

Investigating how the political will for strengthening resilience has developed within Bristol

Thesis Summary

Bristol is consistently rated one of the best places to live in the UK, yet it faces shocks such as severe weather events and disease outbreaks, and chronic stresses such as climate change and growing unemployment. Recently, Bristol has been recognised internationally for its strong leadership in strengthening resilience to these challenges. This study investigates why key organisations within the city are aiming to strengthen resilience. To do so, it uncovers factors that are influencing those organisations, including some that emerge from the city itself, some from the national context of the UK, and some from the international sphere.

In determining why the organisations are aiming to strengthen resilience, this study addressed several research gaps. Much academic work has aimed to untangle the discursive meanings of 'resilience', yet little is understood about how policymakers within cities understand the term. Whilst the term 'political will' is often used to describe why some authorities more effectively manage disaster risk than others, the concept remains vague, with no conclusive definition. This study aimed to address these gaps, by focusing directly on people working to strengthen the resilience of the city, and revisiting the concept of political will.

Thematic analysis of policy documents from the City Council as well as interviews with employees from a range of key organisations working to strengthen resilience throughout the city are used to gather data. The findings are analysed using a framework adapted from existing work on the political economy of disaster risk reduction. 'Political will for strengthening resilience' is reconceptualised as 'an emergent property, that is realised when authorities have the motivation to strengthen resilience to disaster risk, and the broader political economy creates incentives to be able to pursue that agenda'.

Using this framework, the study identifies three underlying motivations that are deeply embedded within the population and institutions of the city, and numerous incentives in the

socio-political-economic environment. It also explores how these motivations and incentives are shaped by the interaction of factors at local, national and international scales, and ultimately converging to create political will. As a result, the study presents many findings that are relevant for Bristol, for other cities worldwide, and for international policy formation.

Key findings include that more incentives are found to be emerging from the local and international-scale than the national-scale, which instead provides several barriers to the city authorities' efforts to strengthen resilience. Additionally, the role of Bristol's legacy as a city that prioritises environmental sustainability and progressive social innovation, is found to play a significant role in shaping its contemporary political will for strengthening resilience. It is also noted that the study is highly exploratory, and the methodological framework should be applied to other case studies before broader conclusions could be induced.