

Creating 'resilience imaginaries' for city-regional planning

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ABSTRACT

Resilience narratives have gathered increased attention in city-regional planning over the last two decades, emphasizing holistic foresight, long-term strategic visioning, cross-sectoral integration and collaborative modes of planning. Combining such resilience narratives with the established idea of socio-spatial imaginaries, we introduce the novel concept of 'resilience imaginaries' and explore its application in the city-region of Thessaloniki, Greece. This paper illustrates that resilience imaginaries can be viewed as dynamic and politically contested visions for long-term city-regional development, collectively structured by civic stakeholders, institutionally expressed through city-regional governance transformations and materially manifested through city-regional planning interventions.

KEYWORDS

collective visioning; Thessaloniki; city-regional planning; resilience; social construction; socio-spatial imaginaries

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INTRODUCTION

City-regional planning is fundamentally about anticipating and controlling the future by preparing plans that bring the future closer to the present and provide stability for citizens and the market (Granqvist et al., 2021). With traditional regional planning having, for some, surpassed its maturity phase (Purkarthofer et al., 2021) and increasingly becoming more obsolete – with some scholars even declaring it 'dead' (Harrison et al., 2021) – rising levels of risk and vulnerability for socio-economic systems have stimulated the advent of the concept of resilience and its developmental directions often indicated as resilience narratives (Borie et al., 2019; Camponeschi, 2021; Coaffee & Lee, 2016). Such narratives of resilience have come to represent a future-looking schema that challenges conventional ways in which both urban and regional planners conceptualize the world and reconcile current circumstances with past investments in search of innovative governance structures and new spatial imaginaries (Coaffee, 2019). From this perspective, planning for resilience entails a move beyond traditional planning styles and the embracing of uncertainty through adaptive and flexible methods. This further echoes a general shift of emphasis

within planning and foresight studies towards addressing issues like socio-spatial inequalities (Ziervogel et al., 2017), informality (Angelovski et al., 2016) and multi-cultural integration (Gunder et al., 2018).


More specifically, emerging ideas underpinning narratives of resilience fundamentally problematize conventional approaches and tools used for future predication, encouraging city-regional planners to devise a range of alternative future visions and advance more interpretivist methods that engage a wider array of stakeholders in foresight exercises (Davoudi, 2018). As a result, resilience-thinking in city-regional planning has often been conceptualized as a perpetual and continuously-evolving process of visioning and adapting to emerging challenges through the development of suitable governance mechanisms (Beilin & Wilkinson, 2015; Healey, 1998; Moser et al., 2019). Such mechanisms are highly focused on the process of institutional change and seek to catalyse increasingly flexible and agile governance arrangements, which can facilitate co-productive approaches to city management and rely on networks of people and organizations at multiple spatial levels (Galuszka, 2019).

Viewed from the perspective of governance change and transformation, such processual understandings of


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resilience have become prominent in urban and regional planning theory, specifically in efforts to understand how complex socio-economic changes will play out in the future (Brunetta & Caldarice, 2019; Christopherson et al., 2010; Pike et al., 2010). Related work has also focused on the creation of new socio-spatial imaginaries by emphasizing the significance of city-regional transformations (Davoudi & Brooks, 2021). These transformations are usually envisioned as an amalgamation of top-down and bottom-up policies and strategies that aspire to break obdurate operational silos, within which policy is often trapped, promote efficient procedural arrangements, and encourage shared motivation and values among city-regional stakeholders and citizens (Coaffee et al., 2018). Some researchers have also emphasized the requirement for a thorough investigation of contextual governance particularities and pre-existing governance models that often reproduce traditional and obsolete approaches, so as to demonstrate the utility of resilience narratives as a transformative agent of change (Porto de Albuquerque et al., 2021). However, the majority of early empirical studies to date have shown that attempts to implement resilience narratives in planning practice frequently fall short in truly addressing inherent socio-spatial inequalities and power relations, often leading to maladaptation (Torabi et al., 2018), promotion of neoliberal doctrines (Joseph, 2013; Zebrowski, 2020), business-as-usual approaches (O'Hare et al., 2016) or inequity in resilience outcomes (Ziervogel et al., 2017).

In city-regional planning practice, emergent policies and plans based on the narratives of resilience are often heralded as beacons of hope by local governments operating in precarious organizational and economic conditions (Simmie & Martin, 2010). Here the quest for city-regional resilience is both a strategic socio-economic goal that advocates long-term holistic responses to uncertain conditions, and an overarching process cutting across spatial and administrative boundaries. Resilience-informed approaches, however, should not be characterized as a silver bullet for contemporary city-regional planning, or even as capable of *de facto* generating ideal socio-spatial imaginaries. While aimed at challenging traditional operational planning trajectories through restructuring urban governance and breaking operational silos prior to the enactment of physical planning interventions, resilience approaches commonly neglect social justice and contextual governance traditions, inevitably leading to the emergence of complex and often underestimated trade-offs across various spatial and temporal scales (Chelleri et al., 2015; Fainstein, 2015; Duit, 2016),

Within this context, this paper critically explores how the visioning and enactment of resilience narratives in city-regional strategic planning has been operationalized in Thessaloniki, Greece, through the concept of 'resilience imaginaries', which we conceptualize as the outcome of a collective foresight and visioning process. Since 2014, Thessaloniki, a city-region that has recently been subjected to fiscal retrenchment as a result of state-led austerity measures, whilst concurrently being trapped in

formalized and fragmented governance arrangements, adopted urban resilience as an overarching conceptual framework for redefining its short- and long-term strategic priorities. This notably led to a reconceptualization of emerging urban problems and their political implications on local governance with a particular focus on the city's relationship with the sea. This realignment also coincided with an ongoing economic recession, unfolding refugee migration flows, the urgent need to mitigate vulnerability to an array of natural and anthropogenic hazards (City of Thessaloniki, 2016) and, more recently, the Covid-19 global pandemic. Methodologically, this paper is based on a longitudinal analysis of resilience implementation and its impact on the city-region from 2014 to 2020, and highlights that despite some early problems, resilience narratives have largely facilitated the ongoing restructuring of governance relations within the city-region, improved civic engagement and place-based leadership, and stimulated the development of a framework plan for the city's iconic waterfront, ultimately leading to the development of a new resilience imaginary for the city.

In the following sections, we first present our conceptual framework for this study. Drawing on the relevance of resilience narratives for foresight and visioning studies and aligning it with ideas of socio-spatial imaginaries, we conceptualize the idea of 'resilience imaginaries' and situate it within existing urban and regional planning discourses. Later, we empirically unfold this concept, through presenting the findings of our study in Thessaloniki through the example of a proposed waterfront redevelopment scheme, focusing on governance transformations, institutional change and interaction with the built environment through material representations of resilience imaginaries. We conclude the paper by critically discussing the potential and limitations of resilience narratives to contextualize collective future visions as resilience imaginaries, emphasizing their capacity to mobilize and express collective action, cement greater future levels of trust and co-production between the local and regional state, businesses and civil society, and identify key opportunities and challenges for future city-regional strategic visioning (Coaffee et al., 2021).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Resilience narratives and city-regional planning

Resilience and its various narratives have progressively entered the academic and practical vocabulary of city-regional planning from the beginning of the 21st century, following a long etymological journey across disciplines, which moulded the flexible and malleable understanding of the term (Alexander, 2013; Meerow et al., 2016). This rapid expansion of the concept's utilization resulted in the extension of its functionality from a systemic quality (Hassler & Kohler, 2014) to a continuous process (Boyd & Folke, 2012; Davoudi et al., 2013) and ultimately to a strategic goal or outcome (Arup, 2014; Lu & Stead, 2013), with hybrid approaches and understandings also widely used. In city-regional planning, resilience has been

increasingly portrayed as an overall holistic praxis to manage complexity and uncertainty of dynamic, interconnected systems (Moser et al., 2019), developing into a prominent idea for driving risk-induced city-regional transformations (Coaffee & Lee, 2016). Overarching narratives of urban resilience have further provided an operational framework for reducing vulnerability and exposure of both communities and the built environment through process-driven physical interventions to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from a range of socio-economic shocks and stresses.

During the last decades, resilience has therefore become a strategic and operational concept of considerable attractiveness to contemporary city-regional managers and policymakers. After all, viewing city-regional operations through a strategic resilience framework has allowed the bridging of ecology and city-regional planning/design in an attempt to effectively monitor and measure how social changes influence the environment, and also how environmental changes shape modern societies and reconfigure future socio-spatial imaginaries (Ahern, 2011; Amin & Thrift, 2017). In such frameworks the fundamental link connecting the concept of urban resilience and city-regional planning is *governance* (Coaffee et al., 2018; Davidson et al., 2019; Normandin et al., 2019); in many instances governance reconfiguration has been closely related to changes in local emergency planning arrangements and the adoption of more community-focused planning approaches. In urban and regional planning, emerging governance practices of subsidiarity and localism have encouraged decentralization and devolution of responsibility to local community levels, seeking either to strengthen existing collaborations between local communities, the private sector and local governments, or to establish new ones, ultimately paving the way for the introduction of a wider place-based framework for the interpretation of resilience narratives at the local scale (Coaffee, 2013).

Embracing resilience narratives within city-regional governance also implies the ability of city-regional systems to adapt and accommodate transformations to their operational arrangements (Healey, 2006; Pike et al., 2010). Yet, the trajectory of such transformations is rarely linear and involves the challenging of traditional bureaucratic values and structures of public administration – a process that frequently induces incremental changes and not radical alterations – promoting instead the development of contextually relevant adaptive capacities (Lloyd & Hicks, 2021; Pizzo, 2015). Consequently, operationalizing city-regional resilience can be understood as a continuous non-linear process driven by the appreciation of the dynamic and fluctuating nature of city-regional systems, with an emphasis on the need of governance arrangements to transform and adapt to new realities (Boyd & Folke, 2012). Ideally, such processes should pay significant attention to the role of formal and informal institutions in assisting the resilience-building process by galvanizing flexible governance arrangements and encouraging wide participation of citizens and other city-regional

stakeholders in the decision-making process (Meerow et al., 2019; Normandin et al., 2019). This collective action has been highlighted as a key ingredient for an effective implementation of resilience practices in contemporary city-regions, an implementation that is also highly dependent on the ability of city-regional leaders to accommodate and embrace change and transformations (Matyas & Pelling, 2015; Olsson et al., 2004), and fundamentally reshape pre-existing, and often obdurate, socio-spatial imaginaries.

Critiques of resilience narratives

Addressing resilience narratives from an urban planning and governance perspective has generated a set of critiques to their transformative capacity and their often-highlighted inability to effectively challenge inherent power relations within city-regions. As a result, resilience has often been criticized as merely recycling a set of previously applied developmental terminology, taking advantage of the attention and access to resources concentrated around the concept. This critique notably includes the responsabilization of individuals to mitigate the impact of natural hazards and other external risks which, according to some scholars, reflect a withdrawal of intervention by local authorities and a concurrent development of particular forms of 'governing from distance', which largely preserve existing urban governance approaches and associated power relations (Chandler, 2014; Crawshaw, 2012). This responsabilization can be viewed as 'a vehicle for devolution of risks' (Diprose, 2014, p. 51) in a process of relocating responsibility not only for disaster response but for citizen well-being in general. This promise of 'more power to the people', however, often focuses on devolution of responsibilities without a subsequent devolution of rights and resources.

Concomitantly, resilience has been widely criticized as conserving 'business as usual' approaches and practices instead of genuinely promoting substantive city-regional transformation. For several urban and regional scholars and practitioners, the concept of resilience has been employed by local governments and political authorities to indoctrinate local citizens and communities to uncritically adopt neoliberal ways of urban governance (Chandler & Reid, 2016; Diprose, 2014; Joseph, 2013; Kaika, 2017; Reid, 2012; Welsh, 2014). For instance, the concept of resilience has been increasingly used to legitimize neoliberal urban agendas as the shift of attention in urban political ecology turned from 'security' to 'adaptation' and responsabilization as 'resilient peoples do not look to states to secure their wellbeing because they have been disciplined into believing in the necessity to secure it for themselves' (Reid, 2012, p. 69). With resilience urging wider mobilization of citizens and urban stakeholders, risk management and allocation of responsibilities are not intended to fall solely on the shoulders of national and local authorities but instead are spread across numerous city-regional stakeholders. In a post-liberal interpretation of resilience, this has the effect of sheltering the state from

providing total security from endogenous and exogenous threats (Chandler, 2019).

Building upon this premise, another critical view of resilience emphasizes the concept's inability to induce real change and transformation that challenges inherent power relations (Fainstein, 2015). Viewing resilience through this lens highlights the disproportionate focus on superficially dealing with the consequences of crises and the subsequent recovery, without profoundly addressing the underlying factors that produced or sustained crisis-inducing conditions (Davidson, 2010; Mckeown et al., 2022). In other words, resilience narratives often simply lead to surviving rather than thriving, as resilience rhetoric and practice does not actively impugn social inequalities or the precarity of contemporary urban life (Diprose, 2014). As a result, while some resilience advocates simply reassure people that the most important thing is 'surviving to fight another day', demands for resistance, change and transformation of current governance practices and the challenging of existing power relations are silenced and sacrificed on the altar of preservation (Kaika, 2017; Reid, 2012). The concept of resilience in this case is depoliticized, ultimately reinforcing the development of apolitical or politically docile individuals (Neocleous, 2013).

Resilience imaginaries

Apart from mere critique, critical resilience scholarship has also established a connection between resilience and imaginary concepts that have been developed within the social sciences over recent decades years (Neocleous, 2016; Reid, 2019). Notably, several authors have referred to the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) through socially constructed 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983). Castoriadis (1987), for instance, in his iconic work on *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, combined Marxist theory with influences from psychoanalysis to conclude that societies are products of ontogenetic radical imaginaries prevailing among their members. More recently critical political geographers (Agnew, 2002) focused on the fundamental role of social imaginaries and the ways they are presented in 'binding together a heterogeneous and spatially dispersed political community' (Davoudi & Brooks, 2021, p. 54). Similarly, Jasanoff and Kim (2009, p. 120) provided an understanding of imaginaries as 'collectively imagined forms of social life and social order reflected in the design and fulfilment of nation-specific scientific and/or technological projects'.

In time, ideas of social imaginaries became increasingly relevant for geographers and urban planners with the development of the concept of 'spatial imaginaries', generally understood as 'socially held stories, ways of representing and talking about places and spaces' (Watkins, 2015, p. 509; also mentioned in Said, 1977). Here, spatial imaginaries are seen as socially constructed visions of territorial entities, where the focus is placed on material representation and performativity. Watkins (2015), for instance, identified three different types of spatial imaginaries: *place imaginaries*, *idealized space imaginaries* and *spatial transformation imaginaries*, providing some distinct

characteristics for each of them. In his view, place imaginaries focus on the uniqueness or the 'otherness' of a place, while idealized space imaginaries are positive or negative descriptions or associations of a place with their general characteristics. Finally, spatial transformation imaginaries are understood as the outcome of the evolution of spatial transformation processes, such as globalization or climate change (Watkins, 2015). These three types of spatial imaginaries can, however, be seen to embed a deterministic view of socio-spatial processes, as they relationally connect ideas, stories, strategic planning and foresight goals with the identity of a place.

In aligning emerging resilience narratives and the established discourses around spatial imaginaries, we introduce the idea of resilience imaginaries for city-regions. In our view, resilience imaginaries are understood as collectively constructed visions of contemporary city-regional life that focus upon perpetual transformation and adaptation and emphasize holistic strategic planning, foresight and interconnectedness among city-regional systems across different administrative scales. Here, our scope is not to denounce existing discourses around spatial imaginaries, but, on the contrary, our objective is to leverage the knowledge produced around the conceptualization, implementation and critique of resilience narratives to inform existing debates in city-regional planning around future adaptation and transformation. Through this prism, resilience imaginaries are ontologically presented neither as deterministic views of strategic foresight and planning nor as embedding positive or negative connotations; instead, they are constructed with a focus upon future-proofing, and understandings of the resilience as a continuous process, an outcome and/or strategic goal (Moser et al., 2019; Pitidis & Coaffee, 2020). Therefore, although resilience imaginaries could be mistakenly associated with either place, idealized space or spatial transformation imaginaries, they are presented as distinct and non-deterministic ontologies.

Despite being collectively shaped and socially constructed, resilience imaginaries are in most cases developed, managed and implemented by city-regional managers, who are responsible for not only aligning multiple visions of the future and fusing them into a robust, integrated and feasible spatial plan, but also for advancing flexible and adaptive arrangements to govern the plan's implementation. Hence, it can be argued that in the process of resilience imaginary construction, city-regional managers are the 'chief imagineers', echoing previously discussed resilience critiques regarding hard-to-change power relations within city-regions. Notably, such critiques call for more pluralistic governance configurations and structures with an increased focus on participatory methods and citizen interactions to allow local voices to be fed into decision-making processes and shape resilience imaginaries (Coaffee & Healey, 2003). Here, resilience imaginaries are not conceived as static ideas but are continuously renegotiated and reshaped collective visions, facilitated by the establishment of cross-sectoral communication and interconnectedness among city-regional

stakeholders and the civil society. However, to secure a more equitable construction of resilience imaginaries, and avoid incremental and lopsided decisions, power relations within the city-region need to be continuously accounted for.

Alongside their conceptual dimension, resilience imaginaries are also physically manifested as spatial interventions in the built environment. More specifically, resilience imaginaries are brought to life through a process of 'material incarnation' that exemplifies the collective visions of resilience and illuminates the role of material infrastructures in the organization of state power, everyday cultural practices and political landscapes. This resonates with the idea of scalar imaginaries (Davoudi & Brooks, 2021), where this form of spatial imaginaries is seen as a fuzzy amalgam of material and discursive practices, and a product of the dialectical relationship between space and ongoing socio-political dynamics. In the remainder of this paper we explore the process of developing and physically manifesting a resilience imaginary in the city-region of Thessaloniki, Greece.

METHODS

The empirical data collected for this research are based on a longitudinal study undertaken in the city-region of Thessaloniki between 2014 and 2020 (Pitidis & Coaffee, 2020). Specifically, the analysis here draws on a mixed-method study approach of institutional and governance opinions and responses regarding Thessaloniki's participation in the 100 Resilient Cities (100RC) network sponsored by the US-based Rockefeller Foundation (2018), and uses a framework of analysis drawn from existing and emerging theories within resilience scholarship. During this study, 30 semi-structure interviews with city officials and other stakeholder representatives, including academics and community groups, were conducted, focusing on the impact of resilience narratives in the social, political and urban planning milieu of Thessaloniki, and followed the process tracing method to analyse the impact of the city-region's participation in the 100RC network from its inception to its establishment and ongoing implementation of spatial plans.

The study also employed a detailed discursive analysis of published documents and other secondary sources of information related to the city-region's conceptual and practical engagement with the narratives of resilience. Here, secondary sources of information – including official documentation regarding urban governance and planning processes before, during and after the completion of Thessaloniki's participation in the 100RC network – were scrutinized. Material analysed included numerous official documents and archival records published under the umbrella of Resilient Thessaloniki 2030, not only by the Thessaloniki Resilience Office but also by other internal and external city-regional bodies involved in different aspects of the formulation and implementation of the overarching resilience strategy. Such non-governmental bodies included community networks, private consultants

and global organizations that published different documents, or communicated their work through social media or other news media reports. In addition, participant observation of numerous events, both physically and virtually, was also employed in an attempt to capture the resilience imaginary construction process in Thessaloniki and the institutional changes and political dynamics this process entailed. Although our wider research for Thessaloniki's resilience journey has collected data representing a wider spectrum of urban stakeholders (including community groups) (Pitidis et al., 2018; Pitidis & Coaffee, 2020), the analysis for this paper focuses mostly on viewpoints of institutional actors and their attempts to consolidate and materialize Thessaloniki's resilience imaginary. Specifically, data analysed for the purpose of this paper mostly had to do with the process of governance transformation enabled by the newly introduced narratives of resilience, the ways such changes could support the consolidation of a resilience imaginary and the potential of physically manifesting such an imaginary within Thessaloniki's landscape, notably across the city-region's iconic waterfront.

CREATING 'RESILIENCE IMAGINARIES' IN THESSALONIKI, GREECE

In 2013, the philanthropic Rockefeller Foundation inaugurated the 100RC Programme and Network in an attempt to 'help cities around the world become more resilient to the physical, social and economic challenges that are a growing part of the twenty-first century' (Rockefeller Foundation, 2018). The overall aspiration of the 100RC network was to make citizens and infrastructure more resilient to disruptive events, including chronic stresses (e.g., resource shortages, inefficient public transportation or unemployment) and acute shocks (e.g., natural hazards, disease outbreaks or political instability). Key within the 100RC campaign was the two- to three-year-funded appointment of a so-called chief resilience officer (CRO), who was expected to work directly with the chief executive of a city-region in pursuing collaborations across government, private and non-profit sectors. As Michael Berkowitz, CEO of the Rockefeller Foundation's 100RC initiative, noted at the time, an effective CRO is a person able to 'work across the sectors and silos to coordinate, connect the dots, advocate and keep the resilience issues and resilience perspective in all the decisions that the city is making' (cited in Clancy, 2014), effectively acting as the 'chief imagineer' of nascent resilience imaginaries.

Thessaloniki's resilience journey started with a successful application to join this programme in 2013 and the active participation of the city-region in the 100RC network from 2014. Such activity subsequently catalysed an ongoing resilience-driven transformation, creating a new roadmap for the city-region's developmental future based on newly established participatory governance arrangements (Pitidis et al., 2018; Pitidis & Coaffee, 2020). Prior to its participation in the 100RC network,

Thessaloniki's governance milieu shared traditional inefficiencies of Greek municipal governments, such as close financial and administrative connection to the national state, a mistrust by local residents, a lack of horizontal and vertical communication among metropolitan and inter-metropolitan stakeholders, a general misalignment of goals, objectives and outcomes among different projects undertaken by local authorities, and the lack of a long-term vision (Pitidis et al., 2018). Attempts to transform such obdurate local governance structures induced by the city-region's participation in the 100RC network focused on three major objectives: (1) reorganization of traditional governance apparatus; (2) the mobilization of adaptive governance capacity and (3) the co-production of a shared vision for medium- and long-term development (Pitidis & Coaffee, 2020).

Through its participation in the network, the Thessaloniki city-region ultimately attempted to secure a new developmental future for by creating a long-term resilience strategy, aiming at 2030. Although formally the city-region's participation in the project was limited to the municipality of Thessaloniki, the strategic influence of resilience policy impacted the full metropolitan area of Thessaloniki's city-region – including 11 smaller municipalities – and was managed by the Metropolitan Development Agency,¹ an inter-municipal public agency responsible for encouraging and coordinating collaboration among the municipalities within the city-region's metropolitan agglomeration. Officially, Thessaloniki's participation in the network ended in 2019 when the Rockefeller Foundation concluded their commitment to the programme, but the ideas underpinning resilience-thinking appear to have been embedded in the city's operational agenda² and continue to actively shape Thessaloniki's city-regional imaginary, influencing new directives in strategic planning and foresight for the city-region. This was practically achieved through the establishment of the Urban Resilience Observatory in early 2020 and the alignment of sectoral developmental plans with the specific objectives of the resilience strategy.

The Urban Resilience Observatory, despite being administered by Thessaloniki municipality, is operationally focused on the city-region, with its establishment funded by the Region of Central Macedonia – a higher level of Greek public administration that operates at a wider city-regional level. The chief objective of the Urban Resilience Observatory is to evaluate the realization of the overall city-region's resilience planning through the generation of locally relevant sustainability indicators, aligned to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 11: Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable), as well as the collection, collation and analysis of various sustainability related datasets. The advancement of such a resilience monitoring approach came as an outcome of the completion of Thessaloniki's participation in the 100RC network following the sudden demise of the 100RC initiative in mid-2019 (Bliss, 2019),³ a demise that led to the reversion of technical and financial support

provided to local authorities by the 100RC network, leaving Thessaloniki without adequate financial and human resources to proceed with the full implementation of its resilience objectives. Figure 1 presents a detailed timeline of the city-region's resilience journey, focusing on the participation in the 100RC network and the resilience imaginary construction process.

Leveraging investment and creating partnerships for city-regional foresight and visioning

In Thessaloniki, after the global financial crisis that began in 2008–09, resource scarcity was a fundamental inhibitor for regional development, and resilience narratives were actively embraced as a potential recourse for mobilizing human, fiscal and knowledge resources towards securing the city-region's future development. In this process, critical views of resilience, as explored above, although acknowledged were not prioritized, constructing a rather positive image of resilience and emphasizing the material and financial benefits that could be derived from planning for a resilience future.

Over time, Thessaloniki was successful in leveraging the operationalization of resilience narratives to attract a range of international partnerships and funding to the city-region. The long-term resilience strategy, published in 2017, has also proved an important planning tool for aligning various potential or actual investments and interests. More specifically, the development and political buy-in to the resilience vision helped the Municipality of Thessaloniki, the Metropolitan Development Agency and other city stakeholders to attract funding and participate in meaningful collaboration schemes at the European and global levels. Engagement in the 100RC network, apart from consolidating Thessaloniki as a major European actor in city-regional resilience implementation and providing the city-region with the opportunity to engage in peer-to-peer learning, has paved the way for a series of notable outcomes, such as the one-year partnership with the World Bank and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), and the accompanying technical assistance across several departments this partnership entailed. The visibility of the city-region's resilience efforts further led to increased invitations to participate in Horizon 2020 and other European funding proposals.⁴ Moreover, the Resilience Office received a European Investment Bank (EIB) loan of €20 million to support the vision and implementation of the 'Thessaloniki 2030' resilience strategy, which included funding for small to medium-sized projects, primarily focusing on city-regional development, energy efficiency, logistics and transport, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and tourism.

Concurrently, Thessaloniki also applied for several national-level grants directed towards attracting private foreign investments to the city-region as part of the ongoing response to the economic recession, the resulting socio-economic crisis and the humanitarian pressures Greece is facing since 2013 with refugee flows. For

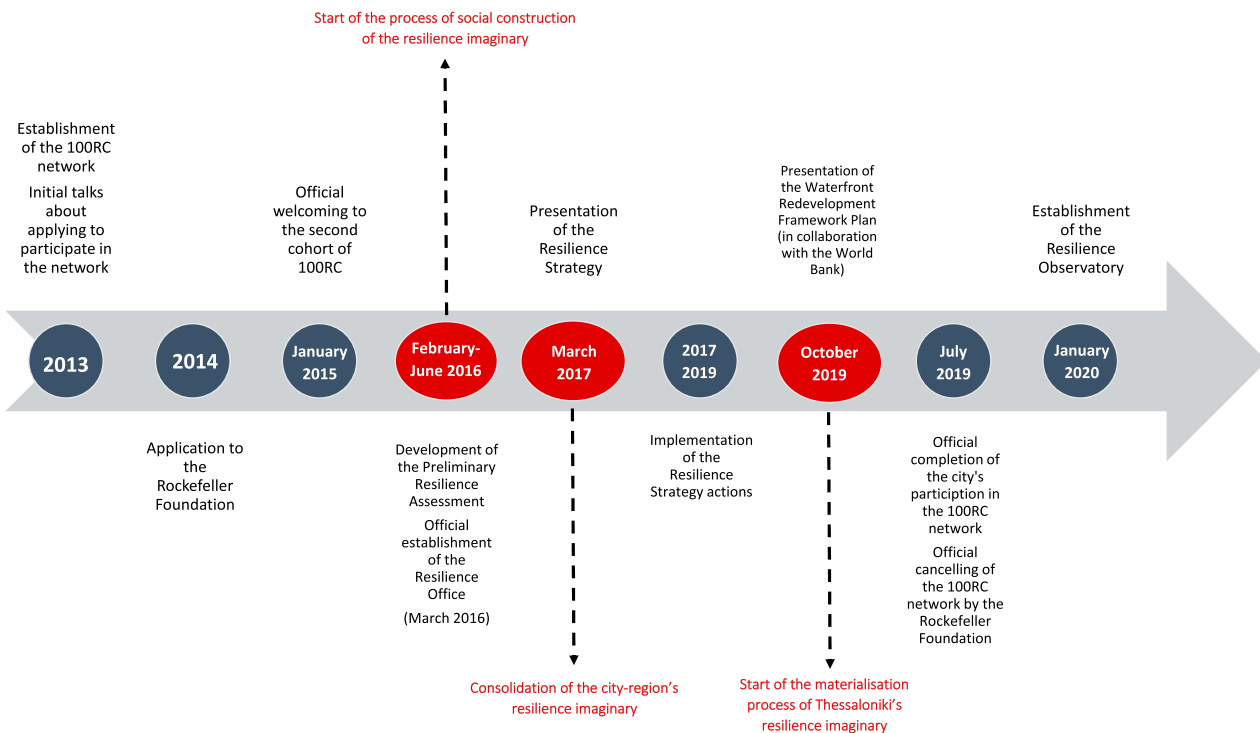


Figure 1. Timeline of Thessaloniki's resilience journey through its participation in the 100 Resilient Cities network and beyond. Source: Authors.

example, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation⁵ announced a grant of €10 million to the central municipalities of Thessaloniki and Athens as part of its 'Grants Against the Greek Crisis Initiative' (City of Thessaloniki, 2021). Whilst this was not expressly linked to the resilience vision, it was announced shortly after the introduction to the 100RC network with Thessaloniki's Resilience Office being actively engaged in the grant's roll-out in an attempt to strategically align previously dis-coordinated administrative units (Pitidis & Coaffee, 2020).

Thessaloniki's participation in the 100RC network also brought to the surface an essential need for interconnectedness across the disparate and siloed city-regional system, and the need for strengthening intra-city and regional partnerships. Traditionally, the absence of a central connecting hyper-municipal actor to operate as a focal point among different agents of city-regional operation and service delivery had resulted in incremental changes to city-regional governance and significantly limited cross-sectoral collaboration across the city-region. Here, even inter-departmental city-regional communication was hampered by ingrained bureaucratic routines, political conflicts and obsolete institutional practices (Pitidis & Coaffee, 2020). The establishment of the Resilience Office in 2015 practically covered this institutional void and became the focal point for inter-municipal city-regional development, subsuming the role of the operationally rigid Metropolitan Development Agency.

After implementing a long-term and wide-scale campaign of seeking to build trust and bringing together multiple stakeholders by adopting a 'system of systems approach' to city-regional management (Bai et al., 2010),

important steps towards overcoming jurisdictional and institutional boundaries within the city-region have been made. This has showcased the necessity for joining-up all services within city-regional policy, as well as the need for municipal administrations to push beyond existing jurisdictional authorities to support long-term visions and imaginaries at wider spatial scales. This complex process is exemplified below through the Waterfront Redevelopment Framework Plan – a large-scale redevelopment plan that advanced the collective vision for the city-region's long-term resilience planning and the materialization, at least in plan form, of its resilience imaginary.

Materializing 'resilience imaginaries'

Thessaloniki's 'resilience imaginary' encompasses a significant material dimension, physically manifested through city-regional planning, and most expressively exemplified through a plan for a complete redevelopment of the city-region's iconic waterfront. Metropolitan Thessaloniki possesses a 50 km waterfront, which contains an extensive economic, environmental, social and cultural ecosystem that has been central to shaping the city's identity and image (Deloitte & World Bank, 2018). Following a previous extensive revitalization process, which was completed in 2008 (Vayona, 2011), the new promenade became the longest developed waterfront in South Eastern Europe: 'repositioning the role of water in citizens' everyday life, making it the most popular public space in the city, as well as the number one attraction for tourists' (City of Thessaloniki, 2017, p. 116). The next phase of local development was focused on enhancing the city-region's relationship with the sea, in line with the fourth

goal of the Thessaloniki's resilience strategy, 'Re-discovering the City's Relationship with the Sea – Integrated Thermaikos Bay' (City of Thessaloniki, 2017). This goal built upon the findings of the preliminary resilience assessment (PRA) undertaken in 2016, where a collective vision for Thessaloniki's future was shaped as a result of ideas and suggestions gathered from civil society, academia, the private sector and other civic institutions, through personal interviews, online surveys, questionnaires and workshops (City of Thessaloniki, 2016). Driven by this collective vision and the anticipated physical, social, environmental and economic changes, including the privatization of the port, six major pillars for the redevelopment of the waterfront were identified: mobility; economic development; environmental protection; social inclusion; promotion of local culture and identity; and promotion of citizen health and well-being (Deloitte & World Bank, 2018).

These pillars framed the Waterfront Redevelopment Framework Plan (published in 2018⁶) and were based, in part, on existing and planned projects and proposed physical interventions to enhance city and regional resilience. The framework was the first strategic planning intervention considering major land use change since the 2014 revised General Master Plan and was initially comprised of a real estate market study and other projects that were aligned to city values and priorities. As such, it set a new precedent for recommending strategic interventions, focusing on holistic visioning and city-regional values, rather than allowing various sectoral development projects to take hold with conflicting and divergent impacts. Including specific financial projections and suggestions for further funding and governance change, the framework plan also (re)emphasized the need for Thessaloniki to leverage private capital to support local development⁷ and invigorate tourism through the establishment of an attractive city-regional identity and physical landscape, essentially signifying the beginning of the materialization process of the city-region's resilience imaginary.

More specifically, the framework plan divided the waterfront area due to be redeveloped into four distinct zones (A–D), each with large-scale regeneration interventions proposed (Figure 2). Zone A, encompassing some of the least developed areas of the city-centre with unused industrial land near the port, was envisioned as a new city-centre, accommodating new developments based on a mixture of commercial, residential and office uses designed to support the needs of residents, businesses and tourists. To achieve this new vision, the plan proposed large-scale urban development focusing on commercial, cultural, sports and recreational uses. Zone B, the 'Old Waterfront', by contrast, was expected to regenerate some of the most vibrant areas of the city-region, including its historic and commercial centre. Given the high density of residential and commercial properties in this area, the main physical intervention proposed included projects emphasizing high-quality open and public space that facilitates access to the waterfront via a network of urban corridors. The intention here was to transform the waterfront into a vibrant pedestrianized boulevard, reflecting the needs and aspirations of local citizens, small

businesses, and social organizations as documented in the overall resilience strategy, whilst concurrently boosting the local economy by providing an integrated touristic experience for domestic and international visitors. Zone C included the most recently revitalized segment of the waterfront (completed in 2008), which today is an attractive place for walking and leisure activities along an extensive coastal promenade. The scope of regeneration in this zone was predominantly focused on beautification, maximizing of the utilization value of existing assets and the establishment of a welcoming environment with a wide range of cultural, recreational and sporting activities. Finally, Zone D, which at present accommodates a significant number of underutilized public buildings and spatial voids, was to be primed for large-scale multipurpose regeneration interventions, such as cultural, leisure and athletic activities focused upon the exploitation of under-used public assets and their physical connection to water.

The framework plan also included a thorough analysis of the current state of the built environment in each zone, a variety of design ideas inspired by international examples, and a detailed presentation of financial tools and mechanisms for potential funding (Deloitte & World Bank, 2018). The plan has inspired the regional authority along with the Technical Chamber of Greece⁸ to announce support and financing for the metropolitan-scale waterfront development strategy and project financing plan. However, at this juncture (early 2022), the framework plan is not legally binding but rather a conceptual design approach to materializing the city-region's resilience imaginary. Although constructed upon the foundations laid by the resilience strategy, it is based on desk-top data analysis and consultation with municipality departments, the regional authority, port authority and business and industry stakeholders, but without additional consultation with civic stakeholders or local community members, beyond those that took place during the development of the resilience strategy. Therefore, potential updates and changes in the city-region's resilience imaginary were not included in the finalized plans, while other issues, such as future considerations for reducing disaster risk or climate change adaptation, were not adequately addressed. In other words, whilst community consultation was undertaken in the beginning of project implementation and was later used as an endorsement for framework plan, subsequent consultation with communities and other stakeholders, has yet to take place. This situation recalls previous considerations related to the influence of underlying power relations in the process of social construction and materialization of future visions. In addition, political circumstances such as the change in the city administration in July 2019, as well as global events, notably the Covid-19 pandemic, have significantly impacted the political, social and economic situation in Thessaloniki ultimately stalling the physical implementation of the framework plan for the waterfront. As the city-region slowly revives from a long-term nationally imposed lockdown, the feasibility and relevance of Thessaloniki's resilience imaginary to the post-pandemic era, both institutionally and materially, will need to be urgently revisited.

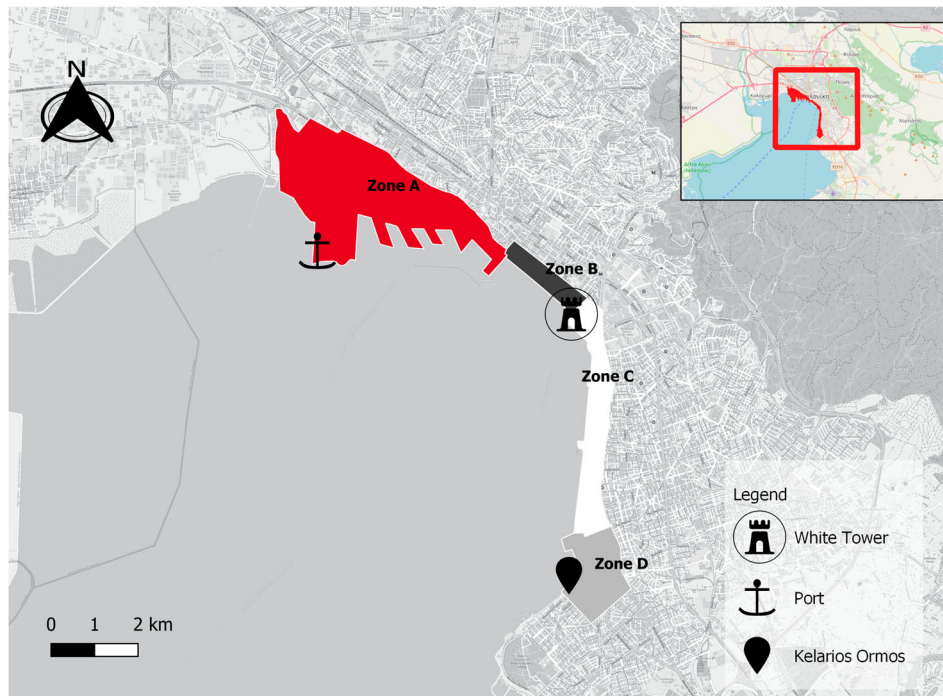


Figure 2. The Four Zones proposed by the Waterfront Redevelopment Framework Plan.
Source: Adapted from Deloitte & World Bank (2018).

DISCUSSION

The emergence of resilience narratives in city-regional planning practice has presented a new pathway for local developmental approaches that encompasses strategic, holistic, and long-term foresight and visioning (Coaffee & Lee, 2016; Béné et al., 2018). Such resilience narratives emphasize cross-sectoral communication among city-regional stakeholders, flexible governance arrangements and the co-production of a collaborative vision for local development, laying the foundations for the advancement of 'resilience imaginaries'. Yet, for such imaginaries to have a substantial impact on urban and regional life, they need to be translated into material interventions, which need to be subsequently brought to life through physical planning and design processes.

Resilience imaginaries are neither place, idealized space nor spatial transformation imaginaries, yet they have a significantly profound performative dimension, which is enacted in space and combines discourse and material practices (Bialasiewicz et al., 2007). In this sense, resilience imaginaries could be understood as a type of spatial imaginary because they are 'discursively constituted and materially reproduced' (Jessop & Oosterlynck, 2008, p. 1158), and are ultimately translated into material practices from linguistic and semiotic understandings. An emerging question from this conceptualization process therefore becomes: Why do we need a new spatial term for resilience imaginaries? The answer here is twofold: first, as resilience narratives are gradually becoming linguistically more dominant within urban and regional planning discourses, contextualizing the concepts and material practices that they generate contributes to the updating of

the existing spatial vocabulary with contemporary relevant terms. Second, from a practitioners' perspective, as more cities and regional entities worldwide adopt resilient policies and practices to construct their developmental future upon, better understanding the opportunities and limitations that the implementation of such imaginaries on the ground entails could prove an invaluable weapon in an urbanist's or policymaker's arsenal. Therefore, examples such as the one in Thessaloniki can provide relevant insights into the ways resilience narratives impact city-regional governance and materially represent collective future visions.

Thessaloniki's resilience imaginary was shaped in the period 2014–19 during the city-region's participation in the 100RC network and subsequently envisioned in the published resilience strategy (City of Thessaloniki, 2017). Throughout the city-regions resilience journey, steps towards an integrated and holistic approach to foresight were made, often accompanied by key transformations in governance structures. Examples of such transformations include the de facto institutionalization of resilience within the organizational chart of the local municipality with the establishment of a deputy mayor position for urban resilience and the subsequent establishment of the Urban Resilience Observatory, which consolidated the commitment of local authorities to implement the city-region's overarching resilience imaginary. This commitment was further demonstrated through the leveraging of national and international investments for the resilience effort and its alignment with the objectives of resilience strategy, providing dedicated funding and support for planned physical and social interventions across the city-region. Here, a key condition that allowed Thessaloniki's resilience imaginary to

flourish was the need for municipal authorities to expand beyond their jurisdictional and operational responsibilities, translating previously aspired urban visions into city-regional imaginaries. Since early 2020, the Covid-19 global pandemic has further provided an undesirable, yet unintended, opportunity for reconceptualizing the local priorities originally set in the resilience strategy and further expanding inter- and intra-regional collaborations across city-regional stakeholders as a result of noticeable gaps in service provision (i.e., the connection of health infrastructure to wider city-regional goals).

However, the example of Thessaloniki and its waterfront also illuminates some limitations for resilience imaginaries mostly related to the process of social construction. While resilience imaginaries, as socially constructed visions, constitute an amalgam of collective and often contradictory ideas for future development (including more marginalized and even radical voices), this process of social construction is often hindered by inherent power relations, political priorities and financial interests. In Thessaloniki's case, and despite widespread attempts spearheaded by the Resilience Office to construct a comprehensive and holistic shared vision for the city-region's future through various engagement activities with social groups and community representatives (Pitidis et al., 2018; Pitidis & Coaffee, 2020), participation of civil society has been constrained to the groups *already* willing to support the Resilient Thessaloniki 2030 initiative. Thessaloniki's experience demonstrates that while the process of social construction in resilience imaginaries aspires to contextualize an inclusive future vision through engaging local citizens as 'co-imaginiers' in the construction of the of the resilience imaginary, the outcome of this process inevitably reflects existing and often deeply embedded power relations. This results in certain key actors (such as the city-regional authorities) having a whip-hand in the actualization of future visions becoming *de facto* 'chief imaginiers' and the predominant agents of local development. This does not imply that resilience imaginaries are not (or should not be) socially constructed; on the contrary, it echoes the essential complications in collective visioning for city-regional development and the additional effort that city and regional authorities need to put into balancing human agency and future development plans; not only when conceptualizing future planning visions, but also when consolidating and materializing resilience imaginaries.

The Waterfront Redevelopment Framework Plan demonstrates a material representation of Thessaloniki's resilience imaginary as it is currently formulated. Inspired and guided by the collective vision for the city-region's future, it was shaped and bolstered through Thessaloniki's interaction with the narratives of resilience. The waterfront plan showcases, the capacity of resilience narratives to stimulate both institutional change and physical transformation, through urban and regional planning processes. It also reveals the fundamental role of physical space in the production of resilience imaginaries, where resilience narratives are transfigured from immaterial agents of visioning and foresight into (soon to be) concrete spatial representations of the built environment.

The example of the waterfront showcases valuable lessons about the capacity of resilience narratives to catalyse a fundamental reorganization of what is built, where and in what style, and how ideas underpinning resilience, such as vertical and horizontal integration, holistic thinking, long-term strategic visioning and co-production can influence the *modus operandi* of city-regional governance. Notably, there needs to be a balance between the collective visions and material expressions of resilience imaginaries, as adopting an infrastructure-first approach has proven 'inadequate in understanding local vulnerabilities and needs' (Camponeschi, 2021, n.p.). In such a collaborative process the role of physical planning – and planners – is important, especially in the process of materializing a socially constructed vision and ensuring that not only all stakeholders are represented in the resilience imaginary but also highlighting ways that account for underlying socio-spatial processes without resorting to an overly technocratic approach. Here, the establishment of flexible and adaptive governance mechanisms in conjunction with wide cross-sectoral collaborations and the frequent revisiting of previous development visions are essential for ensuring an equitable and sustainable future.

Finally, resilience imaginaries should not be static end-points for city-regional development but instead they need to be continuously questioned, contested and collective visions of the future, where city-regions are in a constant process of adaptation and renegotiation (Moser et al., 2019) in trying to avoid experiencing 'an illusion of resilience' (Shamsuddin, 2020). Most recently, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic introduced an unexpected shock to the city-region of Thessaloniki, which widened its operational focus from the identified shocks and stresses included in the city-region's resilience strategy. As a result, the city-region's resilience imaginary is being reconceptualized so as to incorporate emerging socio-economic needs and shifting long-term development visions affected by the economic impact of the 'national lockdowns' imposed during the pandemic. Here, on the one hand, the existence of a predefined resilience imaginary and associated spatial plans can form the basis of a renegotiated city-regional post-pandemic development vision. On the other, the existing resilience plans are tightly bound to political and institutional dynamics that could hijack ongoing civic engagement processes and promote selective visions for future development, based on existing power relations and without adequately accounting for community voices.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper introduces resilience imaginaries as semiotic, representational and performative ontologies binding together two distinct but interrelated discourses around urban resilience and spatial imaginaries. While the introduction of a new term might seem redundant from a sociological perspective, as spatial imaginaries and social constructivism have partly covered similar discussions in the past, there is a conceptual and practical void in urban and regional planning scholarship related to the

capacity of resilience (and its narratives) to produce socio-spatial imaginaries. By following the resilience journey of the city-region of Thessaloniki, we have observed how resilience narratives nurture the consolidation of a resilience imaginary, inspire transformations in city-regional governance, influence the mobilization of financial and human resources to support its realization, and promote its material incarnation. Thessaloniki used resilience narratives not only to develop a socio-spatial imaginary (Davoudi et al., 2018) but also to promote the city-region's image as a 'resilient city' (Metaxas & Psarropoulou, 2021).

With spatial planning increasingly acquiring a central position in maximizing social and economic benefits or enhancing disaster risk management in contemporary city-regions (notably in climate resilience plans), material representations of resilience imaginaries should also reflect shifting socio-political collective visions. For instance, the pandemic has instigated a significant turn in urban design trends with emerging visions for the post-pandemic city focusing on the neighbourhood level, encouraging greater levels of pedestrianization, enhanced investment in affordable housing, the development of green spaces, nature-based infrastructure, and less reliance on motorized transport. Here narratives of resilience are particularly pronounced as a key element in recovery and future planning through better understanding risk, more deeply considering of the interdependences between different urban and regional systems, addressing inequalities, promoting adaptive measures, and encouraging long-term collaborative imaginaries. Understandably, resilience imaginaries of this kind will remain highly political in nature and contested by entrenched interests and will need to be frequently updated and readjusted to emerging realities, incorporating the collective viewpoints of city-regional stakeholders' shifting future visions.

As resilience narratives are constantly globalizing, the cumulative experiences from other 100RC city-members can also showcase the centrality of governance transformation for the development and consolidation of local resilience imaginaries. Some of these emerging imaginaries reflect global policies such as the SDGs, for example, in Quito, Melaka and Cape Town (Croese et al., 2020), while others, such as Melbourne, emphasize governance experimentation as a centre for consolidating imaginaries of resilience (Fastenrath & Coenen, 2021) or the expanded scope of resilience in local governance for foresight and future-proofing, as in the case of Rotterdam (Spaans & Waterhout, 2017). Similarly, a study of resilience governance in 20 North American cities highlights the need for the co-production of resilience agendas with local citizens and communities (Fastiggi et al., 2021), reflecting the importance of social constructivism approaches for resilience imaginaries. Yet, programmes such as 100RC that advocate an 'acting local, thinking global' mentality should be viewed critically as they could effortlessly become vehicles for promoting global neoliberal governance agendas, such as multiscalar governance networks, philanthro-capitalism or platform capitalism (Zebrowski, 2020),

or for endorsing one-size-fits-all 'blueprint' models of idealized resilient planning (Coaffee & Lee, 2016).

Although Thessaloniki's resilience imaginary has not yet been fully materialized, mainly due political changes and shifts in power relations within the city-region, the capacity of resilience narratives to leverage resources, mobilize city-regional stakeholders and establish a collective future vision for city-regional development in recent challenging times, stigmatized by funding cuts, austerity measures and movement restrictions due to the global pandemic, bodes well for the implementation of future resilience plans. The next challenge for Thessaloniki is a collective 'reimagining' of its developmental future and the embedding of resilience narratives and city-regional transformations in its operational 'manual' through the institutionalization of the underlying processes required for constructing and materializing equitable resilience imaginaries. In this regard, the experience of Thessaloniki arguably 'provides a roadmap for cities to make revitalization projects happen, from concept to implementation and financing ... help[ing] communities to trust that the public goals will be achieved' (Santos, 2019, n.p.). Thessaloniki could become a key case in point for other city-regions with obdurate governance structures, limited funding resources and unclear future visions to explore alternative pathways to sustainable development through constructing and materializing their resilience imaginaries.

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NOTES

1. Subsequently renamed as The Major Development Agency of Thessaloniki.
2. The most prominent among them was the establishment of the Urban Resilience Observatory in early 2020 in an attempt to monitor the progress of resilience strategy implementation through newly collected and evaluated, optimized data collection and newly developed appropriate indicators to support the durability of designed urban development policies.

3. It should be clarified here that the first phase of 100RC was concluded in 2019, and although people hoped the project would enter a new phase, it concluded where the originally defined cycle was completed. The network's goal was never to support cities through the full implementation of their strategies.
4. For example, CUTLER Coastal Urban Development Through the Lenses of Resiliency, <https://www.cutler-h2020.eu/tag/thessaloniki/>; LifeASTI (forecAsting System for urban heat Island effect) programme (LIFE Programme of the European Union); FOOD TRAILS project with Eurocities (part of the EU's Horizon 2020 programme), <https://eurocities.eu/latest/food-trails-sets-out-path-to-a-sustainable-future-for-urban-food-policy/>; new Action Planning Network ROOF in the URBACT programme; and ROOF, focusing on ending homelessness through innovative housing solutions, <https://urbact.eu/9-european-cities-acting-together-end-homelessness-ambitious-hell-yes/>.
5. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation is the largest philanthropic foundation in Greece.
6. The framework plan was not focused on the entire 50-km waterfront of Thessaloniki's Metropolitan area's waterfront, but only a segment of it, predominantly around the Municipality of Thessaloniki.
7. Significant changes and investment are expected in the area after the recent privatization of Thessaloniki's port in 2020.
8. The Technical Chamber of Greece is a public legal entity representing all licenced engineers across the country, often serving as an official technical advisor to the Greek State.

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