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*Resilience and poverty — concept, question,  
and first results of a qualitative nine country study*

*Summary*

The paper shows the results of the RESCuE project, an in-depth qualitative investigation of 250 vulnerable households, their living conditions and socioeconomic practices across nine European countries on the background of the European crisis since 2008. Two major findings are in the focus: First, the concept of resilience actually proves to be useful and transferable into poverty and social policy research under certain prerequisites. Second, a wide scope of interrelated, substitutable and polyvalent practices allows the rather few resilient households to gain their livelihood from mixed sources. Among a relevant number of them, direct income transfers incomes play only a minor role, while access to various kinds of common goods is playing a substantial role for resilience in low income households. The typological analysis of resilient households shows how the observed socioeconomic practices are associated to certain cultural patterns and values, as well as to personal networks.

**Key words:** poverty, resilience, household, family

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### *Why resilience, and why so in poverty research?<sup>2</sup>*

Despite all activation policies and increased labour market dynamics there is considerable poverty in Europe, even more so during and after the 2008 crisis. Moreover, there is also an unsatisfactory situation in poverty research: There are a lot of well-developed statistical indicators and state of the art knowledge about what hardship and deprivation living in poverty usually means. But we don't know much about the ways vulnerable households actually manage to get by in poverty or how they struggle their way out. And even less is known about how individuals and households at risk are avoiding poverty or, if actually poor, live without claiming their full benefit entitlement, or do not claim at all. Although the majority of under- or non-claiming households may do so for shame or misinformation, but others do so for good reasons, which could include getting by relatively well on own means and activities. While welfare non-take up is rather common — recent estimates for Germany count an additional unregistered poverty population equalling between 34 and 43% of the registered poverty in 2015 (Bruckmeier, Wiemers, 2017) — we do not know much about the numbers, structure and background of those of them who are getting by better than other poor. Although they are quite likely to be a minority in the poverty population, they deserve scientific attention to a high degree: From them, social policy could learn which resources, attitudes and practices actually help low income households to buffer hardships, avoid or reduce benefit dependency, and lead a life better than expected due to their low income.

But there is little research on that topic if at all, just a few bridges crossing gaps and blind spots and a need for conceptual innovation. Research reveals a considerable heterogeneity of situations, life courses and problems in poverty (Newman, Massengill, 2006), which puts intra-group comparison on the agenda (Solga et al., 2013), in order to identify reasons, conditions and backgrounds for those differences in the poverty population. Such kind of intra-group comparison, relatively new to poverty research, is nevertheless well established in other fields, like social psychology and social medicine,

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where the concept of resilience is being used prominently since long to describe intra-group differences in survival, performance, wellbeing or other outcomes. As the improvement of living conditions and wellbeing of people in poverty is at the core of poverty alleviation, resilience has to be considered a promising new concept for analysis in poverty and social policy research, deserving further investigation.

Nevertheless, resilience has not been a sociological concept at first instance. Originating from technology, ecosystems research and psychology, it has spilled over into human geography and disaster research, community research and political sciences (see overviews in: Revilla et al., 2017; Promberger et al., 2015). Although experiencing a certain growth in those disciplines since two decades, the paths to lead the resilience concept into poverty research are few, narrow and rather fresh, like some poverty studies in developing countries (e.g. Béné et al., 2014) or research on deprived urban youth, mainly in the UK and US (e.g. Anthony, 2008). The work presented here is a part of these attempts. It uses the concept as a background for an intensive international qualitative case study analysis on how vulnerable households are actually getting by during and after the European socioeconomic crises after 2008. Following a public call issued by the European Commission in 2013, under the name of *Citizens Resilience in Times of Crisis* under the 7<sup>th</sup> European Research Framework Programme, a project was launched, called RESCuE — *Patterns of Resilience during Socioeconomic Crises among Households in Europe*, and its results are presented here. Section 2 will finetune the concept of resilience for sociological poverty research, section 3 is going to introduce methodology and design of the project. The fourth section will give a dense exemplary impression of the field results, while section 5 shall synthesize selected findings and develop two types as a nucleus of a yet to develop broader typology of resilient households. Some first conclusions will be drawn in section 6. In brief words, this paper tries to give first answers on the questions whether there actually is resilience among low income households, what does this resilience consist of, in what forms does it occur, and what social policy could learn from the resilient households in order to enable others.

### ***How to understand resilience?***

Humanities' and social sciences' literature tells us that resilience basically means that some people of a certain population do better than others under the same adverse conditions, like Emmy Werner, Jessie Bierman, Fern French (1977) and Ann Masten (2001) say. More specifically, resilience means an unexpected and/or above average kind of recovery after a severe shock crisis, trauma or other extreme events; the respective research tradition starts with Victor E. Frankl (1959) and his studies on Nazi concentration camp survivors. Such an above average recovery may mean falling less deep than others, recover more quickly than others, or even thriving (Keck, Sakdapolrak, 2013). And, in a very broad sense, resilience means to adapt, to cope and to transform after an initial shock (ibidem), or to show flexibility and elasticity (Mandrysz, Nowalska-Kapuścik, Wódcz, 2016, p. 59). But those current definitions of resilience are not enough for a transfer

into social sciences' poverty research (Promberger et al., 2015; Dagdeviren, Donoghue, Promberger, 2016).

One problem of transferring the concept into the sociology of poverty is that psychological resilience research strongly emphasizes the inner forces or abilities of people concerned. Sociological research instead has to look for social factors as (complementary) explanatories, not only by definition of sociology, but also as poverty has to be seen not as a personal trait but as a social relation (Simmel, 1906). Five additional elements of resilience can be identified:

- Resilience is not a state but a process, so resilience is developing, can be lost or can be achieved. Resilience is thus not necessarily a stable state. For good reason, Werner (2004) studied resilience among the Kauai children in an extended longitudinal design across several decades.
- Resilience moreover is not a 'yes or no' phenomenon but a gradual one. One particular kind of household practice may lead to different outcomes in different household and family situations and constellations: There are some persons or households who are doing the same but with lesser outcome.
- Resilience consists of resources and action patterns at levels of individuals and groups under certain and specifiable social conditions. Although there are resources within the persons investigated, the emphasis of a social sciences poverty research rests with resources given in natural, cultural and social environments, no matter if some have been appraised to the individual in family history and biography, or form the conditions and resources in a present-day situation.
- Resilience can be identified only in comparison to non-resilience, because if everybody were resilient, the concept would be indistinctive and therefore useless for comparative analysis.
- Resilience may include deviant behaviour or create individual or collective risks or costs to a certain extent; this means to take a non-heroic perspective on resilience (Estêvão, Calado, Capucha, 2017), and to analyse counterproductive potentials of resilience. This is to be involved in a classificatory judgement, which cases and practices are resilient and which not.
- Resilience, in case of poverty research, should be investigated at household level. Private households, no matter if single person or family households, are the basic unit of consumption, sharing and mutual support along direct personal and intimate relations. Individuals are usually not taking socioeconomic decisions for themselves alone, but for or together with cohabitants, family members or other persons in mutual dependence. Even when abilities, resources and risks may also be attributed individually, their handling in everyday life is at household level.
- Resilience, as to be understood in social sciences, means to successfully use degrees of freedom while acting in a set of given constraints (see: Dagdeviren, Donoghue, Promberger, 2016).

Within this framework, resilience might indeed be a new perspective to learn about avoiding poverty while also being at risk, to live in poverty and doing better than expected,

or even to struggle oneself out of poverty. Studying resilience in a social policy context therefore means to look at those few who beat the odds, in order to support better those who don't. On this background, the overall research question of RESCuE is:

- How can a minority of persons or families do well under the same adverse conditions, including a general economic crisis, which bring other people to suffer from hardship?

The project to be presented here investigates resilience at household level, as households usually are the basic unit of socioeconomic analysis. For single person households this is obvious, for pluripersonal households this is justified by the fact that sharing a place of living usually means to share income and domestic work, leisure, emotions and care on the basis of non-commodified relations, if they are symmetric or not. Our sampling decisions did not exclude single person households, but most of them are families in a wider sense, including different forms of cohabitation. The project is aiming at identifying resilient practices of persons and households instead of personal traits of resilient persons, as practice means to interact and communicate both within and outside the household, in order to capture the social about resilience. The RESCuE study implies a broad understanding of crisis: it can stand for an economic crisis, a social crisis, with some focus on the European crisis after 2008, but also take national or local, personal, biographical, or a family crisis into account. The conditions, forms, processes and outcomes of that resilience at various levels were to be investigated.

### *The RESCuE project: design and structure*

As there is little at all known about resilience among low income or poor households, the research undertaken here was decided to apply an explorative design after analysing statistical figures on aggregate developments in economy, poverty and social policy. The nine countries under study were chosen according to an expanded Esping-Andersen (2013) typology, where the standard types of social-democratic, liberal and conservative welfare states were amended by a Mediterranean type (Gal, 2010) and a post-socialist type (suggested by: Aidukaite, 2004; Promberger et al., 2014). Thus, countries investigated were Ireland and United Kingdom as liberal, Germany as a conservative, Finland as a social-democratic, Poland as a post-socialist, Portugal, Greece, Spain and Turkey as Mediterranean welfare states. Moreover, other comparative dimensions were taken into account crossing the borders of welfare state typologies: Familialism reaching out beyond the Mediterranean, different exposure, affectedness and recovery speed after the 2008 economic crisis with some counties never strongly affected, and others still not fully recovered.

Fieldwork started with statistical and literature analysis, followed by more than 100 social policy expert interviews, mainly at local level. Besides collecting background information, the expert interviews were deliberately used to support field access and case selections; thus, the experts had also been selected through contrasting criteria. Subsequently, variations of the sampling strategies were induced to avoid unintended selectivity and ensure contrast, in order to enable for saturation.

Then, one urban and one rural case study setting for each country were selected<sup>3</sup>. In each such setting, twelve contrasting households were selected, living around the poverty line in terms of monetary income. They were interviewed once in a first wave; this narrative biographical interviewing mostly took place in the family homes and was combined with open non-structured participant observation in the home and local environment. Eight out of those twelve families per country and local case study were given cameras and encouraged to take photographs from their life situations through the next four weeks, following an inspirational guide line provided by the research team, but open for their own issues and topics as well. Subsequently, photo elicitation interviews of eight households per case study took place, which counted 16 per country. The total interview body summed up to approximately 600 interviews in about 225 families and with about 100 expert interviews, and the participants' photographic work comprises several thousands of images. This feeds a combination of three hermeneutic methods: text analysis, visual analysis and observation, plus background analysis from expert interviewing and documentary analysis.

### *Impressions from the field*

The visual data allow not only for elaborated visual analysis and triangulation with other data collected, but also to get a first, rich and powerful impression into the life and practices of the households observed. Methodologically, such first impressions are not random or anecdotal, neither fully cognitive in terms of being analytical (see: Barthes, 1981) on *punctum* and *stadium*, as a background for the advanced visual methodology applied here (Bosch, 2018). Moreover, interview and observation data have been put into comparison with visual data. Although this cannot be enfolded here in full, the following examples also include results of those analyses.

**Picture 1. A catch of fish**



Source: picture courtesy of German RESCuE team: M. Boost, L. Meier and M. Promberger.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Rural' is defined here by spatial remoteness from urban infrastructures.

The first picture shows three rainbow trouts (*oncorhynchus mykiss*), one of them an albino variety called golden trout, freshly caught by one of the German case study families. They are a family of five, children in and below elementary school age, living in an East German rural setting, practicing a wide range of activities to gain their livelihood. The male is a painter and sculptor, not unknown in the wider area neither unsuccessful, but with insufficient and unstable income. His perspective on life as an artist can be seen by the arrangement of fish he depicted, recalling biblical associations and related visual traditions about fish, representing not only fish itself, but nourishment and plenitude. Practically, as the picture implies, the interviewee does angling, frequently and successful. Together with his wife, he produces and sells homemade goods and small artwork on seasonal markets — from homemade liquor and fruit jelly to small pictures, dolls or other handicraft, being a main topic of their photographic work for the project. His wife also works as a self-employed trained tailor for bridal costumes. They live on her parents' small farm but in a separate apartment, own one small old car, get by relatively well, do not claim welfare, but insufficient health insurance of the adults adds to income instability. The adults are frequently debating where to invest their resources (labour force, skills, time, means of transportation) best to stabilize their income: The husband's artist's career, or the handicraft business, to which both adults contribute, but which is mainly planned and organised by the wife. Besides the cultural patterns of being a family of artists, nature lovers and country dwellers, they are part of at least four economically powerful networks — first, a network of fellow artists, art purchasers and art intermediaries, second, the kin and peer networks of the respective brides the wife serves with her tailor work, which recommends her to new customers. Third, there is a network of handicraft market salespersons and organisers, supplying seasonal and festival markets, and fourth, the wife's family of origin, providing childcare and cheap housing.

Another image, not depicted here<sup>4</sup>, taken in winter 2015/2016, shows a woman in her mid-20's. An unemployed ex-student, she is standing in front of a shop window in the ground floor of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century five story building in a working class neighbourhood. The shop is no longer a sales place but a local charity's street children support premise, where she works as a volunteer. This activity is not only useful for the children, but gives opportunities for communication and support for herself. The image, taken at the same time of the year and under similar grey winter sky, but by a third person, is both different and similar to those she took herself in and around her apartment. It shows a dialectic symbolism of spray graffiti on the outside wall, broken pavement, well-trodden steps leading into the children's place, warm colour sandstone wall, the woman smiling, while the pictures from her living place are dominated by greyish colours, the window outlook on a winter graveyard, road or track alignments leading into some far distance, but also contrasting by colourful pictures of a panel of friends' holiday postcards, and the warm shine of a desk light illuminating self-made drawings. In pictures and interview, we can see that our respondent is enjoying her time at the street children shop, while her home

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<sup>4</sup> Picture not displayed here for reasons of data protection.

and surrounding seem both lonely, grey, although a place of self-reflection and openness for development into another stage of life to come. When she is at the street children place, she shares info and conversations with street workers and other volunteers, and it is quite common for her to participate in the meals they cook for and with the children, and “if there are some spaghetti left, I may easily take them home”, she tells during the interview. When asked for the relevant resources beyond some basic income support, she mentions an aesthetical and physical relation to nature, which she loves to explore by long walks, photography and own drawings, her couple relations, and the material and psychosocial support through social infrastructure and networks she participates in as a volunteer.

**Picture 2. A family’s blueberry harvest**



Source: picture courtesy of Finnish RESCuE team: M. Tennberg, J. Vola and T. Vuojala-Magga.

Picture 2 is from Northern Finland, late summer 2015, where our third case, a single mother family, presents their blueberry harvest of that day, estimated 3 kg or more. Picking berries is a late summer outdoor occupation which is very common for many families in Finland. For low income families, this is not just an occasional hobby but plays an important role as a seasonal natural added income in a mixed livelihood, composed of gathering and proceeding wild fruit or products of small agriculture and gardening, for self-consumption, sharing or gift exchange, while small or occasional jobs and transfer incomes contribute to the monetary side of the livelihood, and herding, where applicable, stands between market and money on one side, and subsistence production for self-consumption and non-market distribution on the other side, as it may have monetary and non-monetary outcomes (see: Boost, Meier, 2017). Our respondent exemplifies this plurifunctionality as follows:

“I’m in the forest with my children. It is a kind of meaningful exercise and one gets berries for home use. For example, we use a lot of lingonberries and lingonberry jam, really a lot. Children learn to take responsibilities, like berries just don’t walk to the table by themselves”<sup>5</sup>.

The respondent expands that involving children into practical work and responsibility is a very important educational goal for her. Notably, and similar to many pre-modern economic practices, small subsistence economy on natural resources does not only fulfil the manifest function of getting a livelihood, but also latent functions of using and producing knowledge, transferring knowledge and practical skills to children, as well as reproducing family cohesion and social ties. The blueberries and fish, as well as the street children support shop indicate — beyond all differences — the relevance of common goods as resources for resilience.

Those exemplary three out of several hundred investigated examples already demonstrate that the visual impressions shown are quite in accordance with self-descriptions and narratives of the resilient families. Strikingly, resilient families not only developed numerous and partly unusual *economic* patterns of mobilizing additional resources. Some of them are practices belonging to older historical layers of economy seemingly obsolete in modern labour societies of our days, residual, as Raymond Williams (1983) would call them in his studies on culture. Analysing them that way is well justified, as they are not simply economic practices, but *cultural* patterns, aligned with certain understandings, knowledge, skills, narratives, norms and values. These are not part of mainstream discourses on modern economic behaviour, nor on the affirmative neither on their critical side, but nevertheless are deeply inscribed into human behaviour through the evolution of mankind and still at least tacitly or latently present in everyday life — such as sharing, gift exchange, mutual help, solidarity, craftsmanship, wider concepts of family, and plurifunctional networks and communities.

### *A typology of resilient households*

Instead of researching deeper into the economic and cultural practices of resilient low income families (see recent works of: Promberger et al., 2016; Boost, Meier, 2017; Revilla et al., 2017; Bosch, Promberger, 2018), this paper takes a first comparative attempt, which is to reconstruct a typology of resilient households or families. ‘Typology’ here is understood to be the result of an inductive process, its aim is here to identify resources’ and resource mobilization patterns which have been integrated through time and practice into relatively consistent and stable patterns of living. Resilience is identified by economic, physio- and psychosocial stability and wellbeing outcomes that let the studied persons do better than others under similar adversities. The comparison and interpretation process starts with a heuristic differentiation of resources into hidden and overt, economic, social

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<sup>5</sup> Document collected and translated by Finnish RESCuE team: M. Tennberg, J. Vola and T. Vuojala-Magga.

and cultural ones, inspired by Bourdieu's kinds of capital (Bourdieu, 2011). During comparison and interpretation, categorisations of differences and similarities are being refined, fine-tuned, rejected, modified, carefully generalized or abstractified above single case towards at least a between-case level of meaning (see: Kelle, Kluge, 1999; Hempel, Oppenheim, 1936; Soeffner, 1989; Glaser, Strauss, 1967).

While this process of induction is going on, it has to be noted that not only the 'cases themselves' are speaking. It has been widely disregarded in some 'purist' approaches of ethnographic research, that concepts, descriptions and model processes from earlier analysis — what Alfred Schütz (1981) calls second order constructions — come into play anyway, and have to do so, not as nomothetic attempts, but as conceptual heuristics and offers. The consequence is, what the structuralist approaches of qualitative research (Oevermann, 1981; Lévi-Strauss, 1982) do since ever, to bring in categories from the scientific discourse where it helps to sharpen, to abstractify or generalise the analysis instead of exclusively remaining within the language of the field and therefore neglecting the difference between science and non-science, which admittedly is just a gradual one. Moreover, involving theory in the interpretive process after data collection allows concluding and hypothesizing more generally than by inter-case-level concepts only. And, on the other hand, it allows theorizing more sharply connected to comparative case study analysis than pure desktop or armchair theory would allow for (see: Flyvbjerg, 2006). This is not just a methodological statement, but connects well to the fieldwork and analysis, as it has to be noted that 'resilience' is mostly a second order concept for what is practically thought of as "getting by" in adversity well or better than others.

During the analysis, refinements of the starting heuristic categories with some hoped-for but unexpected surprises from the field emerged to be crucial dimensions for the typology: The composition and diversity of the 'mixed livelihoods' in an economic sense, the socioeconomic and cultural environment in which this takes place, like communities, networks, family wideness and concepts, markets, degree of commodification, the cultural backgrounds and practices, mainly knowledge and skills, norms and values and aesthetics (Bosch, Promberger, 2018). The following typology is still under construction and incomplete, but the first two types can already be considered robust and valid enough to introduce them here.

### *Type 1: The self-reliant oikos*

The first type of vulnerable households showing resilience is the 'self-reliant *oikos*'. Self-reliance is an unsatisfying translation for what Friedrich Nietzsche called „Eigensinn" (Negt, Kluge, 1981) and is intended to invoke connotations of alternative practices and values, subjectivity, autonomy, while *oikos* refers to ancient households being a unit of production, distribution, consumption, reproduction, kinship, affection and defence (Finley, 1965). Empirically, the 'self-reliant *oikos* households in the RESCuE study have a multitude of resources and practices at hand: Weaving, knitting, sewing, foraging, fishing,

gardening, woodworks, cooking and car repair — just to mention a few. The multitude of practices allows for substitution and keeping up the model where one practice fails. Those practices are based on knowledge, skills and experience, on few productive assets, the use of common goods, networks and communities, and surrounded by a (sub-) culture at distance to highly commodified life. ‘Don’t put all your eggs in one basket’ was a characteristic saying of those families. But there is not just a multitude and diversity of practices. Most practices are pluri-functional in themselves: In the frequent examples of families gathering wild fruit in the forests or fields, from Finland via Germany and Poland through Spain and Portugal, these activities are deliberately not only meant for having a nice leisure activity, but also replacing purchases, saving money and increasing food quality, but also is a family event strengthening cohesion and fostering a transfer of knowledge and skills from parents to kids. As the interviewees furtherly elaborate in their narratives, such a practice is useful, recreative, relaxing, but also a part of the family’s self-definition of acting within an alternative value system and finding aesthetic self-expression, in which — and there are many such cases among families we observed — nature and solidarity or other social ideas replace the idea of market success. Thus, such cases show an entwinement of social, cultural and economic aspects or functions in a way which has been significant for premodern social life, not only in the ancient Greek concept of *oikos*, but also in lower social classes until the dawn of the industrial age (Malcolmson, 1988) as well as in industrial workers’ biographies until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Deppe, 1982). Residual patterns of culture, having been made obsolete or redundant by social differentiation and progressing divisions of labour are re-emerging in resilient households and families at the fringes of lower income groups in the European crisis since 2008.

Significant risk potentials of the ‘self-reliant *oikos*’ household type are overwork and related health problems, family ruptures, or a lack of entitlements to welfare state premises if their multiple but still small livelihood fails. The self-reliant *oikos* uses multiple resources, among them many active and economically productive local and wider networks. Case examples show up to six supportive networks in just one family: Professionals’, musicians’ networks, neighbourhood and alternative culture networks, local sports club and carnival society. Often, the self-reliant *oikos* is a kind of a spider or knot within a set of overlapping networks. The education often is at mid-level or above, which means the adult household members are often skilled craftsmen or — women, able and willing to do a lot of work on their houses, flats, gardens, repair their car themselves and sell their labour force through one or another of their several networks. Specifically, an extremely wide definition of family is applied by those families: Their friends, colleagues, clients and customers may all be addressed as family. One woman from a ‘self-reliant *oikos*’, working part time for little money in a public youth support scheme referred to her clients as family. Alternative sensemaking and alternative values in the term of “Eigensinn” or non-commodified orientations are extremely important for them, and such are social relations like gift exchange or sharing, implying cultural patterns at huge distance from the highly commodified ways of life. One stunning characteristic is the multifunctionality

of practices which develops into an entwinement of production and reproduction. They produce goods within the family in the household in the premises where they live, involving good craftsmanship and practical aesthetics (Bosch, Promberger, 2018). Usually the resilient families of that type don't claim for basic income support, although they are close to the poverty line. Examples comprise artisans, artists, rural families returning from renting their land out back to subsistence.

This type of resilience comprises households in most countries of the RESCuE investigation. The 'self-reliant *oikos*' is for certain but not exclusively associated with rural or small-town settings and formal or informal property orders which allow for minor use of natural resources on public land, no man's land or unfenced private or self-owned land; it includes cheap housing facilities, often inherited or self-bought at very low prices, low possibilities for formal labour market integration, but sufficient possibilities for network and community based economic activities. The 'self-reliant *oikos*' is certainly not restricted to the 'bohemian' lifestyles of artists and academics.

### ***Type 2: The small entrepreneur/bricoleur***

The second type of resilient households represents a small entrepreneur or bricoleur-entrepreneur making business on very small profit rates or from other households' leftovers, taking high risks on very low margins, where other entrepreneurs would quite soon turn their back to or never enter at all. The bricoleur-entrepreneur stands for creativity with things and persons having been subject to loss, degradation or deprivation. Alternative values, but also just a lack of interest in accumulation plays a certain role here. Again, skills — from skilled craftsmanship to university education (often unfinished or obsolete), practical experiences in former regular jobs — play a crucial role, and so do personal networks for setting up projects or getting customers. As a bricoleur in the sense of Lévi-Strauss (1962), the entrepreneur-bricoleur is fascinated by creatively connecting things, people, and using what is at hand to form something unusual but useful, or making sense in an unexpected way, while his high level of planning and aesthetics applied rejects the negative connotations carried by the Lévi-Strauss' bricoleur concept. Unlike in the 'self-reliant *oikos*', subsistence economy, gift exchange and sharing play a rather small role in the livelihood composition of the small entrepreneur-bricoleur. Self-producing mainly for markets, he or she, often as a couple or family, do certainly not work for just a favour in turn, but seek to gain a monetary income from their activities, and do not hesitate to set up formal cooperation with fellows of the trade, customers or funders when necessary. Nevertheless, their business often has a certain ethical background — like making waste or leftovers useful again, working for fair prices, or working not only for profit but also doing good for underprivileged persons or society. Examples comprise a one-man facility services business, a second-hand shop, an educational entrepreneur and a retail trader in small electronics on a flea market. There is some overlap with third sector and social economy, but not in a constitutive sense.

### ***General results in brief***

Just a small part of vulnerable households is resilient at all<sup>6</sup>. But those who are resilient show a broad scope of different socioeconomic practices, embedded in cultural patterns and organized within social networks. Most resilient households around the poverty line are making their living out of mixed sources, thus their way of living can be called a multisource livelihood or mixed economy. This also includes mixed functions, meanings and cultural embeddings of every single practice. Therefore, interconnectedness, multi-purposefulness, diversity and substitutive elasticity characterise the practices of resilient families.

Resilience of vulnerable households is vulnerable itself and can involve risks which may affect society, community, or the person or household itself. Health problems, substandard access to health care, overwork are threatening resilient persons. Community risks may arise from practices which overstretch the family's share in collective goods (i.e. by water or electricity tapping, over-extraction of natural resources, free riding public transport, or by not giving back in social or gift exchange relations). Resilient practices may also generate public safety risks (insecure heating, buildings or gas tapping). Illegal practices (small theft, fraud, squatting, undocumented labour or entrepreneurship) might pose risks to general society, but were either rarely observed among the resilient households of the RESCuE project, or yielded just very little impact. This risk profile does not differ too much from other working poor households, although those risks are more actual than potential in non-resilient households.

Generally, the present situation of resilient low-income households is better compared to non-resilient others, but situations can change quite quickly and make established practices no longer helpful. Of course, the observed families then try to balance or compensate through substituting one practice with another, but a severe economic crisis can bring this to its limits quite quickly. Moreover, and again similar to other poverty households, risks may distribute asymmetrically within households such as to gender or generations. Gainful activities of these households are not well paid, so they have to make extensive use of their labour force, which may put them in conflict with their health interests and family relations. It has also to be noted that resilience does not lift families very far above non-resilient families, in terms of risks, positive outcomes and quality of life, but it certainly makes a difference, as we could observe, constituted by the levels of resources, level of welfare dependency, activity, motivation, self-esteem and quality of life, compared to non-resilience.

The project has identified a handful of stable and established patterns leading to a typology of resilient households, of which the first two types have been described above. There is a high relevance of productive networks in an economic sense, of family stability, and of cultural capital in terms of practical and professional skills and education. Then,

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<sup>6</sup> The qualitative methodology applied here uses contrast samples instead of random samples. But all the relevant expert interviews addressed resilient cases as extraordinary and small in numbers, compared to other cases of poverty and low income.

resilience, which is very important, requires certain institutionalized social conditions. Among these, we can find a highly relevant role of common goods and of the developed welfare state in a wider sense. While direct transfer incomes from welfare usually are just lenders of the last resort for the resilient households observed, all resilience among low income households, whether in benefit receipt or not, involved common goods. Some of it was shown in the examples given earlier, some were revealed in further analysis: access to nature as a non-commodified source of recreation and alternative values, but also as a direct provider of means of living. Cheap or free education facilities, affordable housing decoupled from market prices, public transport, water, electricity, public baths and libraries, free computer and internet access, not to talk about the social infrastructure of food banks, volunteer jobs, subsidized labour, clothing chambers, charities and counselling. And the welfare state in a wider sense plays an important role in co-funding, creating, warranting, maintaining or tolerating those common goods. Some first consequences from the project thus are not only to keep up and develop the classical welfare state transfer income and support patterns, but also protect and develop common goods and social infrastructures: They make the life of all low-income households easier, no matter whether registered or unregistered poor, if poor or just slightly above of the poverty line. One further consequence is to provide knowledge on how to get by well under adverse conditions, such as developing practical skills for households, information and access to public goods, and key points for network participation.

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*Streszczenie*

Artykuł prezentuje wyniki projektu RESCuE, będącego pogłębionym badaniem jakościowym 250 zagrożonych wykluczeniem społecznym gospodarstw domowych z dziewięciu krajów europejskich, w szczególności ich warunków życia i praktyk społeczno-ekonomicznych na tle kryzysu gospodarczego w Europie w okresie od 2008 r. Szczególne istotne są dwa płynące z nich wnioski. Po pierwsze, koncepcja rezyliencji okazuje się użyteczna i możliwa do przeniesienia do badań nad ubóstwem i polityką społeczną pod pewnymi warunkami wstępnymi. Po drugie, szeroki zakres wzajemnie powiązanych, możliwych do zastąpienia i wielowartościowych praktyk pozwala jedynie niewielu gospodarstwom domowym uzyskać środki do życia ze źródeł mieszanych, w tym bezpośrednich świadczeń, natomiast szczególnie istotny jest dostęp do dóbr wspólnych. Analiza typologiczna tych gospodarstw domowych wskazuje, w jaki sposób praktyki socjoekonomiczne są powiązane z pewnymi kulturowymi wzorcami i wartościami, a także posiadanymi przez nie osobistymi społecznymi sieciami.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ubóstwo, rezyliencja, rodzina, gospodarstwo domowe