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Cultural Resilience and Cultural Diplomacy: the State of the Art

Barbara Lucini[1]

Nota autore

Barbara Lucini is postdoctoral fellow and PhD in Sociology and Methodology of Social Research at the Department of Sociology, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan. She is also adjunct professor of risk management and crisis communication. She has been involved in several research projects (European and others) focused on crisis management, risk communication, risk perception, security and resilience. Her research interests are directed at disaster resilience, disaster management, and civil protection systems. She also explored the relationship between terrorism or political extremism and resilience. She is the author of "Disaster Resilience from a Sociological Perspective: Exploring Three Italian Earthquakes as Models for Disaster Resilience Planning", Springer International Publishing 2014, and "The Other Side of Resilience to Terrorism: A Portrait of a Resilient-Healthy City", Springer International Publishing 2017.

Abstract

Il presente articolo intende fornire un'analisi dell'importante contributo che la resilienza, soprattutto nella sua dimensione culturale, può fornire nei contesti di post- crisi e negli scenari di conflitto, in relazione con l'approccio operativo della *cultural diplomacy*.
La premessa importante riguarda il concetto di resilienza e il suo ruolo nell'ambito della gestione delle crisi e dell'analisi del rischio. La resilienza culturale si ritiene essere fattore imprescindibile per la costruzione di identità nazionali, collettive e individuali che siano in grado di definire, interpretare e gestire le nuove minacce ibride.
Lo stesso elemento culturale unito al concetto di identità sono da considerarsi, quali *driver* per una necessaria relazione fra la dimensione culturale della resilienza e la *cultural diplomacy*.
Le considerazioni finali consolidano la prospettiva socio- antropologica legata alla dimensione culturale e all'applicazione del concetto di resilienza nell'ambito della cultural diplomacy, per la gestione delle tensioni e conflitti socio – politici in molte parti del mondo.

This paper aims to provide an analysis of the contribution that resilience, especially in its cultural dimension, can provide in post-crises and conflict scenarios, along with the pragmatic approach of cultural diplomacy.
The key premise is the concept of resilience and its role in crisis management and risk analysis. Cultural resilience is regarded as an essential factor to build national, collective and individual identities that are able to define, interpret and manage new hybrid threats.

[1] ITSTIME – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy.

Both the cultural factor itself and the concept of identity need to be seen as drivers for the required relationship between the cultural dimension of resilience and cultural diplomacy. The final remarks consolidate a social anthropological perspective associated with the cultural dimension and the application of the concept of resilience in the framework of cultural diplomacy, with the aim to manage socio-political tensions and conflicts in many parts of the world.

Keywords

Cultural resilience, cultural diplomacy, security, adaptation, proactivity.

1. Foreword

The current state of the world and the increased instability at both national and international levels requires us to focus on the role played by resilience. Conflicts are pervasive, diffused and complex in this new and changing context of hybrid warfare.

An analysis of the concept of resilience requires using multidimensional perspectives as well as an adaptative attitude by the scholars themselves, yet it is a worthwhile opportunity to explore new views of the same concept applied to various scientific domains.

Resilience and its cultural dimension is affected by its own context-sensitive nature, which requires an attention to environmental variables and their effects on societal systems.

From this perspective, a world where threats derive from different sources, thus classified under the umbrella definition of hybrid threats, resilience appears to be the most necessary skill to deal with all post-crisis and post-conflict situations around the world.

2. Resilience and its cultural dimension

Defining resilience is challenging because of its context-sensitive nature and its wide range of application. It requires a specific contextualising of the scientific domain within which the concept will be analysed.

This approach is also determined by the historical background of the concept itself: the term resilience was used by scientific scholars involved in physics experiments. Therefore, ensuing studies on resilience took place within the scientific field of hard science.

Since the 70s, however, the concept of resilience has spread into the psychology and social science disciplines.

It is worth noting that the original definition of resilience was maintained in this context, while its area of application has changed.

For the purposes of this study, the definition of resilience is as follows:

a "*process, capacity or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenges or threatening circumstances*," and "*good outcomes despite high-risk status, sustained competence under threat and recovery from trauma*" (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990) cited by Clauss-Ehlers (2008).

Studies conducted to further understand how the concept of resilience applies to the different societal systems found a few consistent attributes:

1. being context-sensitive
2. adaptability
3. being able to transform
4. flexibility
5. framing the opportunity
6. balance and order
7. proactivity
8. changing attitude depending on the cultural environment

These eight traits are universal in the concept of resilience and can be applied across scientific domains, painting a different picture depending on the context. This action brings the focus onto the characteristics of the system, as well as an awareness of where the resilience concept needs to be implemented: for instance it can be applied to the analysis of resilience within a private company as well as within a public institution.

Regardless of their application, studies on resilience have shown that it is a skill and competence that can be taught and learnt, depending on the inner characteristics of the target, whether that is a single person, a community, or a whole society.

This characteristic focuses on the way resilience can be taught and when it can be implemented according to the original attitudes of the people and the previous organisation of a system: the communication perspective is an essential tool and requirement to improve the effort of achieving resilience in multiple domains.

Moving on from a general definition of resilience, it is worthwhile to focus on the cultural dimension of resilience and its characteristics, as well as understanding the role played by culture (in its socio-anthropological definition) within the framework of resilience.

The main element distinguishing the connection between cultural resilience and cultural diplomacy as regards hybrid threats is the evidence based on previous studies[2], stating the influence that culture can have on resilience for individuals and systems. Specifically, Belgrave et al. (2000) cited by Clauss-Ehlers (2008) concluded that "*positive feelings about the self, one's*

[2] Cabrera and Padilla (2004), Belgrave et al. (2000), and Clauss-Ehlers et al. (2006).

culture, and one's ethnic group promote resiliency and are linked to positive behaviors (e.g., better school performance) and decreases in risky behaviors (e.g., early sexual activity, drug use)".

This finding prompts a reflection on the link between cultural resilience and cultural diplomacy, in that resilience can spread the activity of cultural diplomacy and support the understanding of the multiple identities that exist in geopolitical contexts.

For this reason, it is essential to define cultural resilience. One definition of the concept is provided by Holtorf (2018): "*I define cultural resilience as the capability of a cultural system (consisting of cultural processes in relevant communities) to absorb adversity, deal with change and continue to develop. Cultural resilience thus implies both continuity and change: disturbances that can be absorbed are not an enemy to be avoided but a partner in the dance of cultural sustainability*". (adapted from Thiele [2016, 36]).

A further model was developed to sustain this first evidence: Clauss-Ehlers (2004) presented a theoretical model that posits that culture and the sociocultural context affect resilience. This culturally-focused resilient adaptation model is described as "*a dynamic, interactive process in which the individual negotiates stress through a combination of character traits, cultural background, cultural values, and facilitating factors in the sociocultural environment*" (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008).

The importance of what was previously described as "*culturally-focused resilient adaptation model*" is linked to the current international scenario and its new threats. It focuses especially on the importance of strengthening cultural factors – detailed for each ethnic group, geopolitical framework and post-conflict areas – as they affect the ability to spread national, socio-political and community resilience.

Furthermore, Clauss-Ehlers (2008) clearly defines cultural resilience and the way its influence works within a framed context: "*Part of this contextual focus examines cultural influences involved in resilience and coping. Clauss-Ehlers (2004) presents the term cultural resilience as describing the degree to which the strengths of one's culture promote the development of coping. This type of resilience has a number of aspects including a developmental trajectory within a cultural matrix composed of norms, family structure, and peer relationships*".

The main aim of resilience is to enable people – at all levels, whether a single person, social groups or institutions – to cope with post-crisis and post-conflict times. The ability to cope becomes the main skill to pursue, when discussing the role played by cultural resilience within the scenario of cultural diplomacy.

Addressing the comprehensive contribution that cultural resilience can provide, it is worthwhile to focus on the role of identity and its social anthropological significance (Allovio et al. 2018).

The evolution of sociological theories demonstrates the relevance of identity – specifically social identity – in allowing people to interact and communicate with each other, promoting a common framing and understanding of a situation.

Referring to previous studies conducted about the influence of resilience on the capability of adaptation, Clauss-Ehlers (2008) states:

> Thus, it was the combination of both valuing one's culture as well as learning about the culture of the new system that helped the students be successful. Cabrera and Padilla (2004) wrote: "Some readers might argue that Erandi and Juan [i.e., the study participants] were the fortunate ones and that their success is atypical. We take the position, however, that Erandi and Juan succeeded only because they managed to learn what the middle class take for granted, that is, there is class- and culture-bound knowledge that is necessary to succeed in higher education

The study cited above confirms the bidirectional pattern of cultural resilience, stating the need to address both the individual culture and its view of the world and the collective culture deriving from group perceptions.

At the end of this short excursus, the new approach we introduce here maintains that resilience from a cultural dimension can be defined as the ability to rebuild identity – at individual, community, collective and institutional levels – after a crisis and/or a conflict (whatever its cause), evidencing that this is a specific competence that can be taught to and learnt by a community or a group of people.

This is the first step towards further theoretical and methodological research and activities in the field of *fostering cultural diplomacy through cultural resilience*.

3. Cultural Resilience and Cultural Diplomacy

Having provided a general definition of resilience and cultural resilience, the focus can now shift to a more specific analysis of the link between cultural resilience and cultural diplomacy, with an in-depth look at the role of culture and identity.

In order to develop a number of pragmatic insights and suggest further actions on this topic, we need to outline the scenario for this approach because of the context-sensitive nature of resilience.

Over the past decades, vulnerabilities, crises and fragilities that emerged as a result of various threats and local or national instabilities were mainly managed within political and/or technical perspectives.

The changing nature of the current scenario requires different, equally adequate, tools to prevent, manage, cope and respond to these unpredictable threats: "*[...] global, national and local systems must be strengthened to cope with a range of insurgent threats*" (Evans and Steven, 2009). This new situation requires cultural diplomacy tools to develop a holistic, resilient strategy for ongoing threats.

This scenario, characterized by the presence of pervasive conflicts, should be analysed with a focus on the behavioural patterns of social relations.

The challenges for conflict management in this era are the high levels of complexity and the chaotic set of motivations which lead to conflicts and crisis: interconnections and interdependency are the two main factors that affect an efficient response after impact.

Many significant conflicts are motivated by a combination of ethnic or ideological causes, showing that culture alone cannot be used as reference in dealing with crisis management and risk assessment.

Narrative and communication strategies also play a crucial role for both stages in this framework in understanding and managing the diffused instability and related threats.

Methodologically speaking, linking cultural resilience and cultural diplomacy means taking different levels of understanding into account:

1. Individual
2. Community
3. Society
4. Institutional

The institutional position brings us to the core topic of cultural diplomacy as part of a more general vision of public diplomacy.

Moreover, these levels exist within specific action areas: post-crisis, post-conflict, and extreme.

It is also important to stress the significance of the socio-political scenario's characteristics and cultural backdrop where the relationship between cultural resilience and cultural diplomacy manifests.

In accordance with this methodological framework and its drivers, we can link the cultural resilience domain to that of cultural diplomacy, with these postulates:

– this proposition should not focus on post-crisis responsiveness, but on a proactive approach for effective management that includes all phases, from prevention to planning for impact

– nations and countries with more socio-political instability need to develop adaptability to adverse situations caused by multiple threats, especially when managing ethnic conflicts
– adaptability is also needed for a new way of thinking about different geopolitical and international governance scenarios
– the context-sensitive nature of resilience demands a focus on the actual local situation and resources available in situ, promoting local knowledge in a view to cultural resilience

The combined approach of cultural resilience and cultural diplomacy is rooted into the following crucial points:

1. to manage complex crises and diffused threats, there needs to be interconnection and interdependence of both local and international situations. A social anthropological understanding of typical cultural representation is essential, in order to provide a cultural model of understanding that can be applied to different societal realities
2. the general characteristics of resilience can be combined with the detailed characteristics of cultural resilience, leading to a cultural model of adaptation to help go beyond conflicts and ethnic and social tensions, promoting *resilience-sensitive policies* at governance level (de Weijer, 2013)
3. from a methodological perspective, three aspects need to be developed:
   – promoting *culturally focused resilient adaptation actions* in areas of the world affected by multiple threats such as crises, instabilities, and conflicts
   – supporting the progress of what can be defined as *geopolitical ethnography*, where the three key elements of geographies, identities and cultures prevails over local and international instability management
   – combining the connection between cultural resilience and cultural diplomacy with the sub-categories of material culture (Ciabarri, 2018), where local artefacts become a concrete element linking back to the original nature of cultural diplomacy

These three aspects are tied together by the possibility to inform about the relationships emerging from the fieldwork, stressing the *cultural narratives* that influence both local and international levels.

4. Final Remarks on Future Research

The current piece of writing states the demand to promote an approach of cultural resilience within the domain of cultural diplomacy, with all the relevant challenges arising from this effort.

In particular, these are:

- the need to overcome the "old" understanding of resilience and international cooperation, addressing and including the essential role played by a cultural resilience dimension within the framework of cultural diplomacy, reflecting on more useful methods and tools to implement an international governance resilience framework, that will focus primarily on the *geopolitical ethnography* outlined above
- moving away from a more clinical approach to resilience and instead focusing on a cultural perspective and the impact that cultural factors, which vary from one society to another, have on resilience competences when reflecting on its contribution to social sciences
- it is not possible to ignore the influence that a context of crisis, instability and/or conflict has on the effect of resilience in cultural diplomacy, the original nature of the new global scenario and its threats must be acknowledged: *[Instead,] the concept of resilience should be at the heart of a new doctrine for managing transnational risk and global instability. Resilience offers a guiding principle for informing strategy and animating alliances. It also provides a yardstick for measuring success. At present, much of what governments do internationally inadvertently increases vulnerability. This must change if globalization is to be saved from itself (Evans and Steven, 2009).*

The future trend of cultural resilience and cultural diplomacy could develop in the following steps:

- developing a methodological framework – *geopolitical ethnography* – to enhance cultural resilience through cultural diplomacy (Thomas, 2016) in areas of the world affected by multiple situations of socio-political instabilities, growing as deep an awareness of context and intercultural communication as possible
- developing resilient identities in those countries affected by various threats and instability at an individual, community, societal and even national level, creating what could be defined as a *country profile of cultural resilience*
- promoting the development of a tool to assess cultural resilience from a double perspective: that of geopolitics and that of diplomacy

This roadmap for further development of this research area benefits from the bidirectional nature of resilience, which is on one hand a key element to support cultural diplomacy action and on the other the goal of those very actions.

Finally, the two new essential contributions – *geopolitical ethnography and a country profile of cultural resilience* – are the leading elements to develop the deep connection between cultural resilience and cultural diplomacy.

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La Rivista semestrale *Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società* intende la *Sicurezza* come una condizione che risulta dallo stabilizzarsi e dal mantenersi di misure proattive capaci di promuovere il benessere e la qualità della vita dei cittadini e la vitalità democratica delle istituzioni; affronta il fenomeno del *Terrorismo* come un processo complesso, di lungo periodo, che affonda le sue radici nelle dimensioni culturale, religiosa, politica ed economica che caratterizzano i sistemi sociali; propone alla *Società* – quella degli studiosi e degli operatori e quella ampia di cittadini e istituzioni – strumenti di comprensione, analisi e scenari di tali fenomeni e indirizzi di gestione delle crisi.

Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società si avvale dei contributi di studiosi, policy maker, analisti, operatori della sicurezza e dei media interessati all'ambito della sicurezza, del terrorismo e del crisis management. Essa si rivolge a tutti coloro che operano in tali settori, volendo rappresentare un momento di confronto partecipativo e aperto al dibattito.

La rivista ospita contributi in più lingue, preferendo l'italiano e l'inglese, per ciascuno dei quali è pubblicato un Executive Summary in entrambe le lingue. La redazione sollecita particolarmente contributi interdisciplinari, commenti, analisi e ricerche attenti alle principali tendenze provenienti dal mondo delle pratiche.

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