Workshop Report

Rethinking Governance in a World of Complexity

Duisburg, 27-28 June 2013

Workshop organised by:
Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21)
From 27 until 28 June 2013 the Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21) organised and hosted an international workshop entitled ‘Rethinking Governance in a World of Complexity’. The workshop started with an opening public lecture by Prof Bob Jessop of the University of Lancaster on “Rethinking State Power and Governance in a World of Complexity”.

The rationale of the workshop was to explore the emergence of complexity understandings and the concomitant rise of resilience and adaptation discourses. Complexity thinking is expressive of an understanding of the world that rejects direct causal relations. Instead it posits nonlinear change, interconnectivity and unintended consequences as the starting point for rationalisations. The questions pursued during the workshop centred on the consequences and implications for modes of governing. Particular focus was put on the question of the relation between neoliberal governance and complexity/resilience understandings as well as the changing perspectives on risk and uncertainty that underpin complexity thinking.

Panel 1:

Embedded Governance and Bureaucratic Vitalism in Complex Societies

After a warm welcome by the workshop co-organiser Prof David Chandler, of the University of Westminster, and Prof Dr Tobias Debiel, Executive Director of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research and the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF), the first workshop panel on “Embedded Governance and Bureaucratic Vitalism in Complex Societies” was chaired by Pol Barqués Pedreny of the University of Westminster.

Professor Adrian Hyde-Price:
Governance in Late Modern Europe: A Strategic-Relational Approach

Using the main International Relation (IR) theories as entry point, Adrian Hyde-Price aimed at finding first pillars of a holistic theory of governance with his paper. According to him, a new theory has to overcome the limits of and dissatisfactions with existing IR theories. Furthermore, such a theory must be based on three main consensuses of the governance discourse. First, it has to take into account both, factors of the international and domestic level and factors of structure and agency.
Second, a theory of emergence has to acknowledge that different levels have got different properties and modes which cannot be subsumed under the other. Third, a new theory of governance has to postulate that governance pertains to more than interaction in the political domain (states, political actors). It concerns all four domains of social theory: Politics, Ideology, Economy and Military. The possibilities of governance depend on the joint and simultaneous articulation of those four domains in one matrix.

Setting a first matrix of social formation in “late modernity” of European governance, Hyde-Price considers a decline of the importance of the military domain, a strengthening of the ideological domain (based on the hegemony of neoliberal ideas) and a transformation of the political domain with a hollowing-out of democratic institutions as major trends, which entail that issues are increasingly framed as technical/technocratic rather than being open to political contestation. Here Hyde-Price gave as an example the Euro-crisis, which is framed as a crisis to be managed by economists, out of the hand of politicians.

**Dr Stephanie Simon:**

**Bureaucratic Vitalism and the Interconnected Cyber Emergency**
(co-author Prof Marieke de Goede)

Dealing with another case of the technocratic management of political issues, Stephanie Simon, in her presentation, elaborated on the approaches of European bureaucrats to govern cyber security. As an actual hierarchical block, the European security bodies have to anticipate cyber-attacks from an ecosystem which is flexible, interconnected and thus resilient. Since the cyber space is a particular realm, vastly owned privately, unpredictable and without territory, the ideal response envisaged by European bureaucrats, who are part of a hierarchic structure, cannot be applied. As a consequence, the complex system of “bureaucratic vitalism” has been established. This vitalism refers to the own values of the cyber bureaucracy (“the online life”), process based knowledge (adaptability) and the resilient ideal of flexibility. According to Stephanie Simon, intrinsic complexity has been created by this measure, thereby recognising that one cannot foresee the future in its entirety. The tensions between this intrinsic complexity and bureaucratic interventions are managed by cyber bureaucrats through a language of resilience.

Nonetheless the measures of cyber bureaucracy have to be rational and predictable, applied to a world that is not. Thus the main challenge of bureaucrats is to discipline the imagination and to “keep all players to the script”.
Discussion
The discussant Dr Daniel Gaus emphasised the possible combination of the arguments of both papers and summed up their main arguments. Doing so, he broadly agreed with the points raised by Simon, but also questioned the coexistence of the two logics of European cyber-security with spontaneous behaviour on the one hand and regulatory modes of calculation and planning on the other. Next to appropriate intrinsic entry points for the security administration, Gaus put the ability of such an administration to act spontaneously into question.

After debating on several arguments of the two presented papers, like the normative perceptions of bureaucracy (negative) and vitalism (positive), the problematic usage of the term *post-modernity* or the paradox of adding new complexity while trying to reduce it, the workshop discussion then focused on the omnipresence of the term and concept of *resilience*.

Coming from the Anglo-Saxon region, the term was able to influence a discourse in international organisation and has spread to other regions of the world. For instance, the term is used in German as the loan word *Resilienz*, whereby one can avoid the use of the term *resistance* which usually includes a critique of neoliberalism. Furthermore, the knowledge travel, which was underlying the spread of the term, represented a hegemonic structure and was facilitated by the everyday use of the term in the English language. The latter was then questioned by the doubts whether it was actually used in history and it was argued that it was appropriate that the term replaced other words. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that the concept and the term are two different things, so that the concept was used already before the term was established. There was no consensus on the point of whether it was a concrete concept, nor what it was about. In fact, in a complex world it was rather something relational. In an attempt to capture the concept, the participants tried to find the opposite term of resilience. *rights, vulnerability* or *boundability* (sic.) have been suggested, each disputed in the further discussion. Finally, it was stated that the term could be found in every discipline and that there is no outside to the concept, therefore an adequate opposite term could only be *death*.

Panel 2:

Resilience as a Distant Form of Governance

**Professor Jonathan Joseph:**

**Building Resilience as a Distant From of Governance**

In his paper and presentation, Jonathan Joseph intended to connect the concepts of resilience and governmentality. In his argumentation, he used the case study of the intervention of the European Union in the Horn
of Africa. Joseph maintained that on the one hand, the humanitarian and development intervention in the region follows the objective of rendering countries, communities and households adaptable, resistible and recoverable from crises like droughts or violent conflicts. On the other hand, the European Union considers itself, very similar to other international organisations, as facilitator (a term of governance) who is limiting itself by the governing through others, e.g. the developmental axioms of partnership and ownership. In this form of governance by distance and the used technocratic language, Joseph found characteristics of the Foucauldian concept of govermentality.

In this context, Joseph saw as critical points not only that responsibility was shifted away from the actual actor (here the EU) but also that the form of rule is neoliberalised, meaning the governmentality through market mechanisms, like competitiveness or effectiveness. Thus, the EU intervention, following Joseph, is not intended to help people at the Horn of Africa, but in fact, the strengthening of resilience aims at embedding a neoliberal ideology in governance, while opening up institutions to external scrutiny and review.

**Dr Claudia Aradau:**

**The promise of security? From protection to resilience**

At the outset of her presentation, Claudia Aradau referred to the contemporary “gospel of resilience”, in which resilience became the answer to various problems of governance, while the discourse expands from resilience as dead end to resilience as a bridging concept. The concept as such represented, according to Aradau, a shift of attention from problems (available resources) to responses (options) and hence, a shift of the nature of events and threats. Resilience became a pro-active response to the complex, unpredictable and uncertain world; a response to the disruptive events, incorporated in everyday life. All this was related to the non-eliminable concept of surprise in complex theory. Here resilience seemed to promise risk reduction and disaster management by a shift from reacting to pro-active policies.

Nonetheless, resilience did not promise anything, Aradau continued, with reference to Hannah Arendt’s work on promises. Although promises got the ability to correct the past with statements about the future, resilience did not promise security (or development), because promises appeared inadequate, costly and risky. Thus the usage of resilience in the transformation management became very common, as politicians try to avoid any promises. Aradau concluded her presentation with the rhetoric question, in what kind of world we would live, without promises about security.
Discussion

After the discussant Dr Morgan Brigg highlighted several aspects of the presentations and pointed out the complementarity of both presentations, the discussion mainly focussed on the element of unpredictability, the neoliberal instrumentalisation of resilience and the ambiguity of the concept.

Concerning the unpredictability of everyday life and the related insecurity, the discussion stressed that full security is neither achievable nor desirable. Furthermore, some kind of predictability exists in resilience, since the shift from prevention to adaption and resilience goes hand in hand with the prediction that ‘the crisis will come’. Although the lack of promises was a contemporary feature and is interconnected with the avoidance of responsibility, it became clear during the discussion that resilience is not entirely free of promises, but includes a different kind of promises, like the prevention from suffering. Hence resilience could be seen as equivalent to risk reduction or disaster management.

As a reply to the question of whether global governance is actually all about neoliberalism and if this could be revised, Jonathan Joseph defended his thesis arguing that after it became a hegemony, under certain circumstances of the post-war era, neoliberalism and the supporting epistemological block suggested an "one size fits all" solution by using a set of strategies, tactics and technologies, using resilience as an instrument. Joseph explains the impression of an unmanageable world with this neoliberal agenda. Following Joseph, the fuzziness on the macro-level was necessary to legitimate the neo-liberal logic on the micro-level and thereby make it governable.

It was then criticised that the term neoliberal has to be defined more precisely, as it can imply marketisation, a strong state or different roles of NGOs. Similarly, various stories could be told with regard to the connection with resilience: resilience as a neoliberal project of self-sustainability, resilience as a side effect of neo-liberal logic (resilience as helpline), resilience could have a containing effect on neo-liberalism or resilience could have an emancipatory effect on people.

With the recognition of a distinctive usage of the resilience concept in the two presentations, it was then suggested that the ambiguity of the concept is one of the conditions and problems of its success. This point has been contested by the statement that not the definitions of resilience are different in the given presentations, but the consequences of governance resulting from the notion of resilience. Finally, the argument has been advanced that in fact the ambiguity of resilience would constitute its attraction, however, the particular context and application should be in focus.
Panel 3:

Resilience, Vulnerability and Adaptation: New Perspectives on Security Research

Prof Giorgio Shani:
Resilience as ‘Post-Human’ Security

Giorgio Shani introduced his talk with a short definition and genealogy of resilience. With reference to Ungar, he saw resilience in short as “the capacity of individuals to function ‘normally’ within a given social or ecological system”. Shani explained the rise of resilience based on three supposed imperatives: Post-9/11 resilience to terrorist attacks, resilience to financial shocks like in the current crisis, resilience to environmental disasters.

In his examination of the interconnectedness of human security and resilience, Shani stressed that security was re-defined by resilience. From the meaning of ‘freedom from fear’ the approach was broadening to ‘freedom from want’ (empowerment), so that human security includes now the strengthening of the resilience (‘immunisation’) of individuals, societies or governments. In this context, Shani criticised the cultural insensitivity of resilient human security approaches and, referring to Agamben, that subjects were reduced to ‘bare life’ through this, thereby excluding a life with dignity. Both a secular and ‘religious’ traditions have to be integrated into a new approach, which recovers human dignity, argued Shani, since being human contradicted being resilient.

Mareile Kaufmann, M.A.:
Governing Complexity: Risk, Resilience and Intuitive Reasoning

In her presentation, Mareile Kaufmann addressed the issue of the EU’s Security Strategy Approach with special emphasis on the coexistence of mere risk assessment and resilient responses to emergencies. Kaufmann argued that the latter approach was an attempt of ‘ultimate securitisation’, trying to predict as much of the future as possible. With an ‘Utility/Impact Assessment’, as a linguistic, ideological and calculating procedure, security institutions try to formalise resilience. Kaufmann argued that not only the methodology matters, because the chosen algorithm is already an outcome influencing decisions, but furthermore that the numeric results are the product of intuitions and subjective personal opinions by experts. This fact has to be reflected by decision-makers, while they use the assessment to reduce complexity and to make it governable.
Instead of measuring all risks and adapting intuitions, formalised resilience now starts with the awareness of an impossibility of measuring all uncertainties, and thus, Kaufmann continued, showing a signalling position of governments to address ‘the unknown’. Resilience strategies choose ‘one future over another’ by including the political mainstream and the feasibility of strategies. However risk and resilience remain coexistent in security policies.

Dr Jana Krause:
Adaption and Resilience in International Security: Insights from Complexity Theories

With case studies on two non-violent communities from Nigeria and Indonesia, Jana Krause gave a talk about ‘non-violence as adaption’ in terms of (evolutionary) social resilience. The latter is rooted in the key concepts of complexity theories: non-linearity, adaption and emergence. In the given context, non-violence referred to the non-escalation of social conflicts as well as prevention of violence against social groups. Thus, violence represented stress to communities, which have to use resilience as significant social knowledge of anticipation and self-organisation, aiming to recover from this kind of stress.

Krause considered this a positive implication of resilience: moving the discourse from the vulnerability of fragile states and conflict to the core- and rest-forces of those societies. This had to be seen as a bottom-up process of peacekeeping efforts rather than a rolling back of state responsibility. Finally, Krause stressed the normative questions raised by the concept of evolutionary resilience in respect to structural violence and suppression of e.g. minorities.

Discussion

Although the three panellists had different points of view on resilience, from a rather sceptical one to a more positive, the discussant Prof Dennis Dijkzeul found a similarity between all three approaches. Addressing resilience with a stronger focus on risks, the panellists were rather pushing actors and interests into the background, although they got a dominant role in the political science discourse before. Giorgio Shani defended his point of view with a general rejection of this kind of social science and argued that resilience served as a framework that shapes the interests of actors. Mareile Kaufmann differently claimed that she didn’t challenge the role of actors and that governing complexity was not only about resilience, but also about a set of contexts, decisions and strategies of actors.

In the following discussion it was asserted that resilience is something that happens ‘elsewhere and not at home’, thus, creating a new
universalism, which was exported from the Anglo-Saxon world and which saw resilience as a core human characteristic. In accord with this standpoint, was claimed that it was always someone else who was told to be ‘more resilient’, because one could not be aware of one’s own resilience. This was contested by the claim that the concept is also applied in the domestic field, giving the example of Post-9/11. It was then stated that whenever it is applied – domestically or abroad –, resilience included two elements. On the one hand, it includes an emancipatory element with the empowerment to no longer be object to external threats. On the other hand, the patronising element of resilience indicated that agents could not cope with their problems. Concerning the perception of resilience it was finally argued that wherever resilience was in the world, it didn’t exist literally (e.g. usage in government documents). This cogently expressed the difficulty of the discourse: The impossibility to perceive, talk about or criticise resilience without using concepts from the ‘pre-resilience world’.

“Taking Stocks”

Ulrich Schneckener

Linking up resilience and governance, during his input, Ulrich Schneckener tried to reframe resilience as politics. According to this perspective, governance represents a specific form of politics. Resilience as governance became popular after the vulnerability shock of the 9/11-attacks. While in other parts of the world, resilience (although not called that way) and vulnerability constituted parts of the everyday life, in the northern world the feeling of vulnerability triggered a long-term process of adaptation. The framing and implementation of this process was shaped by the way societies deal with systemic risks in general.

Addressing these issues, Schneckener continued, governance research had to be clear about the context and level of analysis. As a first level Schneckener identified global and regional governance, where agencies and networks interact in processes of informalisation of politics. The second level was represented by the interaction between the local and international, where via governance transfer resilience was spread over the world. And finally the third level, as a bottom-up angle on resilience, where research is about the particular circumstances, environments and inner-societal processes.

Jessica Schmidt

Jessica Schmidt remarked that there might be more fundamental stakes at play in the shift towards complexity and resilience thinking than the debate to what extent it fits a neoliberal paradigm. She drew attention to the shift from epistemology to ontology that seemed to underpin the rise
and current purchase of complexity and resilience. This turn away from understanding problems as epistemological in their nature towards their understanding as ontological describes, according to John Law and John Urry, a shift from different perspectives, in which what is known depends on particular positions, towards multiple worlds, in which what is known is also made differently. She critically asked whether the critical debate on complexity and resilience may have co-executed this shift and mentioned the need to reflect upon how critical scholars want to position themselves in relation to this ontological turn. To exemplify how ontological complexity seems to underpin problematisations of agency and governance in contemporary international policy discourses she mentioned the World Bank’s recent critique of the decision-making subject.

After those remarks a final roundtable summed up the main arguments of the workshop.

Nele Kortendiek/Jan Schablitzki