The shifting status of failure and possibility: Resilience and the 'shift' in partnership-organized prevention in Sweden

Abstract

Based on a study of prevention politics in Sweden, this article probes the turn to resilience in its institutionalized form, cross-sectorial partnerships. It interrogates how resilience proponents strategically deploy the semantics of the shift in policymaking, arguing that they perform the 'shift' (in mindset) to criticize a long-established welfare-state governmentality, associated with professional 'silos', to create new possibilities for partnership-organized intervention. Part I draws attention to how resilience policy mobilizes partnerships around the indeterminate problem of 'problem setting'. Based on the idea of limited knowledge and governance in an indeterminate world, failure is considered inevitable and potentially productive, if handled appropriately – which is an issue of problem design or framing. It is considered particularly important to handle problems of coordination and communication internal to partnerships, since failures here risk jeopardizing collaboration and hence the whole enterprise. Part II demonstrates how partnership-organized resilience initiatives bracket-off risky failure by strategically reframing problems and bringing new visions of the future into being – through the semantics of the shift. In characteristically epochal terms, the 'shift' casts partnership formation as an improvement of the future, although the strategists' belief in future visions is apparently shot through with cynicism.

Keywords: Security and prevention; Resilience and designerly critique; Semantics of the shift; Partnership strategy; Failure and possibility; Problem design and re/framing

Introduction

As policy debates are increasingly moving towards resilience, broadly understood as 'a discursive field through which we negotiate the emerging power of governing complexity' (Chandler 2014: 13),

critical scholars have discussed whether this turn reveals something deeper about shifts in techniques of government. In the field of security, commentators have observed a 'marked distancing from centrally coordinated response organized via hierarchical chains of command and control designed to combat known threats and enemies' (Brassett et al., 2013: 223), in favor of more self-organizing forms of security. Others have argued that the terms resilience and resilient have become 'political keywords' in the field of security and beyond, vested with symbolic meaning to legitimate specific practices (Selchow, 2017). What has received little attention in these debates, however, is the performative function of the 'shift' in policymaking: the semantics of the shift. When taken as a performative category, analytically distinct from the specific content to which it refers, the 'shift' becomes a signifier with its own political agency or purpose. This article proposes to explore what the 'shift' does strategically when enacted to affect change in urban prevention politics. (We put the 'shift' in scare quotes to emphasize it performative nature.) The empirical context for our interrogation is the reformed national crime- and radicalization prevention politics in Sweden, organized around partnership collaboration in designated urban areas. The reformed national policy is oriented towards establishing, maintaining and dispersing local collaborations, often coordinated by the municipality and the police, and usually involving numerous other partner organizations as well. In constantly changing and unpredictable environments, the argument goes, partnership collaboration is a suitable way of organizing prevention initiatives because of their bottom-up, multi-sectorial, holistic and yet open-ended configuration.

We will bring to light how partnership strategy gives meaning to resilience, but also how it severely restricts what resilience could mean, especially when the turn towards resilience is represented as an epochal 'shift'. We advance the argument that the semantics of the shift serves to create what Michel Foucault (2008) calls a 'field of adversity' (cf. Collier, 2017; Grove, 2018), casting the long-established welfare-state regime as outmoded, in juxtaposition to future-oriented resilience thinking. This style of critique inadvertently reenacts the anticipatory temporality that underpins the allegedly failed politics of the past, but insofar as the 'shift' points to an entirely new mindset

(*synvendor*) attuned to indeterminacy, it also conjures up notions of uncertainty and insecurity which increasingly animate urban prevention policy.

With the limits of knowledge and governance in mind, several researchers have pointed out that policymaking is ever more organized around contingency and failure (see e.g. Chandler, 2014, 2016; Harvey et al., 2013; Heath-Kelly, 2015; Kessler, 2016; Lisle, 2018); resilience thinking assumes that governmental interventions will inevitably produce unforeseen consequences or unexpected insecurities. To the extent that failure is an integral part of the process of governing complexity, as David Chandler (2014: 12) posits, resilience politics must take into consideration its own failure, as it were. The awareness of failure is, accordingly, at the heart of much contemporary security politics. Yet, at the same time, the awareness of failure gives rise to new bracketing strategies (Best, 2008), and this is where the semantics of the shift literally enters the scene. We shall demonstrate how the performance of the shift mediates failure as part of partnership strategy, arguing – in line with Chandler (2014, 2016) – that the strategic enactment of the 'shift' serves at once to transvalue and contain failure. Contrary to compensatory, spectacular security measures, which maintain the appearance of absolute security frontstage while assuming the ontological impossibility of eliminating failure backstage (Boyle and Haggerty, 2009), partnership strategy aims to foster an alternative sense of security and order among participants and the wider public.

The semantics of the shift strategically shifts the locus of attention from concrete problems and struggles here-and-now to the 'big picture': an imagined collective future that generates a sense of shared purpose amid complexity and uncertainty. Drawing on Martin Kornberger (2012: 93), we conceive of strategy as a policy technique for producing a common understanding and broad legitimacy for the governing process by extracting problems from the ambiguities, serendipity and complexities of the present (cf. Gressgård, 2015). When located in our discussion, strategizing becomes a response to a specific governmental problem, namely, the problem of coordination and communication integral to partnership governance.

Interestingly, the way in which Kornberger (2012) describes strategy bears close resemblance to how Chandler (2016) describes the ontologization of failure characteristic of so-called post-classical or post-liberal resilience approaches. Borrowing from Robert Cox' (1981) vocabulary, Chandler (2016: 400) delineates how the inclusion of failure in policymaking in the 1990s involved a problematization of 'seeing issues in narrow "problem-solving" terms', as opposed to 'critically rethink the bigger picture'. This convergence in terms might go some way in accounting for why resilience is so readily absorbed by partnership strategy, or, put differently, why partnership mobilization comes across as community resilience appropriate for 'vulnerable' areas where security problems are said to be more 'wicked' than elsewhere.

While Part I gives an account of the policy context, based on document analysis of governmental reports, media reviews and public debates related to urban security (conducted by Gressgård), as well as developing the theoretical framework, Part II is based on ethnographic fieldwork from partnership meetings (conducted by Lozic), as well as interviews with representatives of the police, civil organizations and local authorities that, at the time, were involved in collaborative crime and violent extremism prevention initiatives, supplemented by available info material.[1] The empirical analysis illuminates the entanglement of local practices with broader structural (trans)formations described in Part I, however without assuming an isomorphism between them (Gressgård and Jensen, 2016: 4).

[1] The field studies, partly sponsored by the Swedish Research Council, were conducted between autumn 2014 and spring 2018. Nineteen interviews with twenty representatives of the police, emergency services, schools, social service, the civil sector and the municipality were conducted in 2014. It is mainly the notes from some thirty hours of network meetings and collaborative dialogues that form the basis for the analysis in Part II, in addition to interviews with 1) Ellis, emergency services representative and process developer; 2) Lo, process developer and coordinator; and 3) Jesper, police representative. The interviews revolved around the interviewees' engagement in preventative youth work as part of an area-specific prevention initiative. In addition, we make use of communication materials and info documents, referred to as Info material, distributed among involved practitioners and the wider public. All information about individuals, places and events is anonymized, and all individuals involved have been informed about the aim of the research project. All quotes from the empirical material are translated from Swedish into English by the authors.

Part I: The shift

The emergence of a new policy context

The three largest cities in Sweden, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, have in recent years been featured in media debates as the epitome of failed multiculturalism and rise in crime and violent extremism. Center stage of these debates are the urban districts that were originally built to solve a housing crisis – a large-scale housing project between 1965 and 1975 called the 'Million Dwelling Program' – but has later come to represent the pathologies of the established welfare state. While the policy approach to the Million Dwelling Program was initially characterized by top-down regulation, it subsequently became subject to an array of short-term interventions indicative of a gradual reallocation of responsibility from the state to voluntary sectors and residents (see e.g. Larsson et al., 2012; Ålund et al., 2017). Much like critics of centralized government elsewhere, academics and pundits in Sweden held that state-centric approaches to security problems are no longer fit for purpose. Due to their all-protection and defensive *modus operandi*, conventional command and control techniques are allegedly unable to deal with the complexity of new security problems (Corry, 2014), or more generally, ill-suited for governing complex life (cf. e.g. Chandler, 2013; Wakefield, 2018). In response, Swedish policymakers called for more flexible, bottom-up interventions suitable for creating self-organizing forms of security, which eventually heralded a turn toward partnership-organized resilience.

It should be mentioned that the policy documents do not discuss resilience (*resiliens*) *per se*, as the term has only recently come into circulation in Swedish policymaking. But well before the term entered the debate, we had the thing without the word, signaled by frequent use of concepts such as preparedness (*beredskap*), adaptation (*anpassning*), robustness (*robusthet*) and vulnerability (*sårbarhet/utsatthet*). Resilience thinking no doubt informed security officials when denominating a significant number of urban areas as more or less 'vulnerable' and positing that the complex nature of problems in these areas requires an experimental, adaptable approach to prevention (Polisen, 2015b, 2017).

The resilience approach is particularly evident in the 2015 national reform of the Police Service (Polisen, 2015a), and in the reformed crime prevention program launched by the government in 2017 (Polisen, 2017). One noteworthy outcome of the police reform is the so-called citizen commitments (*medborgarlöften*): pledged allegiance to attend to safety and security matters that concern people living and working in a specific area (Polisen website, 2015a). The reformed prevention policy encourages people to have their say not only in matters of problem solving, but also in problem formulation, that is, in setting out the parameters of the problem. As the Head of the Department of National Operations eloquently comments, '[i]n our citizen commitments, we capture the local view of the problems and come to an agreement about measures' (Polisen website, 2015b). Like transformations in the UK and elsewhere, the Swedish reform aims to enhance the capacity for groups to collaborate on problem identification and solution in novel ways (Grove 2018: 195). To this end, the semantics of the shift plays a pivotal mobilizing role.

The mobilizing power of the 'shift' in partnership formation

While 'social' crime prevention has been an integrated part of social-democratic welfare politics for decades in Scandinavia, the first overarching policy in Sweden to promote systematic collaboration between the police and other stakeholders was initiated by the government in 1996, and was further sped up by a plan of action from the National Police Board promoting formalization of multi-agency organizations in terms of quasi-contractual agreements between the police, local authorities and other stakeholders (Rikspolisstyrelsen, 2007, 2012). The general idea of multi-agency initiatives is that prevention 'is most effective when it involves a mutual and accountable network of civic institutions, agencies and individual citizens working in partnership towards common goals within a common strategy' (Coaffee et al., 2009: 3; Coaffee, 2013: 249). The challenge is, more broadly, to design institutions and networks that can facilitate dynamic cross-boundary linkages and adjust interventions to the indeterminate or unpredictable world they are inextricably bound within (Grove, 2018: 106, 122).

As indicated above, it is a widespread assumption that failed prevention initiatives can be attributed to an outmoded welfare-state approach to security, associated with a narrow, mono-sectorial 'silo mentality' (*stuprörstänkande*) – i.e. disciplinary and professional silos – including rigid civil servants who fiercely guard information about clients under strict legal confidentiality, thus impeding information exchange (Dahlstedt and Lozic, 2018; Lozic, 2018).[2] Partnerships, by contrast, are portrayed as holistic and adaptable (BRÅ, 2013; Regeringen, 2017), properly aligned with the complex reality they seek to govern (Grove, 2018: 113ff., 211ff.). The semantics of the shift casts partnership formation – in characteristically epochal terms – as a possible improvement of the future. As Niels Å. Andersen (2008: 38) observes in a Danish policy context: 'The present is the moment of transformation where the creation of partnerships can help us improve the future that has already been laid out for us in the form of the good welfare society with diversity, flexibility, collectivity, empowerment and inclusion.'

Taking inspiration from Stephen Collier's (2009, 2011, 2017) late-Foucauldian, genealogical approach, Kevin Grove (2018) excavates how proponents of ecological resilience created a 'field of adversity' to carve out a room for maneuver: a wider field of strategic engagement that allowed them to elaborate alternatives out of pre-existing elements. By strategically mobilizing against dominant knowledge and management styles, they could point to limits in established ways of doing things and show how these limits could be transgressed (90f., 154). Similarly, Swedish resilience proponents juxtapose practices that no longer hold purchase (105) with something fresh and abreast with the times (signaled by the 'shift) to create a space for new practices, that is, new possibilities for partnership-organized intervention. Indeed, partnership collaboration is all about possibilities, as the structure of partnerships disallows for agreements on concrete goals (regulated by conventional

[2] Information exchange has been a recurrent matter of concern for the police in Sweden. To ensure public confidence in the social services and protect clients' integrity, a more rigorous confidentiality law was issued in the early 1980s, restricting the circulation of sensitive personal information among authorities. The law was heavily criticized by the police, and was revised in 2009 and 2012 respectively, allowing for more exchange of information provided that the clients consent, or if the risk of crime is evidently imminent. The police have continued to criticize the law for being too restrictive (BRÅ, 2012).

contracts); all the partner organizations can exchange in their agreements are *possibilities* for development in terms of indexical indications of 'overall objectives', values, considerations, shared visions, images etc. (Andersen, 2008: 102–103, 115ff.). It bears noting that abstractions like these create possibilities to re/combine different forms of knowledge, reframe problems and bring new visions of the future into being (Grove, 2018: 24).

Designing boundaries of possibility and failure

By reference to design scholar Herbert Simon's understanding of complexity and 'bounded rationality' – which suggests that total knowledge of a complex world exceeds human cognitive capacity – Grove (2018: 129f., 203f.) accounts for how shifting practices and strategies of critical intervention, what he calls 'designerly critique', gradually transformed policymaking and governmental practice. It was precisely the Simonian sense of bounded rationality, he argues, that prepared the ground for transvaluation of error or failure in resilience thinking (151) (insofar as the recognition of limited knowledge encouraged researchers and policymakers to experiment and learn from failure and surprise in search for satisficing solutions, as opposed to optimization) (cf. Chandler, 2013). And once failure is enfolded into governance, it becomes useful. Chandler (2014: 53) goes as far as to say that current resilience thinking can be understood as transvaluing modernist values in a nihilist manner, 'celebrating incapacity over capacity, unknowability over knowledge and failure over success'. Alluding to Samuel Beckett's famous motto, 'Ever Tried, Ever Failed. No Matter. Ty Again. Fail again. Fail Better', he notes that 'in a complex, fluid and indeterminate world, all we can do is "learn to fail better" … learn to fail through being continually self-reflective about the unintended and unexpected consequence of any policy-intervention' (55; cf. Lisle, 2018).

Because partnership collaboration involves a variety of epistemic communities and competing interests, failure and conflict are unavoidable, though not always nihilistically celebrated. The will and ability to handle coordination and communication problems is a constant concern for everyone involved in partnerships, especially for authorities assigned a special coordinating role.

Indeed, developing adaptive capacity means concentrating a great deal on stabilizing relations by bracketing off potentially destabilizing failures. Andersen (2008: 103, 141) notes that partnership agreements ‘concern a stabilization of expectations under expectation of changing expectations’, while also pointing out that partnerships ‘ensure a framework for productive disagreement and clashes between heterogeneous communications and expectations’. Andersen sees this as an element of uncertainty-absorption, but we could also see it as a design mechanism for making heterogeneity or conflict into a stabilizing force: conflict utilized as a form of cybernetic feedback. In this sense, conflict serves as an index and expression of faulty communication which compels participants to continue adaptively searching for satisficing solutions (Grove, 2018: 211, 213). We may infer from this that as much as institutions must adapt to externally changing conditions, so too must they adapt to internal problems of coordination and communication, and in either case it is a problem of design or framing.

It bears mentioning that an increasing number of studies show how multi-sectorial and multi-level security initiatives are full of tensions, ambivalences and ambiguities due to uncanny combinations of conflicting or adverse modes of thought and policy techniques (see e.g. Anderson, 2010, 2015; Brassett et al., 2013; Heath-Kelly, 2015; Rosenow, 2012). But as Donald Schön (1993: 138, 150) reminds us, when policy problems issue from conflicting frames, they cannot be fixed in the ordinary sense of problem solving – that of selecting optimal means for achieving a pre-determined purpose. As opposed to a problem that can be fixed technically, the problem of coordination and collaboration is better understood as a problem of defining the frames for problem setting, closely related to the issue of setting common goals (for the collaboration) within a common strategy or horizon (Coaffee et al., 2009: 3; cf. Brand and Jax, 2007).

In a theoretical discussion similar to ours, Oliver Kessler (2016: 349) raises the question of what failure *does* as a political concept, suggesting that failure points to a specific mode of problematization in policy: ‘through the ascription of “failure” to some event, an “object of though” is shaped and subjected to a specific “regulatory rationality”’ (cf. Foucault 1988). Drawing on

Kessler's typology, we would argue that the problem of coordination and communication is a composite problem comprising, for one, the 'failure to produce an inter-subjective understanding that allows actors to "go on"' and, secondly, 'failure as "mode or organization" that highlights its discursive grammar, or rules of formation' (Kessler, 2016: 348). As for inter-subjective understanding, failure is usually the result of ordinary misunderstandings, which could be resolved by switching communication to a metalevel where actors problematize the meaning systems and communicative structures that make communication possible. This is a kind of problematization that involves struggles over the shaping of communicative structures necessary for partnerships to work – to go on with the collaboration (354, 357).

At the same time, partnerships must attend to the task of setting the boundaries of possibility that enable them to ascribe meaning to a situation. Recalling the argument on the horizon of possibility being indexical indication of overall goals, visions etc., we could conceive of partnerships as emergent orders that define their own communicative frames (Andersen, 2009: 99, 139). We have also pointed out that it is the abstraction of problems from their concrete context that enables policy makers to re-frame problems and give new meaning to experiences of complexity. In this respect, partnerships function as 'machines of possibility' (Andersen, 2009: 99); at stake is the creation of a common understanding that makes collective practices with a widely shared sense of legitimacy possible. Because addressing the latter kind of problem involves fundamental struggles over knowledge and 'world making', failure at this level is particularly risky, as it risks destabilizing the whole enterprise (Kessler, 2016: 355–356; cf. Grove, 2018: 239).

On both levels, however, the problem of coordination and communication is construed as an object of thought according to a 'classical' linear-causal understanding: faulty communication articulated as caused by errors in action or knowledge. In this framing, failure is in principle preventable and correctable, or at least resolvable, through improvement of skills and knowledge. John Roberts (2011: 190) clarifies the relationship between errors and failures in this classical meaning: while errors 'are identifiable with the missteps, omissions, oversights and mistakes

involved in the execution of a particular activity, or pursuit of a set of ideals or programme, failures imply the dissolution, collapse, breakdown of a given programme, project or systematic endeavour'. To further amplify, he refers to Henri Lefebvre's (1995) distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' failures: whereas weak failures result from indecision, indifference or incuriousness, strong failures involve considerable risk. However, strong failures are not merely potentially destabilizing, but also productive in that they create possibilities. Suggesting that failure and possibility are twinned, Lefebvre (1995: 205) contends that 'every possibility contains risks, otherwise it would no longer be a possibility. What is distinguishable as possibility-producing or productive failure, Roberts (2011: 191) elaborates, 'is that which has prepared the ground well for failure, and is, therefore, able to sustain the renewal of praxis after such a failure has been assessed and assimilated'. As we see it, these are the notions of preparedness and failure that constitute the problem of coordination and communication in partnership governance: preparedness entails harnessing risky failure in order to make it productive, to create new possibilities for action.

Failure and possibility revisited

This is not all there is to the concept of possibility in Lefebvre's political philosophy, though. For Lefebvre, the possible does not simply designate a determinate 'not yet, but points to an indeterminate horizonless horizon: the possible understood as 'the outcome of what cannot as yet be named in the present, or shaped by the present' (Roberts, 2011: 192). Lefebvre (2003) conceives of the possible as an illuminating virtuality that provides us with a u-topic horizon of imagination. Even as the imagined possible is always incomplete or indefinite – like a perennial becoming – it 'is part of the real and gives it a sense of direction, an orientation, a clear path to the horizon' (45). And by virtue of being at the very heart of the real, the u-topic has nothing in common with an abstract imaginary, an abstract vision (and the projection of this abstract back onto lived experience) (38).[3]

[3] As opposed to the abstract space of vision, u-topia denotes a non-place, a possible-impossible, but one that gives meaning to the possible, to action; it is at the very heart of the real but has no place and searches for it (Lefebvre, 2003: 38, 172, 179, 182–83).

Some scholars have developed similar ideas of the indeterminate and yet real possible in relation to resilience thinking, thereby dissolving the 'classical' possibility–reality dualism (in which reality is the negation of possibility) (Grove and Pugh, 2015: 2; cf. Grove and Chandler, 2016: 4; Grove, 2018). In our view, the ontologization of failure that characterizes some critical typological approaches to indeterminacy could potentially foster greater sensitivity to forms of life that exceed present idioms (Lyotard, 1988), including greater attentiveness to clashes between heterogeneous communications and expectations (recalling Andersen's formulation) (Gressgård, 2010). In political terms, this means greater sensitivity to that which escapes signification within prevalent governmental frames, thus compelling political actors to put the formative rules of the political field under scrutiny and rethink the spatio-temporal boundaries of possibility – indeed, the very idea of the possible, in conjunction with failure. However, as part II will show, partnership qua institutional arrangement does not seem to harbor such critical potential.

Part II: The strategy

Neighborhood Empowerment

To demonstrate how resilience mobilizes partnerships around the indeterminate problem of 'problem setting', we shall now draw attention to a prevention initiative carried out in one of Sweden's 'vulnerable areas': an urban renewal process called Neighborhood Empowerment (NE). Since its inception in 2013, NE has developed into a cross-sectorial partnership program involving civil, private and public organizations, as well as residents. It involves some fifty stakeholders and is by far the biggest and among the most acclaimed prevention initiatives in the city. The assumptions are that area-specific social mobilization is essential for affecting change and that systematic partnership collaboration create new possibilities for intervention, under the slogan 'Together we are

stronger!' (*Vi är starkare tillsammans!*).[4] The activities are organized around a shared vision (*målbild*) for the urban area: a 'welcoming, safe and secure neighborhood in which everyone's dreams can come true and where the inhabitants take collective responsibility for making it happen' (Field notes 05/12/2014; Info material 2014, 2015, 2016). The principle idea is that positive change requires coordinated efforts and shared responsibility, encapsulated by the slogan and the following statement from one of the participants: 'together we are more effective in using common resources, and we can achieve greater good' (Field notes 05/12/2014). Cognate statements include '[we must] pull in the same direction' and '[we must] understand how different components fit together, what the big picture is and where we are heading' (Field notes 05/12/2014; Info material 2014, 2015, 2016). The inspiration comes from a model that emphasizes collective impact, as Lo, one of the architects behind the initiative, explains:

> We are inspired by a model called 'collective impact', which entails widening the scope of intervention through collaboration. …. We must […] build alliances of different competences and backgrounds and work against simplistic views on things. If the issue is safety, for instance, it is not only a matter for the police but [concerns] how to include the civil sector and prevent problems. So, we want to set long-term goals, establish mutual understanding. And it is precisely here [on these points] one has failed quite seriously [in the past] (Interview with Lo, process developer and coordinator of 'Safety & security').

To counteract previous failures and to signal that NE is a bottom-up, collaborative and unfolding experiment, the authorities and the organizations involved have opted for the term 'process' (as opposed to 'project') (Field notes 05/12/2014). Lo comments on its *raison d'être*:

[4] The Neighborhood Empowerment initiative is subdivided into the following thematic fields: Culture; Education, Leaning & Recreational activities; Urban construction & Infrastructure; Labor market & Businesses; Safety & Security; and Meeting places & Social mobilization.

> The reason for initiating the partnership collaboration is the fact that everything [up until now] is organized in silos. If a youth is having problems at school, then the school [alone] must deal with it. But maybe it [the problem] is related to mental health issues among parents, or poverty, or housing conditions. There are so many problems in society, and they are too complex to be addressed through silos (Interview with Lo).

Assenting to the critical view of professional silos – in the quote brought into view as a product of a long-established governmentality – another participant stresses the importance of 'backbone support' across sectorial boundaries: 'strategic, communicative and administrative support for the process so that everybody can work towards a common goal' (Field notes 26/11/2015).

Learning from, experimenting with, and adapting to reality

Against this backdrop, we shall primarily – but not exclusively – focus on a participant whose strategic role in NE illustrates the core of our conception of the 'shift'. He is the initiative's 'scientific adviser' and runs a parallel research project that analyzes the process as it evolves. This double role as participant and observer credits him with the combined status of stakeholder and strategist, thus enabling him to lend authority to specific actions and give legitimacy to the whole process when needed. In his presentations of the research project to other stakeholders and the wider public, which is a vital part of the partnership strategy, he performatively invokes the 'shift' by stressing that unlike ordinary problems, there are no easy solutions to complex security problems in vulnerable areas: 'to solve complex or wicked problems, we must initiate interaction between different organizations … breach sectorial boundaries to overcome conflicts and competition … learn from reality' (Field notes 26/11/2015, 27/11/2018).

This passage raises several interrelated issues. For one, it is evident that the aim is to legitimate specific representations of reality (Kornberger and Clegg, 2011: 138–139), even as the

advocated shift in approach to prevention is articulated as *learning from reality*. In resilience thinking, the idea of learning from reality means opening up to the world, becoming aware of relational attachment, reflexively dissolving fixed judgements, and coping with failure as part of this process (Chandler, 2014: 52, 158). Mutual learning is supposed to make both residents and organizations more reflexive and responsive (Interviews with Ellis, emergency services representative, and Lo; Field notes 26/11/2015, 09/02/2018; Info material 2016, 2017). Practically, this means experimenting with new techniques of intervention and, not the least, learning from failure. An experimental approach allows practitioners to try out novel (provisional) solutions in a living urban lab, which is considered particularly valuable for vulnerable areas where problems are more 'wicked' than elsewhere, as worded by the adviser. In design studies, the term 'wicked problems' denotes problems that cannot be fully determined; any solution will inevitably generate new and unforeseen problems (Rittel cited in Grove 2018: 11). Nevertheless, when the adviser posits 'wicked problems' as an antidote to 'simple problems', he lends himself to a readily available development narrative where the term complexity is shorthand for socio-historical progress, as if society tends over time to more advanced forms: earlier forms are perceived as simpler versions of later, more complex ones, and placement in time is conflated with judgment of worth (according to principles of comparative value) (Morson, 1994: 244, 246). In this regard, the semantics of the shift invokes a 'restricted' notion of complexity (Morin, 2007), contrary to the 'general' complexity (of post-classical resilience thinking) it purports to promote (see Chandler, 2014). But the 'shift' not only situates complexity (or resilience) thinking in a mode of development from 'former-simple' to 'future complex', it also abstracts the focal point from concrete problems to the future as a site of renewal – a possible, improved future (Gressgård, 2015).

If we look at the next point concerning *breaching sectorial boundaries*, it becomes clear that mono-sectorial 'silo mentality' and established legal restrictions comprise barriers that the 'shift' promises to overcome. In vulnerable areas, the argument goes, it is particularly important to overcome so-called rigidity traps to gain information about potential threats at an early stage (Info

material 2015, 2017; Field notes 5/12/2014, 26/11/2015, 12/06/2017; Interviews with Lo and Jesper, Police representative; cf. Gressgård, 2016, 2019). Normally, the guards of sectorial boundaries would stand in their way, but ‘here’, as one area developer puts it, ‘we have free hands’ (Field notes 21/03/2016), which suggests that established rules and procedures must give way to more flexible, less strict regulations lest the future will be ever more insecure. Gesturing towards a necessary shift in mindset, the overall message is that time has come to replace narrow-minded welfare state bureaucrats (who are out of joint with the complex world) with practitioners who are willing to think outside the box and break new ground.

The third point we want to highlight is that ‘silo mentality’ and rigidity traps are associated with *conflicts and competition*, which directly concerns the problem of coordination and communication. Clearly, the adviser exhibits a designerly desire to break down boundaries and (provisionally) solve conflicts that impede collaboration and communication. The aim is to stabilize a common ground by folding conflicting or competing views into the (big) picture of the future (see Kornberger and Clegg, 2011: 138), and in doing so the adviser semantically effects the above-mentioned past/future contrast, a strategic line of separation, if only through the semantics’s vectoral orientation. That brings us to how the semantics performance of the shift is being visualized.

Resilient swarm behavior – flocking

To illustrate the ‘shift’, the NE adviser points to swarm behavior amongst birds, so-called flocking. When under attack by a predator, the flock spontaneously reconfigures itself and adapts to the new situation while retaining its essential structure and forward propulsion; that is, the birds remain synchronized so that the flock stays coherent in its movement, without losing momentum. This remarkable adaptive capacity makes bird swarms particularly resilient to disruption. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that NE has adopted the image of flocking as its logo (see the Figure below for an illustrating picture of flocking).

[fig1]

Fig. Swarm behaviour, 'Scania flock', Lund (Sweden) 2017. Photo: Hanna-Beata Christensson

Echoing Chandler's (2014: 171) observation that 'organic complexity [means] that social outcomes [are] emergent and could not be known, predicted, or controlled', the NE coordinators declare that 'the network [of partners] transforms itself organically'; 'there is an organic adaptation to danger and a movement of the whole towards a common goal, without a selected leadership, without [problem-solving] manuals and without full control or an entirely predictable outcome' (Field notes 26/11/2015, 21/03/2016). This view is supported by other participants who embrace NE's experimental approach (in contrast to previous projects), remarking that the NE initiative 'takes on a life of its own […] adapts to the needs on the ground'; 'We do not know how it will turn out, we are free to experiment, and we must continue [experimenting]'; 'When we encounter a problem, we adapt to it' (Field notes 21/03/2016). Taken together, these statements testify to the resilience view that 'it is possible to govern life by being attuned to how life spontaneously self-organizes to bring order' (Chandler, 2014: 23).

The broader communication strategy consists of numerous orchestrated (semi-)public presentations that promote the 'shift' by displaying aestheticized facts and figures that match the visionary images – way beyond reality testing.[5] In a certain sense, then, the semantics of the shift dissolves the modernist bifurcated ontology of possibility–reality, even as it amplifies the trust in facts. We would argue that the visual display of facts and figures *makes it seem like* the projected schemes derive from 'reality' and reflect the community's view on problems (Kornberger and Clegg, 2011). Performativity is key here, as Kornberger (2012: 93) makes clear:

[5] The visionary images, especially the logo, are disseminated through multiple communication channels, such as promotion booklets, newsletters, broadsheets and local media. In addition, there are organized festivities where residents socialize with the police and the emergency services, not to mention the use of social media where the police 'speak openly and honestly' about their interaction with residents (and to whom residents can respond) (Field notes 09/02/2018).

> [S]trategizing is a social activity that has to be performed to be effective … it is the process know-how of the strategist that generates trust and reassures the audience that the desired outcomes are achievable. The value of strategists lies in their ability to apply a process to problems with fuzzy boundaries, and order data so that the fog of war lifts and the big picture can be extracted from the ambiguities, serendipity and complexities of the present.

Transposed to our context, it is possible to argue that the NE strategists operate on the (functional) potential that inheres in any abstraction to synthesize and repurpose bounded forms of knowledge (while containing potentially destabilizing conflicts) so as to create certain possibilities for individual and collective existence (Grove, 2018: 191). Rather than problematizing how statements about the future shape the ways in which the future can be acted upon (Anderson, 2010: 782), partnerships address the problem of coordination and communication in a designerly mode, geared towards improvement of the future. Through the semantics of the shift, partnership strategy offers future visions that create a certain sense of order, direction and preparedness for participants and the wider public. The visionary images are, to borrow from Ben Anderson (2010: 785), 'affectively imbued representations that move and mobilize'. But their stabilizing function notwithstanding, the future visions do not have a predictive function, nor do they presume any ultimate foundations or transcendental guiding principles. Departing from the idea of bounded rationality, they express instead a desire to create new possibilities to fold in diverse forms of knowledge and interests – a designerly will to collaboratively and provisionally engage with the complex reality (Grove, 2018: 16, 17) and, concomitantly, install community resilience as satisficing solution to indeterminant future threats. Harking back to our initial proposition about resilience being readily absorbed by partnership strategy – and partnership mobilization coming across as community resilience – it is evident that resilience (as designerly style of thought) and partnership dovetail on the strategic synthetization and re/framing of problems.

Concluding remarks

We have suggested that partnership strategy, by virtue of being a technique for creating common reference points, attempts to bracket off potentially destabilizing failures or conflicts. By way of conclusion, we want to emphasize that this is a much more fundamental move than what is normally associated with depoliticization (Lyotard, 1988; Gressgård, 2010). Even as partnership-organized resilience transvalues conflict and critique (to enhance the capacity of adaptation), the form of critique resilience exercises reduces contingency to an altogether empirical issue, thereby interiorizing the outside (Chandler, 2014, 2016; Grove, 2016, 2018; Walker and Cooper, 2008). Put in slightly different terms: if radical topological approaches posit an emergent temporality that renders social formations and the future truly contingent, partnership-organized resilience restricts the scope of contingency to the instability of an object's identity (see Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 32, 109–110; Stäheli, 2011: 279) – hence making partial and contingent arrangements function in new ways without becoming something else (Grove, 2018: 221, 222). By reference to Lefebvre's conceptual scheme, we could draw the conclusion, as does Grove, that resilience approaches attempt to turn an indeterminate potential to become radically otherwise into a determinate set of possibilities (20, 171, 195); the possible that one creates (in the register of virtual potentiality) instantly translates into the possible that one realizes (in terms of imagined alternatives) (Deleuze, 1995; Zourabichvili, 2017). Only it remains virtually unrealizable.

To round off, we want to make the case that Swedish resilience proponents strategically enact the 'shift' in pursue of a fantasy, albeit in the confidence that concrete promises and incorporation of failure are ultimately impossible in a complex world (Chandler, 2016: 395). The guarantee that fantasy conjures serves the purpose of concealing the gap between the visionary pledge and the failure to achieve the goals or fulfill the elusive promises. Hence the need of a scapegoat, conveyed through the semantics of the shift. As Michael Gunder's (2015: 9) notes, the reverse side of the insertion of a fantasy is the positing of a negative scapegoat image to justify why the offered visions are failing to be achieved (which of course can be seen as failure only to the

extent that one buys into the idea of some future fullness or coherence). The invocation of a ‘silo mentality’ – associated with an outmoded welfare-state governmentality – works to sustain the phantasmatic imaginary, because the ideological potential is then still in the picture (Gunder, 2015: 9). But utterly phantasmatic though they are, the visions do not assume a true belief in future improvement through ‘classical’ social engineering. Nor do they represent a univocal celebration of failure. Rather than adhering to a modernist trust in the future and social order on the one hand, or an entirely ‘nihilistic’ view on failure on the other, the strategists exhibit a belief that is apparently shot through with cynicism.

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