

Geographies of Immigration and Resilience in Urban Canada. From Multi-Level Policy Discourse to Neighborhood Spaces – 2018 Joint International Geographical Union Regional Conference and Canadian Association of Geographers Annual Meeting, Québec City, QC, August 6-10

This special panel included presentations on the transversal project analyzing policy discourses as well as on two neighborhood studies, in Montreal and in Toronto respectively.

The three presentations on the transversal project were articulated around the main question: how has the notion “resilience” been used in Canada’s governmental discourses on immigration over the past 15 years? A review of the literature provided contextual background, including on the history of the uses of “resilience,” key issues in ongoing academic debates, and empirical case studies – primarily in the UK, the United States and Australia. A Canadian study of the use of resilience in policy discourse will thus provide opportunity to expand and enrich the literature. For the transversal project, a common methodology was developed to analyze policy discourses at the federal, provincial (Ontario and Quebec), and municipal (eight city networks) levels of government. There are three main stages of analysis. The focus of Stage 1 is on the occurrences of “resilience” in policy documents across levels of government by sector and type of documents to examine how resilience is used and framed. At Stage 2, in-depth attention is paid to how “resilience” is used in immigration-related policy documents as a specific sector. For Stage 3, qualitative interviews will be conducted with government officials in the immigration sector (to be completed in Fall 2018) to verify findings relating to policy discourse analysis. The policy documents were analyzed using a codebook developed for the project. The codebook is based on three key components: 1) Dynamics of resilience, including politics of resilience and programs to build resilience; 2) Structural agents of resilience, i.e. top-down or rather bottom-up approaches to implementing resilience; and 3) Scales, levels and spaces of resilience, referring to whom or to what resilience is applied.

At the federal level of government, the use of “resilience” increased between 2010 and 2018, mostly in the sectors of public safety, military and armed forces, and climate change. The analysis of federal policy documents highlighted five main knowledge systems related to the concept of “resilience”: Public Safety, Canadian Armed Forces, Economy and Budget, Climate Change, and Indigenous Populations. While the term resilience is rarely found in the analysis of immigration-related documents, these knowledge systems are present in discourses associated with migrant resilience around notions of strength, resourcefulness and innovation, necessary to adapt to social and economic barriers in Canadian society. There is a particular focus on “skilled migrants” and the importance for a “resilient Canada” to attract global talent in order to thrive.

The results of the provincial and municipal levels of analysis also show an overall increase in the use of the term resilience since 2008. Differences and variations, however, can be noted in terms of the sectors where the notion is used depending on the provincial (Ontario and Quebec) and municipal (Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Gatineau, Kitchener and Waterloo) levels of government. Interprovincial and intermunicipal comparisons highlighted that while both provinces prioritize labour-market integration, the province of Québec employs a discourse of interculturalism with an emphasis on language integration.

Meanwhile, Ontario caters to a more labour market-centric approach, vying to attract “global talent.” In contrast to the provinces that use the term “resilience” in broad and unspecified ways, the use of resilience at the municipal level is both more specific and targeted. In Montréal, there is a recurring use of the notion *résilience urbaine* (urban resilience), and in Toronto the idea of “civic resiliency” is advanced, which refers to an awareness of systemic barriers that exist for people in their environment. Finally, municipal governments emerge as structural agents in the adoption and implementation of resilience in local policy and planning, and they generally tend to align with the trends in immigration discourses of their provincial counterparts in Ontario and in Quebec respectively.

The next two presentations reported on the findings of neighborhood studies on immigrant resilience. The first of these focused on how the interdependence of individuals is mediated by housing structure and tenure along the axes of social identities in the neighborhood of Rexdale, Toronto. The concept of “neighboring practices” was found useful for this study to describe the social and economic practices in neighborhood spaces. The examination of neighboring activities among Rexdale residents showed that there was a perceived isolation among residents based on urban planning, where different types of social and geographical structures (e.g., separation between high rise areas and low rise residential housing) prevented interactions. The dynamics of establishing relationships with others was limited to small-talk and it was thus difficult to create deeper connections with others. Meanwhile, respondents noted that although the targets of racism and prejudice have changed over the past decade, racism as such remained prevalent in the neighborhood. Neighborhoods were framed as fractured spaces, yet individuals’ resiliency could be identified in specific and well-defined aspects within these fractured spaces. These findings provide insights into how to improve the study of resilience at the local level, and to consider which urban spaces are best studied rather than using entire neighborhoods as scale of analysis.

The last presentation of the panel shared learnings from neighborhood welcoming initiatives in the City of Montréal. The project *Vivons nos quartiers* was undertaken to better understand the social resilience of neighbourhood community organizations in fostering inclusive and welcoming neighborhoods for refugees and immigrants. The beginning of the project coincided with the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2015, and it was adapted to the changing context to also include more recent arrival of new categories of migrants to Montréal (i.e., asylum seekers crossing the US-Canada border) and the related stressors that these have brought to Montréal's settlement sector.

Methodologically, the study adopted an ethnographic approach. The findings reveal that the activism and engagement in consultations among local actors across various sectors have very positive outcomes by facilitating response and adjustment to new and changing conditions on the ground between neighborhoods as well as between city-level stakeholders. Nevertheless, a discrepancy persists between the reality observed in the neighbourhoods (these positive adjustments) and the rhetoric used in the media and in politics that too often paints an unfavorable and/or controversial portrait of immigrants and immigration.

During the discussion, two questions were asked about the transversal project: (1) Is there a profile among immigrants specifically targeted in this policy discourse, such as based on ethnicity or religion? and (2) Are definitions of "resilience" used by governments anchored in specific scientific discourses from the literature? Panellists responded that they were looking into any characterization associated with being a "resilient immigrant" and that they were taking into account instances whereby emphasis is put on certain migrant populations deemed as more "vulnerable" than others. It was also explained that while most government sectors did not use a scientific definition of the concept, the Armed Forces discourse had many references to the academic literature in order to define what was meant by the concept of "resilience" and clearly sought to operationalize and appropriate this concept.

Questions were also raised to presenters of the neighbourhood studies: (1) How do you choose a neighbourhood, and what factors may influence neighbourhood selection to study migrant resilience? (2) Are there some types of spaces (e.g., public space) where resilience is more often studied at the neighbourhood scale than others? and (3) Are you using any specific definitions or approaches to study resilience at the neighbourhood level that are based in the existing literature? Panellists responded that due to the potential existence of significant variations both across and within neighbourhoods and neighbourhood spaces, researchers need to spend lengthy periods of time within neighbourhoods to be able to identify how to study resilience in any given neighbourhood – including specific spaces within neighbourhoods as well as what kinds of resilience. As such, it may be useful to think of resilience as "practice" in the sense of Bourdieu's notion of habitus.

Links to the presentations

[Framing migrant resilience within Canada's federal government policy](#)

[Multi-level comparative analysis of immigration and resilience within provincial and municipal discourse across Ontario and Quebec](#)

[Geographies of Immigration and Resilience in Urban Canada: From Multi-Level Policy Discourses to Neighborhood Spaces](#)

[Making Montreal neighborhoods more welcoming and inclusive towards newcomers](#)

Picture of the BMRC partners at this event

(From left to right): Sutama Ghosh, Daniel Boutin, Gabrielle Désilets, Virginie Mesana, Luisa Veronis

