

Delving into the politics of resilience: the role of social resilience cells and their alliances in the co-implementation of housing plans. The case study of HousingNOLA.

[Angeliki Paidakaki](#), [Hans Leinfelder](#), [Constanza Parra](#), [Pieter Van den Broeck](#)

KU Leuven

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Abstract:

This paper approaches ‘resilience’ through the new concept of ‘social resilience cells’ (SRCs). SRCs are defined as affordable housing providers or housing policy implementers who mobilize different discursive and material practices in their aim to influence the recovery profile of a post-disaster city, both socio-politically and through their housing initiatives. The analytical lenses of SRCs advance the political interpretation of resilience by elevating the notion from a single capacity of a system to resist shock and bounce back or forward in a linear, monodirectional way, to a highly politically sensitive, continuously changing, socially transformative process, with various ‘bounce-forward’ imaginations and trajectories steered and materialized by a heterogeneity of SRCs. This paper aims to further delve into the microphysics of resilience politics by shedding light on the politico-institutional role of SRCs, and more specifically on the practices, actions and strategies adopted by SRCs and their alliances to co-produce and co-implement more thoughtful and egalitarian post-disaster housing plans. The work is inspired by theories of social resilience, social and institutional capital and multi-level governance and relies on empirical data from ethnographic research of the Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance (GNOHA) and HousingNOLA; the institutionalized housing policy program in New Orleans that focuses on securing affordable housing for all city residents by 2025. The paper analyzes the ways in which alliances of SRCs such as GNOHA mobilize their members' social capital characteristics (endogenous and exogenous, individual and collective) in their interactions with institutions and decision-makers in order to monitor and ensure the implementation of jointly formulated housing plans. The analysis seeks to highlight the importance of the constant political presence of SRCs and their alliances in recovery governance arenas for the co-implementation of recovery plans that uninterruptedly treat all disaster affected-individuals and neighborhoods in an equal way.