

Policy Brief 3

Conditions for community resilience

Jan Fransen, Daniela Ochoa Peralta

Vital Cities & Citizens: Erasmus University Rotterdam May 2020

Community resilience as a paradigm shift

Rotterdam has a long and rich experience with urban resilience because of the reconstruction after the Second World War and the flooding in 1953. This has led to a very successful planning approach based on infrastructural renewal. However, it is not possible to build one's way out of Covid-19 or climate change: society itself must become more resilient. Esteban (2020), a PhD student at ESSB/IHS, notices a gradual paradigm shift from top-down infrastructural solutions to community resilience in Rotterdam's response to climate change. The policy brief builds on this paradigm shift.

Table 1: Paradigm shifts in Rotterdam

Phase	Time period	Crises	Features
Top-down, infrastructure-controlled	1945-1980	1940 Bombardment 1953 Flooding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern infrastructure • Robust urban planning • Delta work
Participation	1960-currently	2008 Financial crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and environmental movements lobbying for policy change. • Negotiations with NGOs and resident groups
Community resilience	2010 – currently	Climate change 2020 Covid-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear solutions • Networking between the government, residents and businesses • Local initiatives • Local innovation/experiments • Flexibility and customization

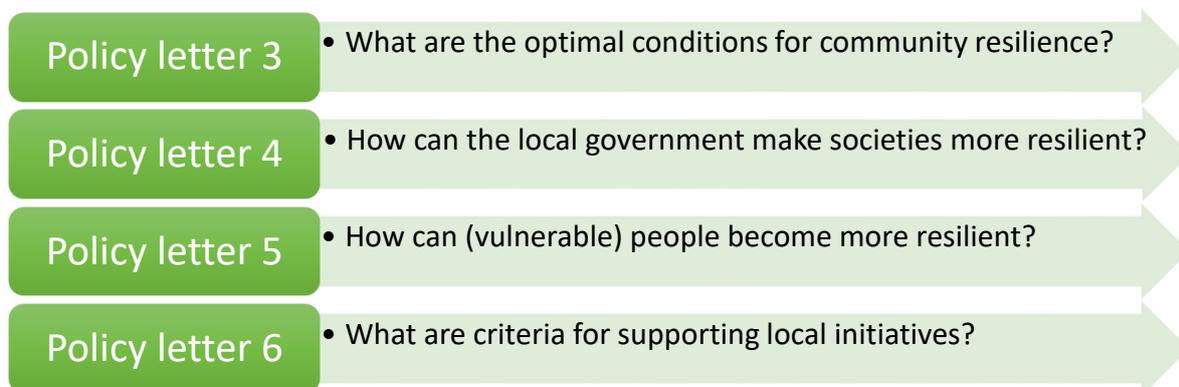
Source: Adapted from Esteban, 2020.

What is community resilience?

A resilient society enables urban residents and businesses to cope with a crisis (Baxter, 2019). This requires a local contribution, social investment, and resources while miscommunication, mistrust, conflict, discrimination, and trauma are lurking (Patel et al., 2017). It consists of three levels: initiatives of resident groups and companies (bonding), cooperation between resident groups/companies (bridging), and cooperation between local authorities and resident groups/companies (linking; Granovetter, 1981). Community

resilience is under a lot of pressure due to diversification, flexibilization of the labour market, and secularization, among other factors (Provincie Noord Brabant, 2018).

We ask four policy questions in four policy briefs related to community resilience. This policy brief zooms in on the conditions of community resilience.



Conditions for community resilience

Table 2. Conditions for a community resilience

Condition	Sub-condition
Local knowledge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Up-to-date knowledge of the crisis (Covid-19) 2. Training: capacity-building for local organizations 3. Self-reliance: ability to transform (unique) local knowledge into initiatives
Local networks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence of social networks and organizations inside and outside the neighbourhood 2. Cohesion within the district
Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Effective communication: everyone understands the message in terms of language and culture 2. Diverse communication networks: various groups are reached through different channels and agencies 3. Crises communication: the channels continue to operate during a crisis
Health services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health services continue during the crisis 2. Applied care for the most vulnerable at the neighbourhood level
Local governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visibility for local initiatives 2. Political recognition and support 3. Keeping infrastructure and services working at the district level 4. Participation in making and implementing plans to become more resilient 5. Connecting local problems, initiatives, and cultures
Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enough resources to cope during the crisis and implement plans 2. Fair and transparent distribution of resources 3. Use of local resources (e.g. vacant buildings) 4. Local capacity to utilize resources

Social investment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fair distribution of social investment 2. Economic investment and support to pull the local economy out of a downfall rapidly
Resistance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase the resilience of individuals and families (policy letter 4) 2. Increasing the resilience of local organizations 3. Crisis roadmaps for local organizations and social businesses 4. Crisis (support) services for local organizations/social enterprises
Mental issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uncertainty can lead to depression and feelings of hopelessness. It is important to provide sources of hope. 2. Promote positivism and cooperation; give people a role 3. Psychological support

Source: McCrea, Walton and Leonard, 2014; Patel, et al., 2017; Baxter, 2019.

Different levels of community resilience

The Province of Noord Brabant (2018) has developed a community resilience monitor, in which they measure personal, social, and environmental resources. They find major differences in resilience between and within urban communities, depending on the resilience of the people, the community, and environmental factors. Large cities in Brabant are on average more resilient.

Within Rotterdam, three levels of community resilience can be observed:

- *High/innovative level:* Districts/groups demonstrating innovative dynamic resilience and social initiatives. These initiatives can be supported, upscaled, and/or replicated. Such initiatives can also strengthen organizational resilience.
- *Middle level:* Groups with lower and varying resilience. Here, providing help is important.
- *Vulnerable groups:* Most vulnerable groups are not self-reliant. They often lack the capacity, time, and/or link with support groups and local initiatives (Patel, et al., 2017). Vulnerable people often require tailored support.

While the above groups overlap a partial overlap, they require different governance mechanisms. This is discussed in the next policy brief.

Reaching the most vulnerable

The most vulnerable require tailored support during a crisis. They often combine of vulnerabilities such as old age, illness, disability, poverty, addiction and long-term unemployment, while suffering from discrimination and exclusion. This frequently leads to a low-self-esteem, which reinforces their exclusion. This toxic combination of factors easily creates isolation, as they are unlikely to ask for help or organize themselves. It is crucial to recognize psychological problems such as low self-esteem and to address them where and when appropriate (see policy letter 5). Frequently, vulnerable people cannot find their way around the complexities of the bureaucracy, and a 'one-stop-shop'/ buddy and cooperation between the different support services is essential. This works best at a neighbourhood and street level, where support can most easily be tailored.

Inspiration: the role of digital platforms

Digital platforms describe inspiring community resilience initiatives and allow for an open exchange of information. The 'Open Government Partnership' platform presents approximately 300 initiatives. Most initiatives, however, are isolated initiatives of residents or local businesses or are instigated by the local government. The bridge between the government and local initiatives seems difficult to accomplish, despite examples of neighbourhood approaches and participatory budgeting where municipalities provide space and support for neighbourhood initiatives (see policy brief 4). Below is one of the initiatives.

Burlington, USA: Local organizations that usually provide stuffed toys, clothing or even theatre performances started making masks during the outbreak of the virus. This was supported by the local government from the beginning by bringing companies into contact with customers (e.g. nursing homes) and making purchases themselves providing them to the police for use and the creation of a 'Resource and Recovery Centre'. By the 29th of April, there were over 12,000 masks delivered to more than 78 organizations. Thus short-term, local knowledge and networks are linked to the local government networks and social investments.

Literature

Baxter, H. 2019. Creating the Conditions for Community Resilience: Aberdeen, Scotland—An Example of the Role of Community Planning Groups. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science* 10, pp. 244–260.

Esteban, A. (2020), Chapter 6 PhD thesis: How 'sterker door de strijd' is Rotterdam: minding the gap to collective resilience building, ESSB/IHS, draft chapter to be included in the full PhD thesis end of 2020

Gemeente Boord-Brabant, Sociale veerkracht Monitor 2018, https://hetpon.nl/content/uploads/2017/09/PON_Telos-Monitor-Sociale-Veerkracht-2018.pdf.

Granovetter, M. (1981). The strength of weak ties: a network theory revisited. Paper presented at the Conference on Contributions of Network Analysis to Structural Sociology, 4 April 1981, Albany, New York, USA.

McCrea, R., Walton, A. and Leonard, R. 2014. A conceptual framework for investigating community wellbeing and resilience. *Rural Society*, 23 (3), pp. 270-282.

Patel SS, Rogers MB, Amlôt R, Rubin GJ. 2017. What Do We Mean by 'Community Resilience'? A Systematic Literature Review of How It Is Defined in the Literature. *PLOS Currents Disasters*. Feb 1. Edition 1.

The City of Burlington. 2020. BTV Community Mask Initiative. Available at: <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/covid-19/masks>.