

THE SOCIAL RESILIENCE IN NEOLIBERAL ERA AS OBJECT OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT. This paper is a brief critical evaluation of the concept of social resilience, specific to the neoliberal era, as a way of natural manifestation and as an applied practical modality. Between the concrete conditions of social development and the methodological specific of sociological research, it is born a connecting bridge, on which the author launches it as a challenge. Through a modest contribution to the development of social resilience concept, it is aimed, however, to stimulate the academic and research environment from Romania in the deepening and continuation of studies in the field, which in the West they are quite advanced. The social resilience, specific to the transition period, offers to the researchers numerous particular aspects, what they are wanted exploited. The validation of the results of the scientific research offers the practical possibility of implementing governmental programs to alleviate some negative state of things and to develop new opportunities specific to the applied resilience. All these results can be constituted in a useful database to monitoring process of social vulnerabilities and of the risk situations, in the purpose of preventing trauma and development of some elements of positive resilience.

KEY WORDS: social resilience, neoliberal era, sociological research, resistance, adaptability.

Introduction

The importance of the theme is given mainly by the fact that the Romanian society, which is in an unjustifiably prolonged transitional stage, being in a continuous change, requires a permanent state of adaptability which fully justify the current concerns in the field of resilience social. The social groups, especially the disadvantaged ones, of unemployed or looking for a job, who bear the hardest the shock of the structural changes of the system, are subject to the necessity of the application of measures regarding the assisted resilience. The interpretation of social action related to resilience is made according of personality traits of the individual components of social groups considered target groups, (Finn & Rock, 1997) of the premises and the result of this process, avoiding simplistic interpretations like considering the resilience as a randomly process. (Egeland et al. 1993); (Rutter, 2008). The main objective of sociological research in this area should be the validation of a program through which the social groups which face the special social problems it can develop resilient competencies and to adapt to some new conditions of existence. A model to follow, in this respect, it can constitute SELF-R

Program(Social Emotional Learning for Developing Resilience) already successfully validated and implemented.

For these reasons, the development of the social resilience concept must be more than a necessity, it is a major imperative of our days. The increasingly numerous concerns regarding the clarification of the concept of the social resilience, in terms of imposing a new paradigm, converge, obviously, to recognition at the level of modern neoliberal contractual societies of a critical social situation that require the intervention of specialized state institutions in organizing a necessary framework under the aspect of resistance and assisted social adaptation. The neoliberalism is thus inseparable related from a new change of paradigm of public policy, in which the evaluation systems hold a central role under the aspect of social adaptability and the social resilience implicitly. As a social desiderate, the paradigmatic approach, unilateral-explanatory, highlights a tendency for reductionist analysis that outshine a multitude of aspects that are overlooked and that are fundamental in the study of evolution and role of the state in the society. Thus, solutions are sought and sources of social adjustment are explored in the societies and social groups to prevent conflicts and maintain the *status-quo*, especially in underdeveloped countries and emerging.

The Political Framework for Analysis of the Concept of Social Resilience

The social resilience represents the ability of a group or the entire society to deal with the internal and external challenges and tensions generated by the political, social, economic and environmental changes. Revelatory in this sense are the appreciations of George Akerlof, Nobel Laureate in Economics, in 2001: "The neoliberalism teaches us how to fight for a successful society in a new world." Beyond the known advantages, the neoliberal era has registered obvious discrepancies between the welfare levels of different categories and social classes, fact which is due to a new distribution of livelihoods and incomes. In this way, the hierarchical differences on the social scale were unjustifiably emphasized determining a real rupture of the social solidarity. The welfare average of the lower classes collapsed in the advantage of a minority class which has registered massive material benefits over short time. This fact has also generated a transfer of power and wealth from the state property to private property. The phenomena, political and economic, have generated important social unbalances and entrained important mass of individuals as a result of massive dismissals, to the fringes of society, much alarmingly increasing the number of unemployed. The migration phenomenon in the countries being in transition to a market economy is worrying one. The transition of the communist states to capitalism, through revolution, a fact considered outdated by some authors in terms of evolution and social development, has been analyzed as a transition to the same market economy. The contemporary neoliberalism is manifested by a trilogy of policies developed under the name of liberalization, privatization and monetary stabilization.

The liberalization refers to the market and companies release out of the strict and centralized control of the state, including the elimination of customs barriers in the movement of goods, capital and persons beyond the national territories.

The privatization refers to the transformation of state enterprises into private companies by transferring of the state property and national wealth into private property.

The stabilization seeks the achievement of monetary policy by stimulating the inflation and deflation financial mechanisms, changing of money and, in time, the replacement of national currencies, as symbols of sovereignty and independence with other types of currencies, the monetary policy not anymore representing an attribute of the national banks.

The Liberal Theory of *Robert Nozick* about the minimal state (night watchman) gives us a negative image of society in general and a positive liberty, especially, the latter being "the individual's ability to be his own master" or "the power to act in certain ways according to individual will." The social adaptation to neoliberalism imposes consistently, applying the concept of *social resilience*. Relying on the concept of social resilience, *Peter Hall* and *Michele Lamont* explain how the individuals are able to adapt to the changes in neoliberal era. Far from being a homogeneous social development program, the neoliberal doctrine appears, rather, as an ideological form of reinterpretation and social resistance. Analyzing the concept of resilience in its social aspect, *Peter Hall* and *Michèle Lamont* propose its use as interpretation of the various ways in which the social actors, individuals or groups, can develop a durable resistance to a number of changes taking place in the world and are related or associated with neo-liberal era. An important role is given by authors to the contribution of communities and specialized state institutions in promoting and implementing the concept of assisted resilience. (Hall&Lamont,2013: 396) The results of neoliberal policies, as they are evoked by *J. Jenson* and *R. Levi*, led, indeed, to a contraction of the spending and public income distribution in favor of new beneficiaries and enlarging excessively the social sphere in which the losers are included. Aspects concerning the financial insecurity, restrictions on the labor force employment policies, of the possibility of a house acquisition, of the living standards, in general, have downgraded the neoliberalism eroding at the foundation of benefits initially recorded. Regional, and not only, there was registered a growing of social individualized inequality, discrepancies that favored the presence of aspects regarding the social discrimination. The social inequalities give rise to some traumatic situations, hence the need for an adapting to the new adverse conditions and the development of new features regarding the social resilience. In such a manner, the globalist tendencies can not only internationalize the social inequality among social groups, nations and regions of the world. The differences in social status and those in living standards correlatively give a different level of adaptability and resilience social, phenomena that can be constituted in the object of the sociological research. The social adaptation differences, even between countries, have been observed the best as part of studies of comparative research on public health. (Keating, Siddiqi & Nguyen, 2013). The benefits, but especially the risks at the social level, caused by the transformations of neoliberal policies have brought in the lives of individuals, differentiated, depending on their status and role, important modifications of adaptation and resistance to essential changes occurred in social life. The resilience of some social groups develops not only in terms of their adaptation to the new social conditions created and political stimulated, but especially under the aspect of resistance and even immunity to the neoliberal ideological system and its social and economic policies. The sociological research not politically subservient can evolve and operate as an explanatory and normative dimension of evaluation and not only as a simple descriptive tool. The theoretical study, but especially the empirical research devoted to sociology, helps us to scientifically diagnose the level of social resilience depending on the target groups concerned and offers solutions to mobilize us to changes. Thus created

opportunities and abilities, for the benefit of individual and collective actors, constitute a valuable thesaurus, the one of the social capital that have to be capitalized.

The Social Resilience - Concept and Object of Sociological Research

The first great precursor of the empirical sociological investigation, *Aristotle* (383-322 BC), wrote in the first book of the *Metaphysics*, that philosophy was born from astonishment. The same can be said about sociology. The starting point of a project and sociological experiment is that of defining the working hypotheses which are simultaneously provisional answers to questions about the researched theme and the question arises as a result of an uncertain finding which does not have relevance than following the validation of research results. According to guidelines the contesting sociology from the America of years 1950-1960, the sociology should be concerned primarily the relations and interdependencies of society components as well as the social classes, the fundamental forms of labor, the major socialization forces. The research involves using the quantitative and qualitative methods based on content analysis, and those that lend themselves the correlational and comparative study of explanatory variables established by the research project.

The resilience, a term which initially designated a physical characteristic of answer and resistance materials to pressures, is currently considered a multidisciplinary concept, with wide applicability, a process of interactions between different types of factors and actions. The concept has increased the scope and meanings to the human individual as a constituent of social groups and even the whole society. A *resilient community* or *society* may be that after some sudden changes, sometimes traumatizing, intervened from inside or outside of the reference system, finds its capacities and necessary means of returning to an optimal state of development and social balance. The social resilience implies, thus, a process of managing and revaluation of the existing competencies and untainted by the state of social shock, in view of a positive adaptability and restoration of initial balance. "The concept of resilience is used, equally, to define scientifically the process by which a person or group shows the capacity to develop, to evolve for good, to continue to protect itself in the future, in the presence of the destabilizing elements, of the difficult living conditions, of the severe traumatisms and/or repeated or to identify the complex mechanism that marks the resumption of a becoming, developments after the shock." (Predescu, 2014)

Following the four conditions, necessary and sufficient, for recognition and identification of a psychological process of resilience, stated by Professor Ovidiu Predescu, the resilience can be considered as a *social process*, object of study of sociology, which assumes:

- a) The identification of *atrauma* as a result of a *social shock* determined by sudden changes of regime or political system or related to a stage of transition from one power system to another;
- b) The establishment of some defense strategies, resistance or withdrawal from the front of major disruptive social factors;
- c) The existence of a social potential of development, really necessary, that must be preserved and protected;

d) The presence of a tendency of manifestation of power from outside the social framework of development and in accordance with general social needs and legitimate. (Popescu, & Băjenaru, 2009)

Thus, as any social manifestation, the resilience can be constituted *inobject* of sociological research that can trigger the approach of scientific research. In sociology, the study of the concept of resilience implies an approach of the concrete social reality that keeps the *natural resilience*. This starts from states and social manifestations that require endurance and adaptation. Secondly, one seeks applicative solutions through *assisted resilience*, a preventive type and post process action in risk situations, approach initiated and supported by specialists from the applicative field of social assistance. The assisted resilience has, thus, not only preventive character but also of recovery, at least of restoring of the social state at the previous situation, applicative genre from the field of law, of the principle “*restitutio in integrum*”. Any research project in this area assumes initially a theoretical and practical study on the risks and vulnerabilities and subsequent of procedures and concrete actions of assisted resilience. The scientific research project should use the most appropriate methods and research techniques in order to evaluate precisely the dynamics of resilience pursuing the layout and final practical benefit of an optimum specialized intervention.

The social aspect of resilience research must be conducted rigorously to validate the assumed strategies and the final results, and at the same time it should be oriented to practical utility under the aspect of assisted social resilience. The resilience modified the conception of social development, evolution and involution of society and how in which it is considered assistance and intervention to risk situations. Therefore, what exactly “amazes” in the case of social resilience?!

The initial concept from the field of physics does not avoid a characteristic attribute, namely *the shock*. The shock can be felt, also, at the level of social body following some “pressures” felt by the society in relation to power. The social resilience can be considered as being the recovery capacity of a social group after a shock. (Walker Holling, Carpenter & Kinzig, 2004). The social resilience is linked implicitly to the ability, capacity and skills formed within the group or social system to overcome the shock and effects produced by change and to reorganize itself such as to keep, eventually, the same functioning ownership, the same structure and identity, all reported in the external environment of the system, which has proved to be harmful or even hostile. (Walker et al., 2004).

At the same time, the adaptability or the robustness of the system can bear the change with keeping the integrity, and the change can be perceived as an opportunity from the perspective of an improvement of life and social activity. In this manner of interpretation, the social resilience can be considered as a capacity of the group or the society to adapt positively, fact that ensures further development. (Smit & Wandel, 2006)

The social group, such as the individual subjected to shock of change, depending on the response to disruptive social stimuli and reaction of response, can be classified according to the adaptability that can be predictive, simultaneous, recurrent, passive or reactive. (Smit, Burton, Klein, & Wandel, 1999).

The development of the abilities of positive adaption and their transmission to future generations, as dowry the community, favors most of the time the development of resilience in response to disruptive social stimuli. (Martin-Breen & Anderies, 2011).

In a society there is always a significant difference between groups and the social classes in terms of resilience. Some groups know an adaptability more significant than others. The first can successfully overcome the adverse situations arising and the shocks due to change. On these we can speak of a positive deviance. In this case the positive deviance analysis after which the conclusions can be drawn starts from normative approach. (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004).

The resilience is given by a type of competence that highlights the opportunities of the social environment correlated with individual factors of adaptability in the face of a situation perceived as destabilizing, for restoring the equilibrium. (Tusaie & Dyer, 2004)

The scientific research of resilience from the sociological perspective can be structured on four stages:

➤ The first stage of the researches must necessarily follow the conceptualization of the term, the establishment of research tools, methods and techniques used. (Cicchetti & Garnezy, 1993; Rutter, 1987);

➤ The second stage of the research can focus on analyzing the process by which a social group becomes resilient. (Rutter, 1990);(Rutter, 1993).

➤ The third stage of the research may reveal the interventions, the sources and the factors that develops the resilience, measuring in what proportion support it;

➤ The fourth part of the research project should include the centralization of data, the validation of the results of sociological research and the perspective of social applicability. The goal is one integrative of the social group subjected to the scientific research experiment.

The levels of definition of the resilience need to be between the resilience as process and resilience as result. In a first phase it aims at the competence or ability to obtain a positive result. In the case of the resilience as a result, it is envisaged the presence of positive sums obtained on the line adaptability in a social environment or context characterized by risk factors.

From another point of view (Masten, 2001), the resilience is defined as a mechanism that helps the individual component of the social group, and implicitly the group, in relation to the society and the legitimate power, to achieve good and steady state, regardless of whether or not faced with traumatic situations of the social shock type. Thus, according to these studies and considerations, the resilience it should be addressed both in connection with events perceived as trauma, and in the absence thereof. As a result, the social resilience is defined as being the beneficial result obtained after successfully handling of the risk factors (Smith, 2006) or, in other words, the resilience is rated as a favorable result following the ability to cope with difficulties. (Masten, 2001).

Although he does not propose to define the term "social resilience", Professor Serban Ionescu, in the "Treaty of Assisted Resilience", analyzes the social aspects regarding unemployment in correlation with the resilience and influence of some social groups, such as family, on the personal resilience of individuals. Despite the absence of a single definition of the resilience, universally accepted, the author appreciates, there is actually an agreement on two essential points:

a) The resilience characterizes a person who lived or lives an event with traumatizing character or chronic adversity and which shows a good adaptability (which has different meanings, depending on the age and socio-cultural context in which he lives);

b) The resilience is the result of an interactive process between the person, the family and their environment. (Ionescu, 2013).

The social investigation is the most appropriate method of investigation within the empirical research methodology which can provide precise data about the adaptability and resilience of a social group. *The questionnaire*, also *the interview* may be used with good results. The answers to the established questions, starting right from the items used in the questionnaire regarding the aspect of resilience, can be introduced in various scale systems such as: The Resilience Scale for Small Age Categories (Sun & Stewart, 2007) and The Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993).

The exercise of state power and domination, for instance, can be constituted in variables of the empirical study, correlative with the variable called resilience. The introduction into the study of variable of resilience means, from the beginning, the recognition of a state of disequilibrium and even potential, conflicting one. It cannot be study the effect in the absence of some causes that generate it. The working hypotheses emitted leave, formulated from the real causes, observable, to be validated or disproved, following the centralization of investigation results. The way in which evolves this last variable offers the scientific researcher the possibility to conclude on how and dynamics of manifestation of power, of the direct social impact and of the individuals and social groups resistance to the stimuli of the active vectors of the state organism. The validation of the research results thus is constituted in a valuable instrument that not only presents us the pulse or social status, but at the same time providing action and recovery solutions to prevent social conflicts and ensuring the *status quo* of power organism. The paradigms not only differ in terms of the concepts used and depending on the values which are subordinated to. *The value*, defined by the American anthropologist *Clyde Kluckhohn* is an explicit or implicit conception about what is desirable, distinctive for individual or group, influencing the choice of modes, means and purposes of the action. Willing not willing, the paradigms include value judgments, reflect the values to which the researcher belongs to. As a general and objective working principle, the German sociologist *Max Weber* demanded in his work "*The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality in Sociology and Economics*" (Weber, 1949) as researchers of social life to dispense in their studies by their moral, ethical or political precepts. The only permissible and desirable values are the social ones, Weber claiming the concept introduced by him concerning "*ethics of responsibility*" in his lecture "*Politics a vocation and a profession*", which shall guide the entire activity of scientific research. Although several sociologists considered that research without values is a myth, *Peter Berger* considers the sociology as a "*discipline of detachment*," the sociologist is qualified to assess the empirical evidence, providing a picture of reality as it is, not as it should be. (Chelcea, 2001: 40-41)

The Community Resilience

In modernity, the life of a community is manifested in an organized and normative framework imposed by society, which is one of contractual type.

The community resilience is the characteristic given by the capacity of a community to adapt to harsh conditions, social or environmental, or after a traumatic shock or disaster, and to get used to the new conditions created continuing to exist, to activate and to develop despite all the vicissitudes through which it passes by adopting a new and different way of life. Such a community, which is manifested flexible, returning to its original state without major

consequences, it is a group of persons well-organized and trained to quickly adapt to change, while maintaining the cohesion necessary for proper functioning of the system of relations and mutual support. The Community, when it is based on solidarity, represents the resilient framework conducive the overcoming of all the adverse and even hostile conditions imposed from outside by other groups, classes, communities or the society itself. The natural disasters, the economic crisis impact, the social crisis are, also, states of traumatic shock which could be overcome by a solidary and well-knit community. However, the modern man, who lives in a community, is dependent on relational social relationships which ensure him the supply or providing of energy, food, goods and services, a situation that forces him to be dependent on the social framework created.

The beginnings of research on the social implications that justifies the attention given resilience are opened by three major founding contributions: the longitudinal study of Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith, the researches on the different populations being in situations of risk, undertaken by Michael Rutter, and the project "Competence" coordinated by Norman Garmezy.

The social measures have been implemented for a long time in the West, after having performed sociological investigations aiming the social groups and communities, which have prepared new ways of intervention in the field of assisted resilience. Authors such as O'Dougherty Wright and Masten (2005), did not hesitate to specify that among the causes traumatizing that impose assisted resilience measures: poverty, lack of fixed abode, political or social violence, situations regarded as generators of a chronic psychosocial adversity. Following such a scientific analysis, we conclude that the traumatic states of shock are not at all coincidental and have verified social causes. Boris Cyrulnick reflects the resilience in terms related to aptitudes, attitudes and protection, a potential required to create and develop certain skills that transform the mental suffering of a human being. Alongside the moral and physical resistance to trauma, this obviously insists on the social adaptive capacity that may be one individual or collective of the social groups, which may be affected by harsh conditions of existence and coexistence.

Conclusion

The apolitical sociological research can evolve and function as an explanatory and normative dimension of evaluation, judgment and change and not just as a simple descriptive tool. The theoretical study and especially the empirical research consecrate to the sociology major priorities help us scientifically diagnose the level of social resilience depending on the target groups. Also, it provides us solutions to mobilize in front of the changes. Thus created opportunities and skills, for the benefit of individual and collective actors, are constituted in a valuable treasure that belongs to social capital and which should be reevaluated. The social resilience can become in time part or dowry of cultural inheritance, it can just become a cultural one, moving from the identification of repeated dysfunctions by developing of some perennial abilities, at finding some new defense capacities and resources necessary to preserve the entity and collective tradition.

According to Cyrulnick, the suffering is not inevitable, but it can become a "*wonderful misfortune*".

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