How has resilience become such a ubiquitous term? As explained by D. E. Alexander in his paper ‘Resilience and disaster risk reduction: an etymological journey’, resilience stems from resilire, resilio, Latin for ‘bounce’, and hence the idea of ‘bouncing back’. Seneca used it in the sense of ‘to leap’, Ovid to ‘to shrink or contract’ and Pliny the Elder to describe the actions of fleas and frogs. Alexander goes on to explain:

‘This meaning was strongly perpetuated in the proverbs of St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420). It is of note that many of these uses had negative connotations – e.g. the rebounding was not a happy result, or the subject person recoiled in his desire to dissociate himself from what was going on.

Much later, the term passed into Middle French (résiler), in which it came to mean to ‘retract’ or ‘to cancel’, and then it migrated across the Channel into English as the verb ‘resile’, a word that appears in the State Papers of King Henry VIII in 1529 and evidently relates to his troubles with his first queen, Catherine of Aragon (1485 – 1536). Here, it was used again in the sense of ‘retract’, ‘return to a former position’ or ‘desist’.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, resilience was still used in the sense of rebounding, and the two nouns and verb were used in various ways to denote the concepts of rebounding, elasticity and fickleness. It was in 1839 that resilience was used to signify the ability to recover from adversity, in the sense of fortitude.²

The first serious use of the term resilience in mechanics appeared in 1858, employed to describe the strength and ductility of steel beams. Importantly, it was used in 1867 as a descriptor of the robustness of the cladding of the prototype iron ships, wherein lies the origin of the modern use of the term in civil protection.

‘A resilient steel beam survives the application of a force by resisting it with strength (rigidity) and absorbing it with deformation (ductility). By analogy, the strength of a human society under stress is its ability to devise means of resisting
disaster and maintaining its integrity (coherence),
while the ductility lies in its ability to adapt to
circumstances produced by the calamity in order
to lessen their impact.’³

At about the same time further applications of
the term were being made in coronary surgery,
anatomy and watch making. The migration of the
term resilience from mechanics, manufacturing and
medicine to ecological systems dates from the mid
twentieth century, as does its use in the social
sciences, which began in a small way in the
1950s.⁴ The use of the term ‘resilience’ in the
developmental psychopathology of children owes
much to the work of the American psychiatrist
Norman Garmezy (1918–2009). It has obviously
not proved as straightforward to apply resilience to
social systems as to scientific matters; ‘Resilience in
ecological systems is about how they preserve their
integrity, which in social systems the concept is
more complex and diffuse’⁵.

The purpose of this swift summary is not so much
to chart the history of the term but to highlight the
interesting shifts between resistance and resilience,
rigidity and ductility, perpetuating a situation and
adapting to it. These changing interpretations are
very pertinent to the articles in this issue of the
Journal.

From ecology and engineering, resilience theory
migrated to the field of disaster research, where it
became the basis for a new focus on the resilience
of human communities. Following 9/11, and

reinforced by the impacts of Hurricane Katrina,
resilience became part of the rhetoric of the
As explored in the article ‘Resilience and Homeland
Security: Patriotism, Anxiety, and Complex System
Dynamics’: ⁶

‘The second reason resilience works so well for the
homeland security community is that it appears
more ‘pro-active’ – to use contemporary
management-speak – than the alternatives,
vulnerability and protection (Wilbanks, 2010).
Vulnerability might be seen as implying weakness,
while protection implies a purely defensive stance.
Resilience, on the other hand, enables patriotic
appeals to American values, to quote Jeanette (sic)
Napolitano. (U.S. Homeland Security Secretary
2009 – 13)

“America is a strong nation. And we are a resilient
nation. But … we can’t guarantee there won’t be
another successful terrorist attack … if that attack
comes, our enemies will still not have succeeded,
because our nation is too strong, and too resilient,
to ever cower before a small group of violent
extremists. We have always rebounded from
hardships and challenges, and come together as
a people to overcome disasters, attacks, and war.
And we will do so again”.’

This use has spread and has been adapted to suit
the threats posed by the global banking and
economic crash of 2008, and increasingly
associated with austerity politics.
In presenting his Budget in 2014, George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer for the United Kingdom, described the new twelve-sided pound coin as a ‘more resilient pound for a more resilient economy’ before committing to continued austerity measures. And there have been, and continue to be, numerous European Union research studies and policy papers e.g. ‘How can the EU European Union take forward the resilience agenda: a ten point plan.’

Inevitably discussion about resilience in an arts context focuses on the impact of austerity. Arguably, just as with Homeland Security, resilience has rhetorical power, and places emphasis on a pro-active response to the challenges of severe cuts to government spending in many countries. Austerity is an ideological choice for politicians and political employment of the term resilience seeks to make a virtue out of what is promoted as necessity. Further, it shifts the responsibility to those affected to find robust solutions to the chosen policy of reducing public funding and social structures of support for the less resilient. Alexander points out that:

‘In the rush to employ the term ever more widely, contrary and cautionary voices have been raised. For example, Hornborg (2009) argued that resilience thinking consistently relies on the assumption that the social order is based upon consensus, while the neoliberal capitalist system involves dispossession and exploitation, in ways that are inimical to the acquisition of safety and robust defences against hazards. Ideas of this kind are capable of changing the conception of societal resilience radically, and they therefore deserve careful consideration.’

Resilience has rhetorical power, and places emphasis on a pro-active response to the challenges of severe cuts to government spending in many countries. This is an interesting point in relation to the arts, where museums, galleries and other cultural organisations occupy positions ranging between the establishment as represented by national and local government, acting as guardians of public collections, providing a public service, as educational establishments, and the questioning and sometimes radical agendas of individual artists and contemporary arts organisations. Diana Coutu, writing in the Harvard Business Review has surveyed research into resilience and observes that

‘...almost all the theories overlap in three ways. Resilient people, they posit, possess three characteristics: a staunch acceptance of reality; a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful; and an uncanny ability to improvise. You can bounce back from hardship with just one or two of these qualities, but you will only be truly resilient with all three.'
These three characteristics hold true for resilient organisations as well.’

Arts organisations tend to meet these criteria for resilience very well. They are certainly adept at improvising and making do with few resources. They have strongly held values and beliefs that their work is meaningful and these support their core purpose and mission. When taking decisions about how to sustain an organisation these values are crucial in determining the direction to take.

‘Since finding meaning in one’s environment is such an important aspect of resilience, it should come as no surprise that the most successful organisations and people possess strong value systems. Strong values infuse an environment with meaning because they offer ways to interpret and shape events.’

It is notable that many people representing the arts and those that work in the arts – particularly in learning and participation roles – speak with a missionary zeal about their work.

‘Businesses that survive also have their creeds, which give them purposes beyond just making money. Strikingly, many companies describe their value systems in religious terms. Pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson, for instance, calls its value system, set out in a document given to every new employee at orientation, the Credo. Parcel company UPS talks constantly about its Noble Purpose.

Value systems at resilient companies change very little over the years and are used as scaffolding in times of trouble. UPS Chairman and CEO Mike Eskew believes that the Noble Purpose helped the company to rally after the agonising strike in 1997. Says Eskew: “It was a hugely difficult time, like a family feud. Everyone had close friends on both sides of the fence, and it was tough for us to pick sides. But what saved us was our Noble Purpose. Whatever side people were on, they all shared a common set of values. Those values are core to us and never change; they frame most of our important decisions. Our strategy and our mission may change, but our values never do.”

The way that this interesting distinction between strategy and values is expressed is rather saccharine but it highlights how individuals within an organisation, and the artists they work with, can have different motivations and ethical standpoints. At times of threat or when struggling to survive, lively debate about how different aspects of the organisation contribute to the core purpose can cause ideological rifts. And the sense of meaning that drives an individual’s resilience might conflict with the organisation’s resilience, including ethical objections to particular issues - such as outsourcing or sponsorship – and complicate otherwise straightforward business and financial decision-making.

This edition of the Journal is arranged in three sections. In keeping with the scope of applications and interpretations of resilience, it starts at a meta policy...
level and moves on to look at the strategies that particular arts institutions are employing to sustain and develop their work. It concludes with research into and examples of how engaging with the arts can assist individuals in building some of the qualities and skills that contribute to personal resilience.

**The big picture**

**Mark Robinson** reminds us that arts organisations should never merely be responsive to changing circumstances but take the initiative in identifying challenges and threats in an ongoing process of analysis, re-assessment and adaptation. Robinson argues for a pro-active resilience, which might be urgently needed in the current financial climate but which should continuously take account of a range of shifting issues, which might include developments in the arts themselves, the interests of artists, new technology, competitors and the needs and circumstances of audiences.

For a sector that has the resilient qualities of strongly held values and sense of meaning there are fundamental questions to address, including ‘is this organisation effectively achieving its mission?’, ‘how could it adapt to achieve its purposes with less or different resources?’, and ‘when will it have fulfilled its purpose and should make way for something else?’. Robinson’s proposed ‘adaptive resilience‘ demonstrates the concept of ‘ductility’:

*The paradox is that being more resilient does not give anyone a greater ability to stay the same.*

It gives you the potential to change, to adapt, to shift to another model when helpful, in keeping with your core purpose and values, rather than merely at someone else’s behest.’

**Susan Jones** updates her provocation ‘Where is the place for art?’ presented at engage’s 2011 annual conference, asking ‘Are arts buildings the “place for art” or could they in future be viewed as memorials to the heady, finance-at-the-ready pre 2007 era? In arguing for a holistic approach Jones makes similar points – in fact quoting Robinson, in her case discussing the dangers of policy makers intent on preserving flagship institutions without recognising the complex and interwoven nature of the arts, embracing children and students and their education, individual artists, production and dissemination, different scales of organisation and different methodologies for engagement across large urban and rural or isolated communities.

Jones also questions a lack of fresh thinking about how organisations can achieve their mission and the common emphasis on finance when addressing resilience, without necessarily recognising and harnessing the wide range of assets and skills available in the arts. These include the commitment and creativity of artists, staff, volunteers and audiences.

In March this year Battersea Arts Centre suffered a major fire but the following week Charlotte Higgins reported in *The Guardian* that ‘the mood at the
theatre is resilient, and the shows are going on’. Arguably very few threats are as severe as the destruction of a performance venue but it has revealed an extraordinary level of public support that the Centre could not have imagined existed; ‘schools have baked cakes; other theatres have offered space and support; £70,000 in donations has flooded in; even the Brownies have pitched in. A wall in the staff’s temporary office has pinned to it hundreds of messages of support and solidarity’. This story indicates an organisation that is tuned to its audiences and at the heart of its community, which has potential untapped resources.

In selecting articles for this issue I was struck with how little mention there was of artistic policy, which is the foundation of all cultural organisations and fundamental to their relevance to audiences and to their survival. In her article ‘The Hierarchy of Authority’ **Yasmin Canvin**, Director of Fermynwoods Contemporary Art in Northamptonshire in the UK, shares the thinking that her organisation has gone through to assess its role, its specific assets and how it can not only sustain but also improve its work and extend its reach. Its conclusion has been drawn out of experience of previous work and centres firmly on the artist; the artist as creator and subject of the artistic programme but also a valuable and valued resource. This understanding ‘makes artistic practice the driver to sustainability rather than sustaining the organisation in order to work with artists’.

Moving to a European policy level, **Guilio Stumpo** reports on research that he has undertaken for the European Commission on the resilience of employment in the Cultural and Creative Sectors during the financial crisis and following recession. Many of us are unaware of this kind of study and it reminds us that the arts and wider creative industries are important to the economy of many countries and offer considerable and increasing employment, especially amongst young people.

‘The awareness of a relationship between resilience in cultural employment and public investment should be one of the factors that can justify a stronger public policy for the Cultural sector in the European Union.’

‘The implications of this research can be summarised as follows: there are different developmental paths in different European regions and therefore we suggest the need for a deeper analysis in specific cultural and creative districts. The practical implication is that investments in Cultural and Creative Sectors can produce ‘good’ employment; cultural and creative professionals are able to easily change or modify their behaviours and in this way are more resilient than other workers. Cultural policies that focus on the development of the job market can have a stronger and longer effect in the middle term.’

**Practical strategies for resilience**

In the second section contributors report on practical and creative strategies that they are
employing to further their work – or indeed survive – against a background of funding cuts and also changes in the wider social and educational contexts for their work in learning and participation.

In her role as a consultant developing links between schools and arts organisations across Kent and Medway in the south of England, **Michele Gregson** describes a county-wide programme to develop youth leadership through arts practice, working in district partnerships comprising arts organisations, artists, schools and children and young people (CYP) to build resilience and capacity.

**Lisa Gale’s** article also explores the benefits of working collaboratively to maintain and increase schools’ participation in arts and culture and sustainable relationships between schools, CYP and arts organisations at a time when arts education is under threat. The CoastEd project brings together five arts organisations on the south coast of England to pool administration and marketing.

Capital developments are exciting but can destabilise organisations and take a toll on staff who have to manage ongoing activities during the disruptive building phase and plan for an expanded remit in the future. **Tom Goddard** describes how, during the major redevelopment of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea, Wales, the learning department has had to move off-site, continue with its programme and at the same time pave the way for:

‘A focus on a new dynamic and creative synergy between the collections, exhibitions and learning programmes. The gallery’s strategic plans aim to improve access and social inclusion to provide more meaningful engagement for both our existing and wider new audiences, as well as supporting the authority’s anti-poverty initiatives for inner city areas.’

In another practical article, **Vicky Chapter** reports on a partnership between Aspex Gallery and the University of Portsmouth, England, designed to tackle the difficulties that arts graduates find in gaining employment, and the issues faced by Aspex in delivering a learning programme due to the loss of 40% of its core staff after funding cuts.

The articles reflect the pressure on public funding across Europe and the consequent focus on resilience in the arts, cultural and education sectors but the situation is similar and the problems reported familiar across the developed world. **Amber Walls**, who previously worked in strategic arts development for Nottingham City Council, moved to New Zealand a few years ago and reports:

‘I’m afraid resilience is also the big conversation here in New Zealand (NZ) ... a recent report produced by the Creative Coalition (Auckland arts sector movers and shakers) - Creative Ecology: A New Model for Resilience in Creative Communities was produced to articulate a new
way of conceptualising the creative ecology using a systems resiliency model. NZ didn’t take such a crash in the financial crisis but we do have the same talk of cuts/reductions in public spending, and though they are not as severe, they have the same impact in effect because there’s historically been much less investment in the arts and in public services. Comparatively we have significantly less public services, a large, fragmented and competitive voluntary and private sector, a decade of neo-liberal policies, and hence extraordinary levels of competitiveness to thrive and survive.’

Nicolle Nugent, Educator-Community Programs at MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, observes the current focus on resilience in Canada and – on a positive note – sees potential for learning:

‘Resilience plays an instrumental role within the context of change. I can relate to all of the definitions you listed in the call for articles. I see national gallery education colleagues playing larger roles within their institutions these days. In the context of change, our institutions rely more heavily on those poised to connect with and engage audiences ... I honestly believe we are in the most exciting years for educators in galleries.’

This is view echoed by Martina de Luca and Susanne Meurer, who work in the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna in Rome. They note that with scarce public funding there is greater scrutiny of the value of investing in culture, which lies increasingly with the relation between the museum and society, with a stronger emphasis on building relationships with audiences, which in turn want to be more involved as active participants.

‘This role has been recognised by public governmental institutions in Italy, which offer increased support for the ‘sideways’ of art: not only the museum and exhibition count, but attention has been drawn more and more to how people get involved in art and how art can affect their lives, and obviously museum education is the main vehicle for addressing this.’

They describe the project The Memory of Beauty that provides opportunities for people with Alzheimer’s disease and their carers to engage with art, with the support and evaluation of a medical institution. As with the programme at Aspex, this project benefits the institution and the participating individuals. It demonstrates social value for the gallery and has been shown to have positive effects on the cognitive abilities of those with Alzheimer’s and the carers’ emotional health.

**Developing resilience amongst children and young people**

The third section pursues this potential for working with art to contribute the development of resilience amongst individuals, particularly children and young people. Dr. Michael Ungar, Co-Director of the Resilience Research Centre, has suggested an understanding of resilience that is relevant here:
‘In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their wellbeing, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways.’

The first contribution comes from Angie Hart and colleagues who are part of the boingboing community of practice, based in Brighton in the UK, that supports resilience research and practice. This article describes their research into how working with the arts – in this case the visual arts – can develop resilience amongst children and young people, sets out the five key components of resilience that are crucial to their wellbeing and personal development and goes on to look at specific examples.

‘Safe to Imagine, Space to Belong’ is just such an initiative taken by The Hepworth in Wakefield in the UK. Rebecca Andrew, Natalie Walton and Gillian Brent reflect frankly here on the issues associated with working with young women from a rent deposit scheme with the aim of finding ways for them to connect with their locality and in so doing raise their sense of belonging and their aspirations.

Taking as their case study We Forgot the Lot!, a project developed in collaboration between Touretteshero and the Schools and Teachers team at Tate Britain, London, Leanne Turvey and Alice Walton look at the idea of ‘resilience’ in relation to ‘resistance’. In doing so they highlight the problems associated with resilience as a means of maintaining a status quo, of bouncing back, and promote a more critical and radical understanding that seeks to question and if necessary change current norms:

‘So, for example, to cope with austerity rather than challenge the structures that brought the global economies to collapse. Crucially, this can be when communities face very real and pressing erosions of civil rights, such as the recent losses experienced by disabled people in the UK.’

Opening up the gallery to young people with Tourettes and supporting them to use it as they wished not only increased the participants’ confidence in their abilities to interact with each other and the art on display, it emphasised their right to access and enjoyment of this public institution. Rather than questioning how the young people could fit in and how they should behave, it questioned the rationale and mores of an institution that is not always flexible and responsive to different audiences, or confident in supporting access for communities with particular needs.

There are currently huge numbers of displaced peoples, many living in refugee camps whilst others have managed to move to new countries, hoping to settle more permanently, with the need to adjust to a new way of life in an unfamiliar cultural context. Line Ali Chayder, Art Educator at the
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, has responded to this situation with the project *Travelling with Art*, a learning project for refugee children. She wondered how encounters with art might strengthen the children socially and verbally, and believed that the museum had the potential to make a difference by creating content and positive experiences for children living in transit, at a time when the political attitude towards refugees was becoming more tense.

In Nicosia, Cyprus, the challenge for those working in arts education is to play a role in challenging the established ethno-national split in the city, supporting conflict resolution and promoting integration. **Evanthia Tselika** relates research into socially engaged arts practices and museum education to the situation in Nicosia and describes two projects with the aim of changing the perceptions of young people.

Turning to mainstream education, **Andee Collard** has written an impassioned argument for the role of contemporary art in developing self-confidence, questioning received wisdom and independent thinking amongst students. As a teacher in the UK, Collard is working to do his best for the young people he teaches and remain true to his beliefs about education and art against the reduction in status and opportunities to study art in schools and an increasingly bland and examination focused curriculum.

When calling for proposals for this issue of the Journal I questioned whether a visual arts education – as it has been understood at least in the UK over the last forty to fifty years, and committed to by Andee Collard – engenders resilience. I had in mind qualities and skills such as critical and independent thinking, problem solving, and being inventive with limited resources.

In the final article artists **Mike Winnard** and **Lester Drake** talk about how they and fellow artists are addressing the challenges they face in pursuing their practice after graduation. Winnard and Drake criticise the university education they received for not encouraging students to consider how they would create viable businesses or helping them to plan for life on graduation. Their article demonstrates how the skills innate to art practice are contributing to the strategies they are employing, and in summing up they neatly refer us back to Mark Robinson’s notion of adaptive resilience:

‘Ultimately, resilience is an issue that will always need to be addressed; as the broader climate shifts our tools and approaches are in constant need of reassessment. Correspondingly we as artists must be committed – and equipped – to constantly navigate new terrain.’

Mike Winnard and Lester Drake
Notes


10. [https://hbr.org/2002/05/how-resilience-works](https://hbr.org/2002/05/how-resilience-works)

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.