

Examiners' Final Report: Date: 6 September 2019

Candidate: Katarína Svitková

Title: Securing cities: 'Urban resilience' as a technology of government

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Examiner: David Chandler, University of Westminster

Summary

This was a well written and clearly structured thesis with a good grasp of the state of the discipline and clear methodological approach to and use of the resources, including institutional documentation and three city case studies.

After reviewing the candidate's responses to the initial comments and the amended sections of the thesis **I am fully satisfied that this dissertation qualifies for the Ph.D. degree.**

More detailed comments

The thesis deals with a very relevant and contemporary policy area, the development of resilience as a framework of urban policy governance, increasingly a key framing for a wide range of global concerns, from economic and social welfare to environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction. It engages well with work at the forefront of thinking in this area demonstrating a high level of awareness of a number of key conceptual approaches. The thesis itself develops an independent and original approach to the analysis of urban resilience, including going beyond Foucauldian 'governmentality' approaches to develop a rich empirical and sociological approach which forefronts the regulative and constitutive effects of resilience thinking through an assemblage theoretical approach.

The thesis is well and clearly structured in a way that develops the analysis, starting with a chapter on urban resilience, which shows a good grasp of contemporary and conceptual discussions at both the policy and academic levels. The arguments are well signposted throughout. The empirics, which are rich, are well contextualized with close engagement with leading international institutional bodies and key major city case-studies.

The conceptual framing is very strong, with the location of urban governance within networked understandings of global governance - where power is more distributed and emergent, posing the need for more processual or systems-oriented framings of governance - of which resilience is foremost in international policy-making. This more interconnected and fluid or relational ontology then poses normative questions relating to the operation of power in top-down, or neoliberal, terms or in more emancipatory or 'flatter' framings, which disrupt traditional understandings of hierarchies of power. These are consistently and critically engaged with, drawing out how resilience discourses are ideationally and materially (re)produced in ways which enable different political and economic interests to be served and often undermine the promise of community empowerment.

The detailed and original empirical work focuses on the ways that problems are articulated and framed that then enable resilience as an effective discursive problem-solving paradigm. The case study selection of the different levels and types of policy actor is well justified. The work first considers the development and ambiguities of resilience discourses through engaging with the work of the UN-Habitat and the Rockefeller Program's 100 Resilient Cities initiative both materially and ideationally. There then follows a closer engagement with policy contexts and actors, especially with three 'leading' international urban centres at the head of resilience policy-making - Barcelona, San Francisco and Santiago, Chile. The analysis of the three cities, facing different problems in different policy and regional contexts works really well to draw out the analysis. The framing - of consideration of the key events that discursively frame the problems and need for resilience as a solution; the discussion of funding sources and agencies; the knowledge actors legitimating, informing and reproducing resilience as a discourse; and the technological projects and platforms leading the policy interventions - works really well.

The analytical engagement with the case study cities and policy and academic materials is very strong with both quantitative and qualitative forms of analysis at a high level of sophistication and very interesting interview material. The amount of work put into the city case studies is particularly impressive with comprehensive framings and process tracing of policy debates around the definitions and approaches to problems and their construction within discourses of resilience and the role of key public and private stakeholders and their assemblages of local, regional and global interaction.

The presentation of the results and conclusion is very strong in that the analytical framework of assemblage draws together well both the empirical and conceptual material, capturing what is unique to resilience as a policy discourse as well as the range of issues and approaches to which it can be applied as well as the contested nature of these processes with often distributed or unintended results. Rather than merely arguing in the abstract that resilience is a neoliberal technology of power the thesis develops a unique framing of three frames through which power circulates making resilience operate in the interests of hegemonic forces, through the channels of funding, knowledge and technology. The conclusions from this analysis are clearly stated in terms of the way in which resilience discursively frames, coheres and reproduces governmental power: firstly, in terms of regulatory power, that percolates through the global system via NGOs and international agencies and funding streams; secondly, in terms of constitutive power, through which problems and their solutions are carved out and shaped on terms which tend to serve the interests of power rather than the vulnerable communities said to be empowered.

Signed:

Professor David Chandler

Date: 6 September 2019

Location: London