14.10

Making the Urban Economy

Moderator: Dr Tatiana Thieme, Lecturer in Human Geography, University College London

William Day, Sustainability Adviser, PricewaterhouseCoopers

Justin DeKoszmovszky, Associate Director, Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership

Ugo Vallauri, Co-Founder, The Restart Project

Open floor discussion

14.10 – 14.30

Tea/coffee break

14.30 – 16.00

Making Space(s) for Urban Economies

Moderator: Professor Ash Amin

Rubbina Karruna, Cities Adviser, UK Department for International Development

Professor Ravi Kanbur, T. H. Lee Professor of World Affairs, International Professor of Applied Economics and Management, and Professor of Economics, Cornell University

Abel Schumann, Deputy Head, Urban Programme, OECD

Open floor discussion

16.00 – 16.20

Tea/coffee break

16.20 – 17.50

Rethinking the Urban Economy

Moderator: Dr Tatiana Theme

Professor Keith Hart, Co-Director, Human Economy Programme, University of Pretoria

Dr Kate Meagher, Associate Professor in Development Studies, London School of Economics and Political Science

Professor Edgar Pieterse, Director, African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town

Open floor discussion

17.50 – 18.00

Closing Remarks

Professor Ash Amin

Participant List

Professor Ash Amin

Foreign Secretary and Vice-President
British Academy; Professor of Geography,
University of Cambridge

Professor Julio Dávila

Director, Development Planning Unit
University College London

Dr Stuart Dawley

Senior Lecturer in Economic Geography
University of Newcastle

William Day

Sustainability Adviser
PricewaterhouseCoopers

Maggie de Pree

Co-Founder
League of Intrapreneurs

Justin DeKoszmovszky

Associate Director
Cambridge Institute for
Sustainability Leadership

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