Performative Promise or Transformative Power?
– Reimagining Culture in Urban Resilience Strategies

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ABSTRACT

European cities are facing increasing pressure from multiple, interconnected crises ranging from climate disasters and socio-political upheaval to democratic erosion. Under these conditions, resilience has emerged as a guiding framework for urban policy. This thesis employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the role of culture in urban resilience strategies across Europe and examines how the dynamics of municipal governance influence its integration. Despite the increasing recognition of culture's potential in academic discourse on resilience, the analysis of 30 European urban resilience strategies and seven expert interviews reveals that culture's multidimensional and transformative potential is largely neglected. The findings of the policy analysis reveal two patterns: (1) culture is implemented to maintain the status quo rather than to foster transformation, and (2) it is reduced to easily measurable policies, such as heritage and tourism. The thesis argues that this approach limits culture's critical potential and reflects broader neoliberal tendencies in urban governance. The expert interviews further highlight that the integration of culture is hindered by two factors: conflicting institutional logics and a general lack of awareness. Cultural actors are often excluded from resilience planning because of their critical and alternative perspectives on resilience that do not align with the dominant, technocratic approach of municipalities. Furthermore, while culture departments are structurally isolated, resilience teams are often shaped by sustainability-focused backgrounds. As a result, the narrative that culture does not contribute to sustainability is perpetuated in resilience thinking. This leads to missed opportunities for using culture as a strategic driver of long-term, inclusive change. Moreover, the lack of structural, interdepartmental cooperation prevents the cultural sector from being recognized and funded as a fundamental component of resilience. The thesis concludes with three recommendations: (1) reorienting policy towards a dynamic and inclusive resilience paradigm that includes cultural and democratic dimensions, (2) advancing an academic resilience framework that acknowledges the multidimensional and transformative potential of culture, and (3) ensuring long-term, structural funding for the cultural sector to support inclusive, participatory, and place-based transformation. By using culture as a lens, this thesis critiques the dominant managerial logic of resilience planning and advocates for a more inclusive, democratic, and context-sensitive approach. Furthermore, it contributes to cultural policy studies by revealing the structural and discursive barriers that prevent the meaningful integration of culture into broader policy frameworks.

Word Count: 16.276

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definition
100RC	100 Resilient Cities
CRO	Chief Resilience Officer
ECOC	European Capital of Culture
EU	European Union
ICLEI	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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1   Introduction

We live in a time of extremes that has been described as one of the most difficult years since the 1950s (Schwarz, 2024). Europe is challenged not only by the war in Ukraine but also by the climate crisis, growing migration movements, and the rise of far right-wing parties that threaten democracy. The concept of polycrisis is often used in this context to describe a situation in which several emergencies occur simultaneously and are causally linked, reinforcing each other and thus amplifying their overall impact (Lawrence et al., 2022). In this context, the notion of resilience appears to be important, especially on urban agendas (Datola, 2023). This could be due to chronic stresses in cities, which are mostly related to social problems such as housing shortages (Hoare et al. 2019) and rising crime rates (Bulkeley, 2013). In addition, acute shocks such as climate disasters, pandemics and political unrest underline the need to build adaptive and transformative capacity at the urban level (Horgan & Dimitrijević, 2020).

1.1   Urban Resilience and the Cultural Dimension

As one of the most influential concepts of the 21st century, urban resilience has shaped the thinking of policymakers, international financial organizations, municipalities, NGOs and activists around the world. Originally, the concept was closely linked to its roots in the natural sciences and was considered close to sustainability (Leitner et al., 2018). Today, its definition has broadened, referring to the capacity of an urban system and its interrelated socio-ecological and socio-technical networks to absorb disturbances, sustain or quickly restore essential functions, and adapt or transform in response to current or future challenges (Meerow et al., 2015). Despite this, resilience is often criticized for shifting the responsibility of the state to the individual level while justifying state withdrawal and austerity policies (Brassett, 2018), which is why it is seen as an extension of neoliberal logic (Samaraweera, 2021).

Simultaneously, the concept has a crucial potential if it is used to strategically deal with uncertainty and enables a long-term perspective on risk. Especially if a holistic approach is used that includes different sectors and actors, these neoliberal market logics could even be criticized (Corry, 2014). Specifically, the imagination and promotion of alternative practices that oppose neoliberalism are crucial here (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016). Cultural actors and artists can serve as role models who embody these alternative practices and are embedded in networks that are characterized by solidarity and reciprocity (Pratt, 2017). Thus, they create creative solutions to these increasingly complex crises while promoting solidarity,

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responsibility and togetherness (Schwarz, 2024). Additionally, culture can play an immense role in the creation of symbolic content that can transform values and change behavior, which is essential for future transformation in the European Union (EU) (Köster & Belda, 2023). This is highlighted by numerous case studies that show that culture contributes in various domains to urban resilience. Examples range from improving the general well-being of the population (Donelli et al., 2021), creating a sense of belonging (Amirtahmasebi & Schupbach, 2024), contributing to the economy (Bulkeley, 2013), as well as promoting social cohesion and adaptive transformation (Cooke & Lazzeretti, 2019). This twofold role of culture as a contributor and role model makes it a "'poster child' of resilience" (Pratt, 2017, p. 127), which could be specifically helpful for urban challenges (Montalto et al., 2019).

The transformative power of culture has gained importance in recent years (Amirtahmasebi & Schupbach, 2024), which corresponds to resilience because it is not only aimed at *bouncing back* but using crises as an opportunity for systemic change (Donelli et al., 2021; Horgan & Dimitrijević, 2020). Through practices such as creative placemaking, culture can contribute to this level in urban contexts. Its potential lies in the ability to activate locally anchored knowledge, facilitate participatory processes and rethink resilience as a creative restructuring of urban life (Yue, 2020). However, neoliberal governance, prevalent in contemporary urban policy, focuses on technocratic approaches, meaning that this critical potential of resilience is often dismissed. This thesis goes beyond examining the role of culture and explores why this sector is often neglected despite increasing calls for the inclusion of culture in all policy areas (Borrup & Zitcer, 2024). Particularly in national resilience strategies, culture is largely overlooked in terms of its transformative potential (Betzler et al., 2023). However, as cities are more closely connected to local knowledge and needs, they are more agile (Eneqvist & Karvonen, 2021) and act as drivers of policy innovation. Therefore, they often influence overarching policy developments (Durrer et al., 2023), which is why it is worth investigating this level.

1.2 Contribution and Structure of the Thesis

Building on these insights, the present thesis investigates what role is assigned to culture in urban resilience strategies in Europe and how municipal governance dynamics influence its integration. To answer the first part of the research question, 30 urban resilience strategies are examined with regard to cultural measures, their level of resilience (Frigotto et al., 2022) and their contribution to the dimension of urban resilience (Ribeiro & Gonçalves, 2019). The second part of the research question is answered by means of seven semi-structured interviews, primarily with Chief Resilience Officers (CROs).

Although literature highlights the immense influence of resilience networks and their partners on strategy development (Tierney, 2015; Zebrowski, 2020), this study deliberately places an internal focus on municipal governance. As CROs are usually senior city officials (Hofmann, 2021), they were able to offer particularly deep insights into internal decision-making processes, especially relevant when examining the integration of culture. This mixed-methods approach allows for deeper insights with the triangulation with literature to understand the difference between rhetoric and practice of culture in the context of urban resilience.

Thus, this thesis contributes to the academic discussion by highlighting the obstacles to the integration of culture in the resilience context. Furthermore, it uses culture as a lens to show the proximity of the concept to sustainability and the prevalence of neoliberal thinking at the urban level. At the same time, resilience is used as a lens to illustrate obstacles to the holistic integration of culture in city-wide policy contexts. In doing so, this thesis takes a critical stance towards the latter observations and points to necessary steps to utilize culture in urban resilience strategies that serve citizens by demonstrating the critical potential of resilience, which underpins the social relevance of the thesis.

To achieve this, the present research is structured as follows. In Chapter 2, the theoretical basis is laid by (1) introducing resilience in the context of neoliberalism, (2) defining the concept of urban resilience, (3) describing the instrumentalization of culture in cities, in contrast pointing out, (4) the critical potential that cultural actors hold for resilience, and (5) the multidimensionality of culture. (6) A summary is provided at the end of Chapter 2 to conclude important insights and point out how culture should be used in the context of resilience. Subsequently, the methodology is described in Chapter 3 and encompasses three sections on (1) case selection, (2) data collection, and (3) data analysis. In Chapter 4, the findings are presented: firstly, the findings of the content analysis, highlighting culture's role in stabilizing the status quo and a focus and measurability, while the second section discusses the findings of the expert interviews that focus on conflicting logics of culture and resilience and the lack of awareness of culture in this context. Based on these findings, Chapter 5 provides three recommendations for policy and academia. The final, sixth chapter presents the conclusions, highlights key findings, and outlines limitations and future research directions.

2   Theoretical Background

This chapter examines the connections between culture, resilience, and the urban context. As cities react to specific shocks and stresses in a technocratic and managerial manner, the first section examines resilience, its emergence in neoliberalism and its critical potential. Section 2.2 analyzes resilience in the urban context, including relevant frameworks. The role of culture in today's cities is explored in Section 2.3, highlighting its often performative and instrumental usage, while the fourth section outlines the potential of cultural actors as role models and structural funding as a prerequisite for culture's independent and transformative role. The latter is examined in Section 2.5, specifically in regard to urban resilience. Subsequently, in the final, sixth section, the ideal role of culture is outlined, and the findings are summarized.

2.1   Resilience: Instrument of Neoliberalism or Vehicle for Transformation?

2.1.1   The Evolution of Resilience

To date, the concept of resilience has not been uniformly defined (Copeland et al., 2020). As it is used in various disciplines, the context strongly influences how it is understood (Mulligan et al., 2016). However, resilience has its roots in the natural sciences and ecology (Folke et al., 2010; Walker & Cooper, 2011). This explains why the concept gained prominence in the 1980s along with sustainability and was initially used almost synonymously (Gupta & Gupta, 2019). Resilience enables systems to withstand and recover from crises (Zamboni, 2017). Furthermore, it is essential to understand resilience as an ongoing process rather than a fixed output (Almedom et al., 2007; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000), as this has important implications for the long-term development of resilience strategies.

The 2007/2008 financial crisis, which was a shock or crisis per se, gave the concept renewed relevance. However, the concept has attracted much criticism as it contributes to the stabilization of neoliberal concepts such as market logic, the legitimization of austerity and the reinforcement of social inequalities (Glenn, 2018).

2.1.2   Resilience in the Neoliberal Discourse

Neoliberal discourse continues to be a dominant force in political thought and policymaking (Glenn, 2018). One of its most prominent proponents, Adam Smith, introduced the concept of the *invisible hand* in 1776, which promises optimal economic outcomes when individual decisions are coordinated in free, competitive markets (Rosenberg, 2020). Therefore, external interventions, for example, by the state, are seen as the main cause of

economic problems. Consequently, neoliberalism calls on the state to reduce or withdraw from economic activities (Rosenberg, 2020), which is usually done in the area of social infrastructure (Horgan, 2020). This illustrates another important principle of neoliberalism, which emphasizes the self-reliance of individuals and organizations (Dalal, 2016). This is also reflected in a shift of responsibility from the state to the private sector, which is expected to regulate itself and adapt to uncertain and difficult conditions. In this sense, resilience serves as a justification for reducing state activities (Brassett, 2017), austerity measures and the call for citizens to adapt.

Milton Friedman, a supporter of neoliberalism and Nobel Prize winner, had already understood that crises can be used to create real change. However, he utilized them to implement neoliberal agendas. As Klein (2007) notes, disasters were used by Friedman as democracy-free zones to impose radical reforms such as school privatization. This form of *disaster capitalism* (Klein, 2007) can take forms where the status of austerity is simply accepted as a given and it is proposed to simply adapt to it rather than to question this structural problem (Glenn, 2018). The latter also explains why more attention is paid to resilience compared to resistance thinking – it closely aligns with the underlying assumptions and ideas of neoliberalism. In this respect, resilience does not challenge neoliberal thinking but ensures that its measures are implemented (Glenn, 2018).

This is in line with the concept of *new planetary vulgate* by Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001), according to which a new language emerges with neoliberalism that normalizes certain concepts (e.g. employability, flexibility) while marginalizing more political words (e.g. class, inequalities). Even if resilience is not explicitly mentioned, it is understood as part of this new language (King et al., 2021). Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001) argue that these words are often disseminated by major institutions (e.g. the World Bank, OECD) under the assumption of universality, although they are strongly influenced by neoliberal ideology. However, this new language of neoliberalism presents three problems: (1) the acceptance of the words leads to them seeming to be without alternative and thus evading any criticism; (2) the legitimization of political decisions, so that resilience, for example, becomes not only a goal but also a measure of laws; and (3) such words obscure the actual causes of neoliberalism (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001). This neoliberal vocabulary shapes cultural narratives. A prominent example is Florida's (2002) concept of the *creative class*, which celebrates flexibility, innovation and entrepreneurial self-reliance, thus ignoring structural inequalities and bringing cultural ideals in line with neoliberal values.

2.1.3   *Resilience as Justification for Austerity*

This dynamic becomes apparent through the introduction of the *Catalyst* projects in England. In 2012, the Arts Council England and the Department for Digital, Culture, Music, and Sport launched a £100 million fund. The aim was to strengthen the resilience of culture to mitigate the consequences of budget cuts by building entrepreneurial skills. However, this approach reinforced the tendency of austerity policies and the shift towards more private funding (Pinder, 2023). This is in line with the findings of Gupta and Gupta (2019), who show that resilience is often introduced as a political keyword to justify public budget cuts and advance neoliberal restructuring, albeit in a way that appears both positive and inevitable.

Furthermore, resilience serves as an instrument for the performative enforcement of neoliberal structures and the reinforcement of existing power imbalances. This is because large and prestigious institutions can better mitigate a reduced state funding budget through private sponsors than smaller institutions or independent actors (Newsinger & Serafini, 2019). This illustrates how resilience privileges those who are already able to survive crises, while marginalizing those who are most affected by them (Brassett, 2018). The alarming aspect of this development is that, particularly in the cultural sector, the presence of many private funding partners is seen as resilient and positive, although it reinforces social and economic hierarchies (Pinder, 2023). This focus on neoliberal state withdrawal and the reinforcement of existing power structures led to the criticism that the concept's character is "being regressively status quo" (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016, p.143), rather than fostering genuine transformation. However, as mentioned above, resilience holds the potential of transforming and *building back better*, which is why the following paragraph will examine it.

2.1.4   *Reclaiming Resilience*

Nowadays, scholars such as Glenn (2018) link resilience to Foucault's theories of biodiversity and resistance to examine its critical potential. By moving away from its originally technocratic, apolitical and reactive approach, resilience can challenge growth paradigms and power inequalities (Olsson, 2020). This is achieved when a focus is placed on collective practices, reciprocal relationships and networks of solidarity that promote systemic change (Brassett, 2018). This potential grows when attention is paid to social issues such as the well-being of residents, social justice and equity. Consequently, new indicators need to be introduced that not only look at quantitative measures but also qualitative ones (Olsson, 2020). Additionally, participatory processes should be implemented to understand the experience, needs and problems of residents (Finkenbusch, 2022). When this path is followed, resilience can be used strategically to deal with uncertainty, enable a long-term perspective on

risks (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016) and serve as a tool for resistance and transformation (Brassett, 2018). In this context, scholars even emphasize that resilience can challenge neoliberal logics (Corry, 2014), especially when alternative practices that resist neoliberalism are supported and promoted (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016).

In this respect, culture holds enormous potential for the development and implementation of these alternative practices. This is particularly the case at the transformative level, where the contribution of culture is increasingly recognized, such as in storytelling and creative place-making. As these practices are particularly relevant in urban settings, the following section explores the concept and potential of urban resilience.

2.2 Urban Resilience

2.2.1 *Conceptual Foundations*

Due to its roots in the natural sciences, resilience was originally focused only on disaster risk management (Chelleri et al., 2015), particularly in the context of climate change (Wardekker, 2018). However, urban resilience is applied very broadly today (Chelleri et al., 2012) and through many different approaches (Sharifi & Yamagata, 2018). This diverse engagement stems from its ability to address environmental, socio-economic and political uncertainties (Kolers, 2016). However, this has resulted in the concept gaining prestige without providing a clear definition (Copeland et al., 2020), which is why the following paragraph discusses important approaches.

There are two main understandings of resilience, a static and a dynamic one. The former comes from the discipline of engineering and focuses on a system's ability to *bounce back*, where the concept is defined by the speed the system returns to the previous equilibrium (Davoudi et al., 2013; Holling, 1996). The underlying assumption is that the optimal condition of the system is the original state, neglecting the possibility to transform and improve the initial conditions through crises (Meerow et al., 2016). This contrasts with the dynamic approach, which is based on the hypothesis that systems are complex networks, which is why their evolution is non-linear and characterized by multiple equilibria (Batty, 2013). Therefore, the focus of this approach is less on turning back to the old equilibrium and rather on the ability of the system to transform itself. For this reason, different socio-spatial subsystems are considered. These include not only ecological (biophysical) but also human subsystems (social and cultural). These different subsystems differ in behavior, feedback and interdependencies (Folke, 2006), which is why this approach is often referred to as socio-ecological resilience (Datola, 2023).

Since cities function as highly complex, dynamic systems with diverse socio-ecological interactions and do not develop linearly (Batty, 2013), but rather evolve and adapt over time (Holling, 1996), the dynamic approach dominates in the field of urban resilience (Amirzadeh et al., 2022). Comparing various definitions of urban resilience in an extensive literature review, Datola (2023) found that the one by Meerow & Stults (2016) summarizes the key similarities of the concept. According to their definition, urban resilience is a multidimensional capacity of urban systems to deal with disruptions and impacts while integrating change and improvement. In other words, urban resilience is not just resisting or recovering but growing in crises (Meerow & Stults, 2016), which in turn emphasizes the dynamic approach of this understanding.

2.2.2 *Governance and Dimensions of Urban Resilience*

At the policy level, the dynamic resilience approach advocates for recognizing the city as a highly complex object and therefore involving multi-level, polycentric and diverse governance institutions, as this can enhance urban resilience (Béné et al., 2017). This is due to the fact that the parties involved in the efforts to build resilience are particularly important for the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge and information (Hannibal et al., 2021). As a result, departmental or disciplinary silos are often identified as a major barrier to an effective urban resilience policy (Coaffee et al., 2018).

Moreover, efforts to build resilience are observed to break down these silos and improve collaboration between different actors in the urban context (Woodruff et al., 2021), which is why the concept is often seen as a "boundary object" (Hannibal et al., 2022, p. 1777) that unites different actors, sectors, disciplines and agendas in one common goal (Meerow & Newell, 2019). In this context, it is emphasized that civic participation must be included to ensure key elements for successful resilience planning, such as equity and justice (Fitzgibbons & Mitchell, 2019). This is where culture can play a crucial role by bringing citizens together and facilitating space for reflection and action (Annet, 2024). Furthermore, marginalized voices should be included to express criticism and connect, for example, through storytelling (Beauregard et al., 2019). In this way, art and culture not only function as a platform to bring people together, but also to stimulate negotiation processes between different actors and their realities.

Regarding the question of how to categorize resilience, there are various perspectives. The following analysis will focus on the categorization by Frigotto et al. (2022). This framework identifies three levels of resilience. These are based on the dynamic between continuity and change, which is why the interplay between stability and change defines the right level. This

focus allows for an in-depth but also flexible approach that is particularly useful when considering different policy approaches (Betzler et al., 2023). Therefore, it is presented in the table below.

Table 2.2.2

Categorization of Resilience Levels

Resilience type	Definition	Adversity and novelty	Change	Stability
Absorbability	Ability to return rapidly and efficiently to the original state	Minor novelty; temporary, low profile	Temporary change; momentary departure from a stable state	General stability
Adaptability	Ability to produce within buffer capacity, withstand shock, and maintain function	Medium novelty; persistent, medium change	Persistent change of functioning within stable context	Stability of contextual elements
Transform-ability	Ability to interact with disturbances and impact on the system's change	Major novelty; durable, major profile/ wide range	Profound change that requires renewal	Major changes in contextual elements,

Furthermore, there are many frameworks concerning the different dimensions of urban resilience (Amirzadeh et al., 2022). The one by Ribeiro and Gonçalves (2019) receives increasing recognition. Based on a literature review, it connects the physical dimension with infrastructure and the natural dimension with ecological and environmental factors. The economic dimension is related to the development of economies and societies, while the institutional dimension includes governance and mitigation aspects. Lastly, the social dimension encompasses people and communities (Ribeiro & Gonçalves, 2019). In that sense, both of the above-described concepts, the three levels (Frigotto et al., 2022) and the five dimensions of urban resilience (Ribeiro & Gonçalves, 2019), underline the dynamic understanding of the authors, as they include both transformational and social aspects.

2.2.3 *Towards Transformative and Just Urban Resilience*

Combining those insights with the transformative and critical potential of resilience discussed in Section 2.1, it can be concluded that the examined critical potential of resilience can only be realized when following the dynamic approach. In contrast, the static

understanding is subject to the risk of technocratic appropriation in cities. However, if the social dimension is missing, this can be particularly problematic in cities, as physical and social capital is unevenly distributed. Hence, there is a risk of reinforcing inequalities rather than mitigating them. However, the dynamic approach that not only includes risk reduction but also transformation can provide inclusive and structural developments. In this context, it is important for cities to think about the political component and question for whom resilience is built in a city. The latter emphasizes the need to foster it in a just, inclusive and transformative way, implementing social justice, redistribution and collective design (Vale, 2013), as well as interdisciplinary dialogs and collaborations (Davoudi, 2012). This is directly related to the findings from Section 2.1, as this resilience approach is intended to counteract neoliberalism. Additionally, it offers opportunities for political participation, critical voices and the questioning of existing power structures (Shawn, 2012). Thus, it serves as an "intellectual bridge, both in theory – and more importantly – in practice" (Vale, 2013, p.199).

In this context, the role of culture becomes particularly relevant. As discussed, both resilience and culture hold theoretical potential to act as boundary objects – capable of bridging actors, interests and disciplines. When approached strategically, culture can foster dialog, critical reflection and collective agency, thus supporting inclusive and transformative forms of urban resilience. However, many cities operate within technocratic, managerial frameworks that prioritize quantifiable outcomes and efficiency over social complexity and cultural meaning. Within such logics, culture is frequently reduced to an economic asset or a symbolic label, while its deeper social, political and emancipatory functions are neglected. Therefore, the following section examines how this instrumentalization manifests in urban contexts, revealing a clear gap between the transformative approaches discussed earlier and their limited reflection in policy practice.

2.3 Culture in Cities

Cities face a variety of different problems, be they economic, social or environmental (Donelli et al., 2021). In this respect, culture contributes to various dimensions, such as in the economy, thereby catalyzing regional development (Köster & Belda, 2023) and innovation (Kebir et al., 2017). Furthermore, culture is an important driver of social development, especially for fostering social capital and cohesion (Bedoya, 2021) as well as mental health of citizens (Amirtahmasebi & Schupbach, 2024). Therefore, it appears to be a powerful tool to address the above-mentioned challenges (Ciuculescu & Luca, 2024).

2.3.1 Strategic Use and Misuse

In response to the manifold crises cities are facing, urban governance increasingly relies on managerial and technocratic logics that prioritize efficiency and measurability. Within this framework, culture is often reduced to a quantifiable asset or symbolic label (Donelli et al., 2021; Mbaye & Pratt, 2020), sidelining its critical and transformative potential.

If addressed with its actual contribution, an intense commodification of creativity can be observed (Campbell, 2018), based on Florida's (2002) concept of the creative class. This trend has not only reached cultural policy but also urban policy in general (UCLG, 2019), where the conceptualization of creativity is often based on the creative city model (Whiting et al., 2022). The latter limits culture to its function as a driver of economic growth and urban regeneration (García, 2004; Montgomery, 2003). These developments are increasingly criticized for intensifying competition between cities, weakening social components and increasing inequalities (Durrer et al., 2023). The European Capital of Culture (ECOC) program illustrates precisely this dynamic. Instead of fostering inclusive cultural development, ECOC events often prioritize image-building and international visibility. For example, the emphasis on high-art programming in Cork 2005 led to a marginalization of local voices and reduced culture to a marketing tool (O'Callaghan, 2012). Similarly, in Liverpool 2008, official narratives of urban renewal masked deep social inequalities and excluded peripheral communities from meaningful participation (Boland, 2010). This ignorance of social components and the unique character and identity of a place can lead to gentrification and mass tourism, which is often a consequence of an exploitation of the urban cultural heritage (Donelli et al., 2021).

2.3.2 Cultural Heritage and Resilience

It is interesting to note that especially the tangible aspects of cultural heritage are extremely present in discourse about culture's contribution to resilience. Reasons for this are that (1) cultural heritage is the culture that is inherited, which makes it *more valuable* to preserve because it should be passed on to future generations (Linaki, 2024), (2) its accessibility is often mentioned as essential for participation and partnership in the urban context (Clarke et al. 2019) and lastly (3) cultural heritage is often closely linked to tourism, which makes it an important economic component for a city's resilience. This economic focus on maintaining visitor streams limits the concept of resilience to its absorptive features (Bui et al., 2020). Notably, not only have cities adopted this emphasis, but also the theoretical frameworks. Culture's contribution is limited to cultural heritage and the first two levels of resilience, neglecting its transformative power.

The resilience frameworks published by the World Bank, namely the *Disaster Risk Assessment for Cultural Heritage* (Newman et al., 2020), as well as the *City Strengthen Diagnostic* (World Bank, 2017), but also the *Cultural Heritage Addendum* by the United Nations (UNDRR, 2017) and the EU's *Risk Management for Cultural Heritage* (European Commission, 2023) all focus only on tangible cultural heritage. Although the *CURE framework* of UNESCO and the World Bank (2018) includes other forms of culture, it still limits its potential to the first two levels of resilience, which again illustrates the omission of the transformational level.

2.3.3 The Creativity Shift

However, this focus on economic aspects has taken on new forms in recent years. In an analysis of euro-regional cultural policy in 2012, Perrin noted a shift from a policy approach focused on cultural heritage to one focused on creativity. Bertacchini and Segre (2016) consider this development as a replacement of economic values by social ones. They consider creativity not only as contributing to the economy but also to sustainable development and social quality. However, the latter is questionable, as culture is still used as a strategic asset aligned with the pillars of creativity and innovation. This triad reflects the technocratic logic in which culture is instrumentalized to support economic agendas (Machado & Costa, 2024). This logic is also reflected in the academic language used to describe creative actors, with terms such as "place-based innovation engines" and "effective power stations for innovation and growth in modern cities" (Kourtit & Nijkamp, 2018, p. 978). Furthermore, culture and creativity are increasingly gaining prominence not only from an economic perspective but also from a technological one (Grodach, 2017). This is also evident in recent debates on artificial intelligence, where the prevailing narratives run the risk of detaching creativity from its social and material context (Caramiaux et al., 2025).

2.3.4 Context and Locality

The developments described above show that culture is often limited to its economic contribution, with successful models from other cities often being imitated. However, whether this cultural resource has a positive impact depends strongly on the local context. This is why it is important to consider cultural and artistic initiatives in the urban fabric as a complex, site-specific system (Donelli et al., 2021; Pratt, 2015). This is particularly relevant as the potential of culture in resilience efforts is strongly determined by the knowledge of individual actors (Clarke et al., 2019). It is therefore important to contextualize, reflect on and critically examine this important resource rather than assuming culture as automatically promoting resilience. This can be done by developing strategies that work within place-specific cultural

and social norms, political contexts and institutional differences (Durrer et al., 2023), as well as through participatory governance approaches (Donelli et al., 2021). Such approaches are primarily based on physical interactions, which enhance the circulation of complex and place-bound knowledge that is, as Lavanga (2020, p. 176) describes, "complex, uncodifiable and sticky to a place". These interactions foster learning, knowledge production and innovation (Lavanga, 2020), all of which are essential to resilience and its transformative potential.

Through these interactions, culture can be a resource for people not only to absorb and adapt but to actively and strategically use this very knowledge to transform adversity into opportunity (Forbes, 2013). As this transformation does not only take place on an individual level but is rather a collective resource, this approach can be particularly applicable in postcolonial, decentralized and urban contexts (Bousquet & Mathevet, 2019). Here, culture offers more than just symbolic or economic value. It provides a platform for social connection, democratic participation, negotiation and collective action (Borrup & Zitcer, 2024). Building on these insights, the following section examines how cultural actors contribute to resilience through their lived practice, serving as role models beyond managerial approaches.

2.4 The Cultural Sector as critically resilient

2.4.1 Lived Resilience

Although the cultural sector has been described as one of those that have suffered the most during the COVID-19 crisis, Yue (2022) sees the portrayal as highly problematic. According to her analysis, the discourse was based on a static understanding of resilience, in which it is important for the sector to return to equilibrium. Consequently, solutions such as digital transition, emergency measures and funds were presented, highlighting the technocratic approach of this understanding of resilience (Yue, 2022). However, the dynamic understanding focuses not only on how quickly to recover but also on how to turn crises into opportunities. Particularly in this understanding, the cultural sector can be seen as a model of resilience, as Pratt (2017) points out. Reasons for this are organizational factors, such as working practices, embeddedness and connectedness, as key factors for the resilience of the sector (Orru et al., 2021). Furthermore, Pratt (2017) sees culture's resilience as rooted in the history of the sector. For example, the need for innovative approaches to fundraising has led to the cultural sector being "born resilient" (Pratt, 2017, p. 136), which is particularly true for small organizations. Their role model function is also underlined by the fact that the critical values of resilience, such as collectivity, solidarity and resistance, are already practiced by the

individual players and their networks (Pratt, 2017). Additionally, these actors have non-traditional career paths and do not focus on promotion and hierarchies but show a sector that acts out of resilience. Not in a neoliberal way, but one that presents and lives future-oriented and creative approaches (Yue, 2020). In this sense, cultural actors embody resilience thinking that resists neoliberalism (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016) and are therefore important actors to strategically engage in building urban resilience (Yue, 2020).

2.4.2 Structural Tensions

However, the resilience of cultural actors is not achieved through austerity or neoliberal policies, but rather by small organizations compensating for the latter through precarious working conditions such as unpaid and temporary work (Pratt, 2017). Although Pratt (2017) criticizes these neoliberal policies, he argues for a neoliberal transition of the state from a provider to an enabler. This new role is to strategically support networks, competencies and long-term structures instead of purely financing the sector. However, the acceptance of budget cuts limits the innovative capital inherent in culture and reinforces a trend towards homogenization, where cultural institutions follow market logics to ensure their survival (Bourdieu, 1993). One of these forms of survival, which is also a direct response to these cuts, is the hyper-instrumentalization of culture, where actors legitimize public funding by examining social or economic benefits (Belfiore & Bennett, 2010; Hadida, 2013). In that sense, the aforedescribed focus on how culture contributes to resilience inherits the potential of reducing culture to a means to achieve benefits in non-artistic domains (Pratt, 2017), where often the connection to the intrinsic value is neglected. However, the motivation to participate in art and culture is always primarily driven by intrinsic benefits, the value connected to the subjective experience (Holden, 2006). And only through this participation can instrumental benefits be realized (McCarthy et al., 2004). Additionally problematic is that the latter is often measured by quantitative short-term Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), instead of valuing culture's long-term effects, which can hardly be captured in numbers (Pratt, 2017).

Therefore, O'Connor (2024) argues that culture should not be seen as a tool but as a foundation alongside health, education and infrastructure to achieve goals for society. If this recognition of culture, appropriate public funding and institutional protection are guaranteed, it can unfold its multi-layered and transformative potential. Importantly, it is only through independent and long-term government support that culture can freely develop these qualities without undermining itself (O'Connor, 2024). To move beyond the structural limitations described above, the next section explores how culture contributes to resilience across multiple dimensions, beyond instrumental logic.

2.5 Culture as a multidimensional concept

Looking at the aforementioned five dimensions by Ribeiro & Gonçalves (2019), it can be observed that there is a wide range of case studies that highlight how culture can contribute to resilience. As the economic contribution has already been discussed in detail above, this section focuses on the remaining dimensions.

2.5.1 The Social Dimension

The contribution of culture to the social sphere is often examined, with a focus on the valorization of social capital. In this context, culture can play an important role to foster social cohesion, connect people in a city and build a sense of belonging (Markusen & Schrock, 2006), which is particularly relevant for marginalized groups (Sievert & Kim, 2024), not because they are lacking resilience but because of their structural exclusion (Ungar, 2014).

These spheres of influence are important, as many cities face problems related to the social realm, such as rapid urbanization, racial colonial awakening, social dynamics, as well as equity issues (Durrer et al., 2023). Culture can contribute significantly here by transforming narratives and stereotypes, e.g., through storytelling (Ungar, 2014). Moreover, it can be used with its physical interaction and locality-specific knowledge to facilitate platforms of mediation and exchange that foster a sense of belonging and place-based identities (Davis, 2025).

2.5.2 The Natural Dimension

Many case studies indicate that culture contributes to the natural dimension through the amplification of urgency, the facilitation of solutions led by the local community and the communication of complex data. Furthermore, climate scientists have repeatedly cited culture as a key enabler for transformative climate action (Roy et al., 2018), as this challenge requires translation and facilitation. This is congruent with the growing literature considering culture as a pillar of sustainable development (Potts, 2021). In this context, culture serves not only as a precondition but also as a mediator of values that can prevent or support the achievement of sustainable and resilient pathways (Roy et al., 2018). Moreover, it has the power to promote new ways of thinking and visionary narratives of a desirable future besides economic logics and ideologies of growth (Yue, 2020).

For both the social and the natural dimensions, it is important to note that culture plays an essential role in reaching the transformative level of urban resilience. This is due to creativity, which can communicate meaning, stimulate the imagination needed to develop solutions and thus bring about necessary behavioral changes (Loots, 2023).

2.5.3 The Physical Dimension

For this dimension, the transformative power of culture can be found in concepts such as creative place-making (Engstrom & Mahmoud, 2024). The latter is described as the collaboration of different sectors to shape the character of a place around arts and culture-related activities (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Important factors such as the mobilization of public will, place specificity and a particular focus on working with the local community and achieving social goals can reduce the risk of amplifying negative consequences of gentrification, such as displacement (Redaelli, 2019). Therefore, the creative design of places can help to democratize the city in its physical structure and provide citizens with a sense of agency (Zitcer, 2018).

2.5.4 The Governance Dimension

Moreover, the creativity inherent in the cultural sector can contribute to the governance sphere of resilience by fostering democracy. With culture and its role of facilitating and mediating different local actors, it can be crucial to collectively define important social issues with the population, to co-create meaningful solutions and lastly, to empower citizens by strengthening dialog and connection (Borrup & Zitcer, 2024). In this sense, culture fosters civic participation, previously highlighted as a crucial factor for urban resilience. Therefore, using culture to facilitate the self-organization of urban residents can be a powerful tool, especially for marginalized voices to initiate systemic change (Sievert & Kim, 2024). This is also due to the fact that the cultural sector already contains important factors of the critical potential of resilience.

In sum, culture unfolds its transformative potential across various dimensions, ranging from social cohesion to ecological imagination, participatory governance and spatial democratization. What unites these contributions is culture's ability to bring people together and create spaces for connection, reflection and action. Especially in times of crisis, this potential to foster solidarity and open new pathways for democratic and sustainable transformation is a deeply political resource for building truly resilient cities. Based on the multifaceted contributions outlined, the final section reflects on what it means to rethink culture as a foundational element of transformative urban resilience.

2.6 Rethinking Culture in Urban Resilience

The discussion of the present theory illustrates that culture plays a key role in enabling transformative forms of resilience, namely those that aim not merely to preserve existing structures but to rethink and reshape them beyond dominant growth paradigms. The ability of

culture to open spaces for discussion, participation and collective imagination is a central prerequisite for an inclusive and equity-based approach to resilience. This can only be achieved if resilience is understood as a metaphor for change and not mere crisis management. In contrast, contemporary urban governance focuses on technocratic and performative strategies instead of integrating culture holistically. To unlock the outlined, critical potential of culture in urban resilience, it is crucial to acknowledge its multidimensional potential, fund accordingly and move away from standardized quantitative KPIs to ones that are developed with the residents of the cities. In that sense, culture should be used as a platform for discussion and collective reflection rather than instrumentalizing it for economic purposes and urban competitiveness. Before exploring the role that culture plays in urban resilience strategies and how municipal governance logics influence its integration, the following chapter presents the methodological approach used in this thesis.

3   Methodology

As it has already been made clear, the overall objective of the present thesis is to explore what role is assigned to culture in urban resilience strategies in Europe and how municipal governance dynamics influence its integration. For this purpose, a mixed methods approach was employed. Firstly, 30 urban resilience strategies were analyzed in a qualitative content analysis to understand the assigned role of culture. Secondly, seven expert interviews were conducted across multiple levels of governance to understand cities' governance dynamics that influence the integration of cultural measures. In this sense, the work followed a sequential mixed-methods design in which the findings of the content analysis of the strategies determined the structure and focus of the subsequent semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2016). Consequently, one phase of the research was built on the other, which provided deep insights through triangulation with literature. Thus, the content analysis established the foundation by illustrating *how* culture is integrated into urban resilience strategies, while the interviews provided insights into the *why* – uncovering the underlying reasons and governance dynamics behind this integration.

The methodology of the thesis was integrated in a multiple embedded case study approach (Yin, 2017) by complementing the case-linked interviews with CROs with interviews involving a former urban resilience network employee and a practitioner working at the intersection of culture and urban transformation to integrate cross-case contextual information. As Yin (2017) emphasizes, embedded case studies benefit from integrating contextual insights without separating them from the comparative logic of the overall study.

The sample includes European cities of different sizes in the EU, network affiliations, and cultural profiles to uncover systemic patterns and contextual differences. The point of reference for the analysis was October 2016 until May 2025, as the publication of the *United Nations' New Urban Agenda* (2016), which marked a discursive turning point in international urban development. The explicit mention of a connection between resilience and culture in the report makes the New Urban Agenda a relevant policy document for the analysis of urban governance discourses after 2016. The chosen geographical focus on the EU ensured comparability of cases due to shared cultural history and values, while providing a consistent policy framework that enables a coherent approach to culture and resilience in member cities.

The foundation for this research design consisted of the literature review elaborated in the previous chapter, which approached both, the critical and transformative potential of resilience in the context of neoliberal urban governance and, the multidimensional, context-specific and facilitating potential of culture in building urban resilience. To address the

research question, what role is assigned to culture in urban resilience strategies in Europe and how municipal governance dynamics influence its integration, the present thesis proceeds by (1) presenting the process of the sample selection, (2) explaining the sequencing of the data collection and (3) examining the analysis of the data.

3.1 Case Selection

The sample for the comparative content analysis comprises 21 European cities and one metropolitan region that have published one or more resilience strategies since October 2016. Further details on the city selection and distribution are shown in Appendix A. The overview shows a strong presence of northern and southern European cities and a tendency towards larger cities within the sample.

Going back to the timeframe under consideration, the period starts as aforementioned in October 2016 with the publication of the New Urban Agenda and ends in May 2025. This period was chosen as the research aims at analyzing the evolving role of culture in urban resilience strategies. The New Urban Agenda not only marked a significant shift in international urban policy discourse but also explicitly framed culture as an element in sustainable and resilient urban development. For the sample, this meant that those networks were evaluated that were active in their operations in the field under consideration, namely Europe, and that fall within the given time frame.

3.2 Data Collection

The qualitative data was collected using data triangulation, meaning that information was collected from multiple sources (Yin, 2017, p. 114-116). Primary sources were obtained through a comparative content analysis of 30 resilience strategies; secondary sources in form of the conduction of seven expert interviews to elicit further data. The data collection is thus composed of two distinct processes: (1) the collection of resilience strategies, and (2) the collection of interview material, which are outlined in the following sections.

3.2.1 Urban Resilience Strategies

Three networks have uploaded strategies on their websites, while independent strategies were derived by searching for cities associated with the respective networks. As a result, some of the cities, such as Rotterdam or Velje, are represented with multiple strategies. Although they slightly biased the sample, the different strategies still offered interesting insights due to the differences in time and focus. In addition, strategies were sought through city networks such as Making Resilient Cities 2030, ICLEI Europe and Eurocities, which was unfortunately unsuccessful. The following table provides an overview of the resilience

networks relevant to the strategies examined and describes their governance models, operational timelines and the cities whose strategies are published and thus represented in the sample.

Table 3.2.1

Overview of Resilience Networks Relevant to the Analyzed Strategies

Network	100 Resilient Cities Network (100RC)[1]	Resilient Europe	RESCCUE	Independent
Funding	Rockefeller Foundation	EU	EU	Respective City
Governance Approach	Top-down approach	Bottom-up approach	Top-down approach	Differing
Key Features	Internationally coordinated, centralized within municipality	Focus on neighborhood-scale	Focus on water-related climate adaptation	Developed after the collaboration with 100RC network
Number of Strategies	14	10	3	3

The homepages of the networks were scanned for webpages entitled *Member Cities* or similar. Subsequently, within the given period, all relevant strategies were identified, selected and added to the data.

3.2.2   *Expert Interviews*

To generate insightful and targeted interview material addressing the research question (Yin, 2017), the type of an expert semi-structured interview was selected. These represent embedded units of analysis within selected case cities, as well as contextual sources outside the immediate cases. A focus was set on CROs, as they are directly involved in the city's governmental organization and usually in the planning and implementation of the city's resilience (Hofmann, 2021). The two cross-case interviews were conducted to provide contextual insights beyond the city level, such as structural conditions, policy logics or

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[1] Although the 100RC network now operates as the Resilient Cities Network, this thesis refers to it as 100RC, as the strategy development discussed here took place under the former name.

governance narratives at network and sector level. An overview of the interviewees is presented below, the detailed profiles are available in Appendix B.

Table 3.2.2

Characteristics of Interview Participants

Interview- ID	Relevant Position	Position Status	Professional background
Case-Linked Interviewees			
Interviewee 01	CRO	Current	Urban policy and sustainability
Interviewee 02	CRO	Current	Urban policy and sustainability
Interviewee 03	CRO	Current	Urban policy and international relations
Interviewee 04	Deputy CRO	Former	Urban Policy and resilience
Interviewee 05	CRO	Former	Urban policy and water management
Cross-Case Interviewees			
Interviewee 06	Program Manager at 100RC Network	Former	Sustainable cities and partnerships
Interviewee 07	Independent Expert	Current	Culture & Urban Transformation

The interviews were conducted with the aim of understanding how municipal governance dynamics influence culture's integration in urban resilience strategies. Expert interviews were chosen as a complementary data collection method, as they offer insights on the perception and experience of a specific issue as a sort of witness (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, p. 12-14). To this end, a semi-structured questionnaire was created, which can be found in Appendix C, including key values and principles that guided its execution.

Thematically, the interviews were structured in five parts, beginning with (1) introductory and contextual questions to establish rapport and situate the interviewees' perspectives. Subsequent sections focused on (2) the development and (3) implementation of the urban resilience strategy, with particular attention to the role of (4) culture, stakeholder participation, and network dynamics. The final part invited (5) broader reflections on cultural resilience and underused potentials. Each session was held using Microsoft Teams and lasted around 45-60 minutes.

The initial criteria for a city to be included with an interview were that the city (1) had been selected as a European Capital of Culture and (2) is undergoing a shift away from formerly industrial structures. This was intended to ensure that resilience is not approached purely through technological lenses but also considers other dimensions of urban development, thereby offering particularly relevant insights. This selection aligns with a

dynamic understanding of resilience, which highlights the multidimensional nature of urban systems. The cities fulfilling both criteria were Antwerp, Athens, Glasgow, Lisbon, Rotterdam, and Thessaloniki. However, due to the limited response, only two of the planned cities could be reached. Therefore, a snowball approach led to three further CROs and the extension to cross-case interviews. This resulted in three factors that weaken the representativeness of the sample: (1) Southern Europe is not represented at all, (2) the interviewed CROs all work for cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants, and (3) all were mainly engaged in the 100 Resilient Cities Network. Even though this limits the generalizability of the findings, it was mitigated by including cross-case interviews with actors beyond the city level to capture additional institutional perspectives and contextual nuance. The seven expert interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams between April and May 2025. Subsequently, they were entirely transcribed in a simplified manner. Thus, extensive and relevant data was gathered despite the rather small number, enabling a systematic and comparable analysis of the collected material.

3.3   Data analysis

3.3.1   Urban Resilience Strategies

The policy documents were examined using a thematic content analysis based on Mayring (2023), supported by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). This approach enabled a systematic evaluation of the qualitative material. The data was analyzed both rule-based and theory-guided (Mayring, 2023, p. 13). Supporting all processes, a computer-aided analysis by MAXQDA was chosen to systematically and comprehensively analyze the large amount of data material.

As an evaluation method, it was decided to use a thematic frequency analysis of the content, as this enabled offsetting, i.e. the identification and comparison of frequencies (Mayring, 2023). The coding concept was based on a hybrid approach of deductive and inductive category development (Mayring, 2023, p. 105). This means that a list of themes was derived from the theory, and further categories were supplemented through a data-driven approach.

A comprehensive set of categories was deduced from two theoretical frameworks. As pointed out in Section 2.3, there is not a holistic approach to culture in resilience policy. For this reason, two existing frameworks were selected that offer enough conceptual openness to be adapted to the cultural context, while still providing a robust foundation within resilience research. Their structure enabled a systematic categorization of cultural elements across

relevant dimensions (Ribeiro & Gonçalves, 2019) and levels of resilience (Frigotto et al., 2022). Furthermore, the latter was used by Betzler et al. (2023) in a comparable study on culture in national resilience and recovery plans. This category system served as the basis for examining the role of culture in the urban resilience strategies, including not only the assessment of the presence of the specific theory-based codes but also their absence.

For the inductive approach, the formation of categories included: (1) review of the material and open coding of text passages, (2) grouping and reduction of coded text passages, (3) categorization of codes, and (4) abstraction and generalization into a category system. Finally, the analyzing process and the results were compiled, evaluated and interpreted (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 110; Mayring, 2023). An overview of the coding system can be found in Appendix D.

3.3.2 *Expert Interviews*

The interviews were used to develop an in-depth, actor-based perspective on how the dynamics of urban governance influence the integration of culture into urban resilience strategies. Thus, identifying reasons for the integration of culture as it was present in the strategies. To analyze the interview material, a qualitative content analysis was carried out using MAXQDA. The applied category system for analyzing the interview data was developed inductively and is structured into four overarching codes: resilience, urban policy, culture and external influences. These categories capture recurring themes such as the evolving understanding of resilience, governance dynamics, the positioning of culture, and external influences on local strategies. A detailed overview, including sub-categories and descriptions, is provided in Appendix E.

This category system was used to identify the institutional dynamics shaping urban resilience strategies and to uncover barriers and opportunities for integrating culture into city-wide policy. Reflexive notes were kept during coding to ensure transparency and to reflect on potential researcher bias, which contributed to the trustworthiness of the analysis. This is particularly relevant against the background of a growing demand on national and EU policy level to include culture in all policies (Borrup & Zitcer, 2024). In this sense, understanding the governance dynamics at the city level, which often exhibits a more agile and innovative mode of operation (Eneqvist & Karvonen, 2021), can be crucial in identifying the key factors that hinder or promote the integration of culture in this realm. In this respect, city-level findings can inform overarching policy developments (Durrer et al., 2023), which is why the following findings should also be considered in a broader context.

4 Findings

In this chapter, the empirical findings of the different data sets are examined separately, which is aligned with the bifurcation of the research question. The first section will therefore examine the role of culture in urban resilience strategies. The presentation of the various code patterns and their occurrence clearly shows that the transformative potential of culture is largely overlooked. This is indicated by cultural measures that focus on maintaining the status quo and on quantitative measurability. This suggests that the critical and political potential of resilience and culture is overlooked and instead "what is rolled out is a neoliberal governance agenda in resilience clothing" (Leitner et al., 2018, p. 2). Building on these findings, Section 4.2 examines how the dynamics of municipal governance influence the integration of culture based on the expert interviews. It identifies conflicting logics and limited cultural awareness as key determinants of the performative and technocratic integration of culture into urban resilience strategies. In triangulation with literature, this mixed-methods approach sheds light on the structural conditions that hinder culture's important contribution to urban resilience planning.

4.1 The Instrumentalization of Culture in Neoliberal Governance

Although culture is formulated as a symbolic resource in many strategy forewords, with word clusters around "*vibrant culture*" and "*creative identity*" that signal creativity and openness (Donelli et al., 2021), concrete measures are largely absent. Thus, culture is instrumentalized for branding and economic purposes, emptied of its critical and political potential. This reflects a neoliberal rationality in which culture is made governable: depoliticized, instrumentalized, and aligned with technocratic logics that privilege (1) measurability, and (2) the preservation of the status quo. These two themes are explored in more detail in the following section.

4.1.1 *Reinforcing the Status Quo*

Conducting a frequency analysis based on Frigotto et al. (2022) shows an immense focus on the first two levels of resilience. This points to a technocratic, static understanding of the concept, in which culture is used as an instrument for stabilization rather than transformation. The following table illustrates this distribution.

Table 4.1.1

Frequency Analysis by Resilience Levels

Level	Code related to Culture	Count
Absorbability	Culture contributes to maintaining stability, preserving the status quo, and reinforcing existing structures or identities during disruption	92
Adaptability	Culture supports adjustment and learning within existing institutional or social frameworks, enabling gradual change and flexible responses	78
Transformability	Culture drives deep structural or systemic change, enabling redefinition of values, institutional renewal, or shifts in governance logics	7

This suggests that culture is mainly used to preserve contemporary structures instead of challenging them. The promise of a culturally diverse city in the forewords is thus shown to be performative, as culture is curtailed by the focus on the status quo. This is because precisely those art forms that are dynamic and forward-looking are disregarded. However, a focus on the transformative level is imperative to foster the critical potential of the concept. The few occurring codings range from a festival for democracy, to "*create communal and better welfare solutions*", to an art festival "*visualizing challenges and identifying opportunities with artists*", to enhance neighborliness by creating space for cross-cultural dialog. However, these codes mostly refer to events, which illustrates their short-term nature. In contrast, more long-term concepts such as creative place-making (Yue, 2020) or regular events do not appear.

The rarity of this level is also consistent with a study that examines the national recovery and resilience plans of EU Member States and concludes that the transformative power of culture is also rarely considered at this policy level. Furthermore, the lack of structural reforms that could unlock the potential of culture for systemic change is pointed out (Betzler et al., 2023). This observation is consistent with the urban level, where these reforms for the cultural sector are completely absent. However, this static understanding of resilience risks reinforcing neoliberal logics by prioritizing rapid recovery through technocratic policies to restore the status quo, over structural change. This tendency is further reflected on in the next section.

4.1.2   Measurability on the Forefront

Based on a frequency analysis of the five dimensions of urban resilience by Ribeiro and Gonçalves (2019), the table below shows the different dimensions, the codes interpreted in relation to culture and the frequency of occurrence.

Table 4.1.2 – 1

Frequency Analysis by Resilience Dimension

Dimension	Code Description	Count
Economic	Culture is presented as an economic factor, including its role in development, growth, employment, or competitiveness.	57
Social	Highlights culture's role in relation to social structures, cohesion, identity, participation, or inclusion.	45
Physical	Focuses on the integration of culture in connection to the built environment, including spatial organization or infrastructure.	44
Governance	Culture is linked to decision-making, policy integration, and its role in enabling democratic practices and civic participation	35
Natural	Culture is addressed in relation to environmental concerns, ecological values, climate change, or nature-related aspects.	10

Although this overview shows an almost equal distribution, except for the natural dimension, these frequencies are here misleading, which is why the following paragraphs examine the revealed patterns. As the physical dimension is addressed in very general terms in 12 cases, for example by mentioning libraries or public art spaces, but overlaps considerably with the economic dimension in specific measures (32 mentions), it is included under the economic category in the following analysis. The two patterns that emerged through this analysis are specific to the different levels of resilience according to Frigotto et al. (2022), which is why they are visualized in the table below.

Table 4.1.2 – 2

Economic Dimension with Physical Overlap

Resilience Level	Category Description	Total Mention	Physical Overlap
Absorbability	Cultural-economic strategies aim to restore stability by preserving traditional structures and avoiding lasting change	36	21
Adaptability	Cultural-economic practices support gradual change within stable frameworks	21	11

On the level of absorbability, the economic dimension is connected to the physical one in terms of the preservation of cultural heritage (19 occurrences) and tourism (17 occurrences), with actions related, e.g., to the improvement of pedestrian trails between different heritage sites. On the level of adaptability, the cluster creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation can be found. Here, a target group are young and creative entrepreneurs (7 mentions). Furthermore, urban regeneration is emphasized on, e.g., the development or extension of creative hubs and co-working spaces (5 mentions) and the use of vacant buildings (9 mentions). This once again underlines the short-term nature of the actions, which often refer to temporary use and a vague vocabulary around "*supporting artists*" and "*giving artists opportunities*".

The results show a focus on stabilization and short-term visibility rather than structural change. These patterns reflect a policy orientation that prioritizes pragmatic feasibility and measurable outcomes at the expense of the culture's ability to support long-term, socially embedded change. The observed emphasis on preservation, measurability and entrepreneurial innovation in the physical dimension is particularly problematic when considering that the transformative power of culture lies in the creation of spaces for exchange, reflection and negotiation, all essential factors for multidimensional resilience. In this respect, enabling sustained, process-oriented cultural engagement is crucial — not through temporary, performative measures but via long-term structures that acknowledge culture as a foundational dimension of transformative resilience.

However, the emergence of these two patterns is consistent with Perrin (2012) who shows a policy shift from heritage to a creativity-focused approach. The persistent dominance of cultural heritage could be explained by the many policy frameworks focusing on cultural heritage but also by the simplicity of its management and measurability that results from a

managerial focus. This orientation, however, tends to displace processual or intangible forms of art (Harrison et al., 2020), which is highly problematic, as the transformative potential of culture simply contradicts this quantitative evaluation logic.

Figure 4.1.2

Cover Page of Rome's Resilience Strategy
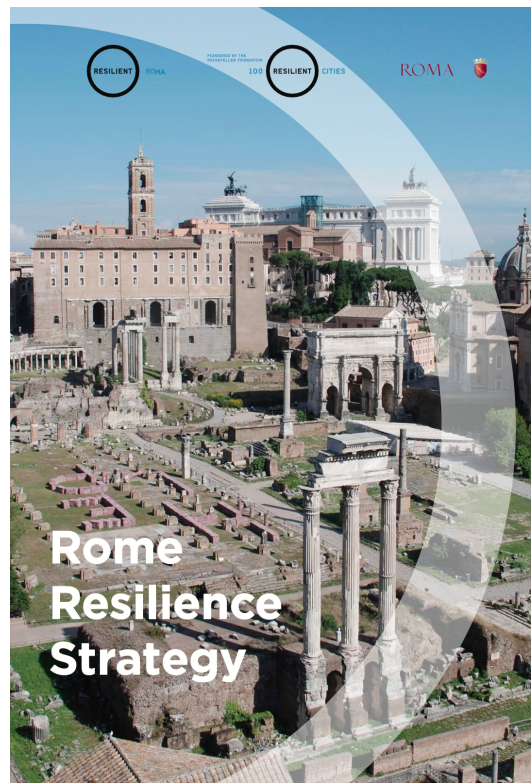
Note. From *Rome Resilience Strategy,* by City of Rome, 2017, *Resilient Cities Network* (*https://resilientcitiesnetwork.org/downloadable_resources/Network/Rome-Resilience-Strategy-English.pdf*). Copyright 2017 by City of Rome.

This strong focus on heritage can also be observed in the social dimension. Through vague expressions around the topic of place-based identity, e.g., "*strengthening local identity*", "*promoting social cohesion*" or building a "*stronger city identity*", an attempt is made to link the two areas, however, without mentioning actual efforts for how this can be done. Although these statements suggest performativity, the potential of cultural heritage as a vehicle for inclusive, process-based resilience is increasingly recognized. A notable example of this is the *Multaka* project, which began in Berlin and is now being implemented in many European cities. Refugees and migrants are trained as museum guides who can interpret cultural heritage from their own perspective and in their native language. This approach empowers marginalized communities to actively participate in heritage interpretation,

promoting inclusion and intercultural dialog (Macdonald, 2022) by providing agency and ownership, which builds resilience (Kirby et al., 2024). Furthermore, it promotes communication, interaction (Young et al., 2018) and understanding between different groups (Delanty, 2003), which are important prerequisites for equitable and transformative resilience (Vale, 2013).

Examining the coded segments of the governance dimension, it becomes clear that the democratic potential of culture is almost completely overlooked. Although there are many coded segments, some of them simply mention the culture department. The acknowledgement of culture, however, as a space for participation, discussion, negotiation and collectivity remains entirely overlooked. Although resilience itself is described as process-based (Almedom et al., 2007; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000), the neoliberal appropriation of the term, which is oriented towards measurability makes no room for the dialogue- and process-based qualities that make culture vital to democratic life (Borrup & Zitcer, 2024). Because of this focus on measurability, hardly any money is invested in this function of culture (Borrup & Zitcer, 2024). This is a particularly serious shortcoming, as scholars see neoliberalism as a driving force behind the rise of populism (Bettache & Chiu, 2019). Therefore, it becomes even more important to subsidize culture to strengthen democracy and transform communities into "collective problem solvers" (Erenrich & Wergin, 2017, p. 260) by using culture as a democratic forum for participation and interaction (Habermas, 1969).

As described above, the natural dimension occurs with only ten mentions, focusing on green policies and the creation of awareness. However, there is an immense gap from policy that generally hardly includes culture, for example in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Duxbury et al., 2017), to academia. Scholars integrate culture already in sustainable development frameworks (e.g., Stoltenberg, 2010; Potts, 2021) and highlight its transformative role when facilitating space for local climate action (Roy et al., 2018), as well as visionary and forward-looking narratives for a positive future that challenge neoliberal logics (Yue, 2020). As these pathways are not included in the urban resilience strategies examined, the present frequency analysis shows that the political narrative of culture's non-contribution to sustainability is perpetuated in resilience thinking. Instead of recognizing the potential of sense-making and stimulating the imagination needed to develop solutions that lead to necessary behavioral changes (Loots, 2023).

In summary, the dominance of the economic dimension with a focus on tourism and cultural heritage further supports the hypothesis of a static and managerial understanding of resilience in urban resilience strategies. This further indicates that resilience strategies serve a

neoliberal agenda rather than a desire for change. When it comes to culture, this technocratic logic privileges what can be measured, while neglecting dimensions that defy quantification, such as culture's contribution to democratic participation, critical discourse and collective action. This narrow understanding excludes the critical social and political role of culture, which could contribute to a transformative, just and dynamic understanding of resilience. Based on these findings regarding the technocratic and instrumental role of culture, the following section examines the underlying municipal governance dynamics that help explain this pattern.

4.2 Institutional dynamics

Although the CROs made clear that the external partners and framework conditions are important for the strategy development, which is further highlighted by research (Hoffmann, 2021; Leitner et al., 2018), Interviewee 07 describes that the responsibility for defining priorities and key stakeholders lies primarily with the cities themselves. This makes it essential to shift analytical attention to municipal governance, as it is here that institutional logics, interdepartmental cooperation, and political will concretely shape whether and how culture is integrated. Therefore, the following section examines municipal governance dynamics by identifying two key barriers to the integration of culture: (1) conflicting logics and (2) a lack of awareness.

4.2.1 Conflicting Logics

Before diving into the specifics about culture and urban resilience, some insights about urban governance in general are to be examined. Although the findings from the previous section highlight a static, technocratic and neoliberal connotation of resilience, the CROs all describe a shift in resilience thinking to a broader understanding, for example, "*I could observe how the word resilience was changing in its generally understood usage in the policy field (...) moving not away from emergency planning but broadening out to encompass a lot more*" (Interviewee 01). The interviewees mention in this context broader societal challenges, such as the threat to democracy or social inequalities. However, the analyzed strategies still focus on shocks and their solutions that are more measurable, such as cyberattacks, the climate crisis, or pandemics. This may be due to the fact that "*a lot of politicians want facts and data*" (Interviewee 05).

However, this focus on measurability has a twofold problem, firstly, this narrow focus on data neglects the ethical, contextual and value-based dimensions of urban governance that are essential to making informed, just and inclusive decisions (Cook & Karvonen, 2023).

Secondly, resilience itself is inherently difficult to measure, as there is no universally agreed-upon method or indicator (Copeland et al., 2020), and as one interviewee puts it, "*You can have 100 different indicators but still not be too sure –are we more resilient? If so, are we 10% more resilient 20%? These are not things you can measure easily*". (Interviewee 01). This difficulty becomes even more apparent when it comes to culture. While resilience already defies easy quantification, the impact of culture is even less compatible with performance-based assessment due to its diffuse, procedural and symbolic mechanisms (Pratt, 2017).

As one interviewee puts it, "*What makes [creative] work valuable is not easily measured through impact*" (Interviewee 07). In this respect, although resilience cannot be measured by numbers, especially in regard to culture, urban policy still aims to do so. For this reason, culture tends to focus on either economic measures or more symbolic policies rather than those that have a real but unmeasurable impact on residents. It is therefore important to find alternative ways to determine whether the introduced measures have a positive impact on citizens. As one CRO emphasized, in order to truly understand the value of cultural interventions, it is "*important to continue the democratic conversation with communities*" (Interviewee 01) to gain direct feedback from residents. Such participatory processes are not only essential to cultural policymaking, but central to resilience itself. Culture, when understood as a space for facilitation and shared meaning-making, can enable these conversations, and in doing so, counteract its own commodification (Donelli et al., 2021).

However, rather than being structurally anchored at the citizen level (Finkenbusch, 2022), resilience strategies remain contingent on individual actors, particularly person-based connections to departments such as culture, as well as political leadership. Therefore, should political change occur, resilience as a project is at risk, which highlights this dependence on individual leadership. This is becoming a serious threat, especially in times of rising right-wing populism across Europe. As recent developments in countries like the Netherlands show, culture is often among the first sectors to be devalued or downsized. This is no coincidence: cultural institutions offer spaces for critical thinking, democratic dialog and negotiation, which are essential in increasingly diverse societies. Simultaneously, they are perceived as politically uncomfortable by right-wing movements. Thus, if culture's transformative role is not structurally anchored within municipal governance, its potential to build resilient and democratic communities remains at risk.

Figure 4.2.1

Cover Page of Rotterdam's Resilience Strategy
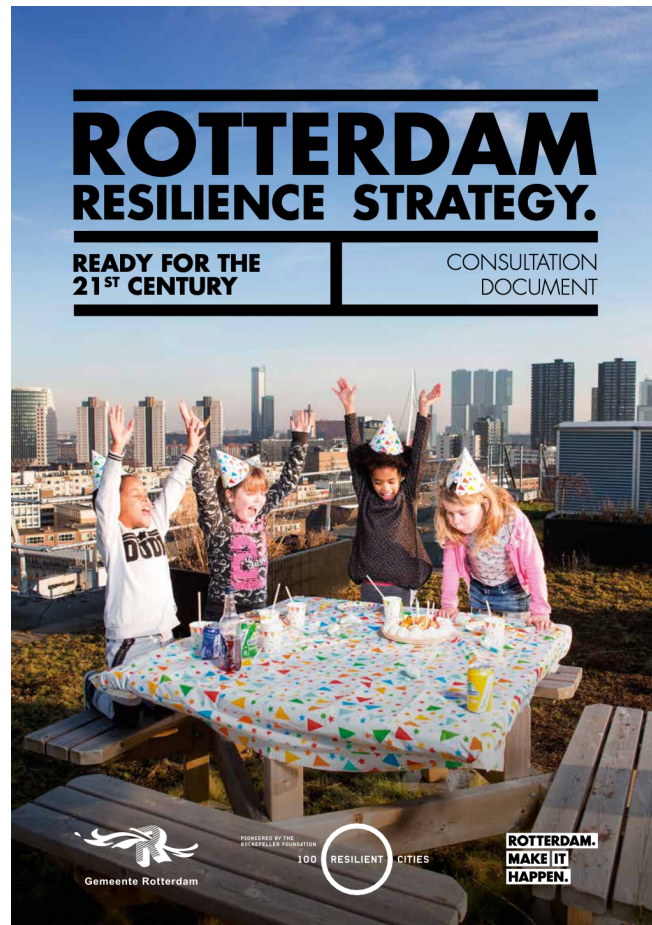
Furthermore, this top-down, managerial approach has three additional problems that specifically affect culture. Firstly, the resilience of the cultural sector is still viewed by local authorities as "*picking yourself up by your own bootstraps*" (Interviewee 07), which underlines the neoliberal perspective of self-reliance and adaptability. Moreover, the narrative about the fragility of the sector from the COVID-19 pandemic is omnipresent (Yue, 2020). As one CRO asks, "*How can the city help to make the cultural sector to become more resilient?*" (Interviewee 05). This question already reflects the limits of the current framing, where neoliberal logics do not value culture as a democratic infrastructure that facilitates participation, negotiation and collective meaning-making. This also corresponds to the funding, where support remains project-based and fragmented, instead a lack of structural, long-term funding. However, the latter would be essential for culture to develop its facilitative and transformative potential (O'Connor, 2024).

Secondly, this neoliberal view of the cultural sector as unresilient is in stark contrast to the perspective that cultural actors can be role models in this context. In this respect, one CRO reports that artists oppose the city by saying that they are already contributing to the resilience, thus asking, "*What's the added value of working together with* [*the municipality*]?" (Interviewee 05). This further highlights that cities very often struggle to reconcile the resilience mission with artists. Nevertheless, given this static and neoliberal urban understanding of resilience and self-reliance, which often legitimizes austerity, it is not surprising that "*not every creative person likes the word*" (Interviewee 07), thus provoking resistance from cultural actors. This illustrates the tension between a neoliberal, static understanding of resilience and the dynamic, lived resilience of cultural actors.

Thirdly, culture's marginalization could be rooted in its own nature, which surfaces uncomfortable topics and perspectives and challenges prevailing narratives, which may not always be welcomed by those in power. As one interviewee puts it:

> *Culture is often used as a tool to address [...] topics that people in power don't always want addressed [...] and depending on who's in charge, maybe you don't want that, and so you choose not to fund around that.* (Interviewee 07)

This highlights again how politically exposed the cultural sector remains. To prevent this, long-term, institutionally anchored funding programs must be developed that secure the transformative role of culture not only for resilience but also for democracy itself. In addition, openness and curiosity must be maintained in democratic municipalities that value culture and its ability to think critically. One CRO describes this importance in governance, even if it leads to discomfort:

> *We're willing to be challenged; it's never much fun. But we're open to that challenge because we need to see things differently. We need people to hold up a mirror sometimes to us, even if we don't like what we see in it.* (Interviewee 01)

The same CRO emphasizes that many institutions tend to follow habitual ways of thinking and approach complex social issues with technical solutions. In this context, they point to artistic storytelling to encourage new solutions, thus breaking these dominant narratives. "*We are seeing things as engineering problems when they're actually social problems. The more we can tell stories, the more we can encourage people to think*

differently" (Interviewee 01). Highlighting a progressive understanding of culture in shaping more reflexive and inclusive urban policies. At the same time, these critical, challenging voices can complicate collaboration, simply because their logic and language differ: "*People from different sectors speak different languages completely, and I think that can often put people off*" (Interviewee 02). This illustrates that the integration of culture into resilience strategies requires governance structures that are not only open to conflict and differences but appreciate them as a foundation for democratic negotiation (Beaumont & Nicholls, 2008). These critical voices can be easier incorporated when principles such as negotiation, interdependence and trust are implemented (Haindlmaier, 2016), which is highlighted by Interviewee 07: "*You really have to invest in the process [...] once you build up trust in a team, you're more willing to understand why you see things slightly differently [...] we often underestimate how important the process is*". Therefore, the importance of participatory processes applies not only outside but also within administrative structures (Haindlmaier, 2016). This can be understood in line with Habermas' concept of deliberative democracy, which focuses on a domination-free discourse in which rational arguments and equal participation conditions should enable legitimate decision-making. In that the focus is not only on the actual outcomes, but also the quality of the process itself, that enhances legitimacy through inclusion, transparency and argumentative discussion (Habermas, 1992). When legitimacy is built in this way, policies are not only better accepted but are also more resilient to political change because they are based on a broadly shared consent rather than being tied to individual leaders or party programs. This approach could also find implementation with residents, where bottom-up approaches actively support and include place-specific knowledge (Durrer et al., 2023). This could help to counteract *isomorphism* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), the tendency for projects and policies to become increasingly similar and lose their location-specific relevance, ultimately making them "uniquely 'local' to nowhere" (Durrer et al., 2023, p. 7).

In this respect, it can be argued that building relationships on the basis of resilience principles such as solidarity and collectivity (Brassett, 2018), even with dissenting voices, have to be integrated at the policy level to make those strategies themselves more resilient. This would represent a conscious shift away from linear, static models, calculations and hierarchical structures towards a focus on cooperativeness, openness and the appreciation of processual factors and cooperation (Haindlmaier, 2016) that handles criticism as part of a democratic discussion, thus increasing legitimacy. Additionally, such a turn would also move away from making culture fit into predefined, measurable frameworks but to embrace those

very elements that challenge measurability and procedural efficiency. Only then, can resilience unlock its critical potential of transformation when including dissenting voices, especially those that resist and question the reduction to quantifiable outputs.

4.2.2 Lacking Awareness

In addition to the fundamental tensions between the logics of urban governance and cultural work, this section explores another structural barrier, namely the lack of awareness, as one CRO emphasizes: "*I'm not sure people really make the connection between culture and resilience*" (Interviewee 02). However, it is unclear whether this disconnection between culture and resilience is simply the result of a lack of awareness or whether it reflects the reluctance described in the previous section to engage with the critical and unmeasurable dimensions that culture brings to urban policy. This gap in recognition, whether intentional or unintentional, could once again point to a static understanding of resilience that neglects the transformative potential of culture. In addition, the proximity of resilience to sustainability could be a reason why culture is not recognized as a contribution. This connection is therefore examined in more detail below.

In the expert interviews, the CROs emphasize the partnership with all policy areas. Although the departments mentioned include health, social justice and poverty, there is a dominance on those related to climate and disaster risk management. Furthermore, the professional backgrounds of the CROs indicate this proximity, as three of the five CROs have climate-related backgrounds. This finding is consistent with a literature review, according to which most studies still treat resilience as part of sustainability (Weber, 2023). If resilience is understood in this way, the exclusion of culture is nothing new. For instance, in the development of the Sustainable Development Goals, many scholars criticized the neglect of culture in regard to sustainability (Duxbury, 2017). In general, the role of culture is in this context often overlooked, although it has long been recognized in academia (Hawkes, 2001; Throsby, 1995), likely due to its historical separation from environmental and social policy (Duxbury, 2017). In this sense, rather than acting as a boundary object that connects disciplines (Hannibal et al., 2022) and breaks down departmental silos (Woodruff et al., 2021), culture in urban resilience strategies tends to replicate the narrative of sustainability in which "the dominance of managerial and technical rationalities often excludes the less tangible dimensions of sustainability, such as culture" (Nurse, 2006, p. 37). This ties in with the discussion in the previous section, as the dominance of measurability logics in resilience could be the reason for the proximity to sustainability.

Consequently, although defined as a main barrier for successful urban resilience policy (Coaffee et al., 2018), the cultural department is separated in this process with one-off meetings and connections that are described as "*informal at best*" (Interviewee 02). This structural isolation within the municipality is observed, where culture is "*standing alone. They shape their own policies, they have subsidies for their own activities*" (Interviewee 04), which fosters the perception that "*[c]ulture will always be seen as some kind of island within a municipality*" (Interviewee 04). This connects to Evans (2001), who sees culture being managed in separate departments and not treated as a cross-cutting issue. For urban resilience, this segmentation is rooted in two interconnected problems: (1) limited resources and (2) lacking awareness.

The afore described budgetary autonomy of the cultural department, which is intended to ensure cultural self-determination through its own funding programs, paradoxically restricts integration into broader resilience agendas due to its limited budget. As one interviewee notes, "*because the cultural sector is not that rich […], if you want to do some things you need budgets. And so that was also a barrier in this area*" (Interviewee 05). Therefore, instead of relying on the limited funds from the cultural department to contribute to urban resilience, there needs to be awareness of the essential role of culture, especially on the transformative level. This requires the allocation and use of cross-cutting resilience funds that enable explicit collaboration with culture. An outstanding example of how this can be done is Barcelona's *Cultural Rights Plan*. A strategy that provides for multi-year funding from the overarching city council with 50% and other ministries such as culture but also education and social affairs, thus presenting culture as a cross-cutting issue. In this program, culture is understood not only as an industry or location factor, but as a democratic instrument and social right. This means that the money is primarily invested in a cultural infrastructure of grassroots initiatives, community centers and projects aimed at cultural participation and social change. In this way, the critical and transformational characteristic of culture is valued instead of aiming for quantifiable measurability (Rius-Ulldemolins & Roig-Badia, 2023). Although this program is exemplary, it separates culture from urban policy and neglects the approach of culture-in-all policy areas. This connects back to O'Connor (2024), who asks for funding that represents this inclusion by financing culture similarly as the health or infrastructure sector. One CRO illustrates what this could look like in practice, describing how resilience principles such as solidarity and collectivity are reflected in both policy and cooperation with the cultural department. As a foundation, they explain that the understanding and collaboration with the cultural department is also strong and uniting, where "*politicians*

that lead on these areas know each other well and see part of the same administration"
(Interviewee 01), which results in a "*follow-up commitment with funding and resource*". In
practice, this includes sharing resources with the cultural department, particularly through
joint external funding applications. Reflecting on this institutional setup, the CRO highlights
how integrating resilience thinking has prompted a rethinking of governance structures:

> *It made us think differently […] about how we work together and whether our 19th-century embedded forms of organization are fit for the 21st century. […] How we stop worrying about whose money and whose resources it is and instead think about how we collaboratively share resources to serve people better, protect them, and enhance their opportunities.* (Interviewee 01)

However, such forms of institutional collaboration presuppose a shared understanding
of the contribution of culture. To enable this, the cultural contribution to urban resilience must
be actively recognized. This awareness can only develop through close cooperation with
cultural departments, those best positioned to identify local actors, needs and potentials. As
one CRO emphasizes, "*I'm a strong believer in a programmatic approach where the
municipality, together with small and big representatives of the cultural sector, joins forces
[…]. Of course, you need some funding*" (Interviewee 05). Yet in most cities, such integration
remains absent. This non-existent strategic relationship with the cultural department the
various contributions that culture could make to resilience, such as "*community cohesion and
social capital*" (Interviewee 04), "*continuing the democratic conversation with communities*"
(Interviewee 01), and "*how a narrative on climate change can be developed through cultural
activities*" (Interviewee 03), risk being reduced to rhetorical commitments. This is especially
likely given that most CROs come from sustainability backgrounds and may lack the tools to
translate cultural dimensions into actionable policies. As one CRO reflects:

> *It's harder to imagine how you can work on [culture]. For example, if you work on
> water resilience, you know how to make your people aware, but also how to work on
> physical projects […]. And when it's about culture, […] it's a lot more difficult.*
> (Interviewee 03)

This quote indicates another reason for the dominant appearance of cultural heritage, as it is a

very concrete project that CROs can work on without addressing the critical potential of culture.

Figure 4.2.1

Screenshot from the Tbilisi Resilience Strategy

Note. From *Tbilisi Resilience Strategy* (pp. 25–26), by City of Tbilisi, 2019, *Resilient Cities Network* (https://resilientcitiesnetwork.org/downloadable_resources/Network/Tbilisi_Resilience-Strategy-English.pdf). Copyright 2019 by City of Tbilisi.

Furthermore, as the interviewees said, projects were included when either a relationship already existed through previous collaborations or had developed through outreach by individual cultural actors. Unsurprisingly, the latter leads to the involvement of well-resourced cultural institutions. As one CRO noted:

> *Institutions are just much more professionalized and know how to reach municipalities. But if you're a grassroots initiative, you're often not able to reach the institutions in the way they are organized […] you kinda need lobbyists for the grassroots.* (Interviewee 03)

The inclusion of those prestigious institutions tends, however, to be flagship projects, that serve political elites who turn their involvement into a performative act of political self-promotion but may ultimately further alienate residents of suburban neighborhoods (Evans,

2001). This illustrates how resilience in the neoliberal sense strengthens existing power structures, even in the cultural sector. However, the latter could be prevented by integrating culture "*in a programmatic and systemic way*" (Interviewee 05). This could be done by valuing and funding grassroots cultural initiatives that promote critical and transformative resilience because they are deeply rooted in the community, characterized by an established community trust, and at the same time exhibit local knowledge that promotes democracy and sustainability in neighborhoods (Ali & Khan, 2015; Hidayat & Stoecker, 2018).

In this sense, instead of lobbying for smaller institutions, it is important to (1) foster structural links with cultural departments that know local cultural actors and could thus act as a bridge between the resilience team and smaller actors. And (2) the appreciation of more inclusive approaches to fostering resilience based on participatory processes, even if difficult to measure, yet promoting cultural democracy and diversity (Evans, 2001). This could lead to the inclusion of not only large institutions, but also more informal places such as artists' studios and skate parks, whose contribution is significant (Amirtahmasebi & Schupbach, 2024).

However, Interviewee 04 pointing out that they need lobbyists instead of this structural connection, shows their experience of how fragile departmental connections can be. After moving from the cultural department to the resilience team, the interviewee describes how her previously established connections to the cultural department quickly eroded: "*The links with the cultural department were not so strong anymore […] it was really fragile, you could say it was not resilient at all*" (Interviewee 04). This experience underscores the urgency of integrating resilience thinking by building institutionalized relationships rather than relying on individuals. Yet, such integration is only possible where cultural awareness exists within resilience governance. As Interviewee 04 notes, "*Then everyone should feel the urgency [to integrate cultural actions] and I guess that was something that was not really there […] it was also kind of like a nice to have*".

This marginalization of culture is not only anecdotal but systemic, where other interviewees plainly state, "*I think most politicians do not appreciate culture*" (Interviewee 03) or "*It's not a main priority*" (Interviewee 02). These attitudes can be traced back to the aforementioned neoliberal measurement logics in resilience governance that privilege environmental and economic concerns over social and democratic factors. In this sense, depending on the city, culture can either be seen as an instrument for reinforcing the status quo or a nice-to-have. In both cases, however, culture is deprived of its critical potential and serves the logics of contemporary urban governance. To counteract this attitude towards

culture as a "set of optional extras" (Boeri et al., 2018, p. 2), frameworks must be more closely informed by research and grounded in broader conceptualizations of resilience that recognize cultural contributions, especially at the transformational level. Although networks such as the 100RC network are often criticized for their role in realizing neoliberal agendas (Hofmann, 2021; Leitner et al., 2018), networks could serve as catalysts in this regard. As one interviewee observes, external impulses are often more persuasive than internal advocacy: "*To have [the] 100 Resilient Cities network was great because in our culture, when somebody [from] international experts come and tell you something, they believe more versus when you're [the one] saying something*" (Interviewee 03). If cities remain hesitant to embed culture from within, it may be external frameworks that are best positioned to redefine what resilience means in practice.

In conclusion, the conflicting institutional logics and the persistent lack of awareness identified in this section represent key structural barriers for a meaningful integration of culture in resilience strategies. These barriers must be addressed to unlock culture's critical, democratic, and transformative potential. Against this background, the following chapter develops concrete recommendations for academia and policy that support this shift and enable more inclusive and future-oriented forms of urban resilience.

5   Recommendations

The findings show the structural and conceptual limits of integrating culture into resilience efforts. In doing so, they reflect the static, technocratic and neoliberal understanding of resilience in municipal administrations. However, at a time when democracy is endangered by populism, which emerged from the longstanding practice of neoliberalism (Bettache & Chiu, 2019), it is imperative to reframe urban resilience on a policy level. A resilience agenda that challenges neoliberalism should therefore incorporate the critical, democratic and transformative dimensions of culture that go hand in hand with structural, social transformation. To reach this, the following section outlines three recommendations based on the findings: (1) reorienting policy towards a dynamic and inclusive resilience paradigm, (2) advancing an academic framework including the multidimensionality of culture, and (3) ensuring structural funding for the cultural sector as a pillar of urban transformation.

5.1.1   *Toward Inclusive and Dynamic Resilience*

In today's age of polycrisis, the concept of resilience needs to be understood as referring not only to adaptation but also to transformational capacities. Especially on this level, the cultural sector can make a decisive contribution. With its multidimensional and transformative contribution and individual actors as role models, culture enables inclusive spaces for discussion, participation and negotiation. In this sense, the Multaka project is an excellent example for fostering inclusive, transformative resilience by amplifying marginalized voices and facilitating participatory spaces. The latter encourages dialog, shared understanding and new perspectives that promote resilience, not through control but through connection and inclusion (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016). As pointed out by Interviewee 07, "*You need arts and culture to bridge gaps between communities in a way that just having bridged won't do*". And this is precisely what is missing in current resilience strategies: that culture is acknowledged as the glue that holds a society together at its core (Graves, 2010).

5.1.2   *Embedding Culture in Resilience Frameworks*

In that regard, culture needs to be embedded in broader resilience frameworks. There, its facilitating role must be recognized as a prerequisite for its contribution across all five dimensions of urban resilience. Such a framework must be based on scientific literature, thus focusing on the level of transformability. Furthermore, an emphasis on long-term and systemic change is important in order to counteract today's depoliticization, commodification and instrumentalization of culture. Generally, resilience can oppose neoliberal governance when understanding it as a collective, political and iterative process. This could be done by

basing the framework on values such as reflexivity and place-based adaptation in order to capture cultural specificities. In this way, isomorphism can be counteracted while promoting cultural diversity. The latter could contribute to economic development and sustainable tourism that serves the citizens instead of mass tourism that often goes hand in hand with gentrification and its negative consequences, such as displacement of vulnerable groups (Cocola-Gant, 2018). To reach this potential, a focus should be set on culture-led participatory processes, not only for the strategy development, but also its measurement (Finkenbusch, 2022). This approach makes the framework grounded in shared ownership, dialog and legitimacy, strengthening its own foundation, which makes it more resilient against political changes. Such a framework, especially when promoted by networks and incorporated by cities, will lead to an increased awareness and valuation of the cultural sector, which must be funded accordingly.

5.1.3   *Structural Funding for Cultural Transformation*

For a shift from a purely managerial state to one that defines clear societal roles, takes risks and strategically deploys public capital to achieve transformative goals, argues Mazzucato, a renowned economist and professor of innovation economics (Mazzucato, 2021). When investing in transformative aims, culture must be fundamentally included. This corresponds to the demand of the European Cultural Foundation to include culture at the highest level of EU policies as well as their institutions to acknowledge its pivotal role in shaping the future (Schwarz & Andreeva, 2025). In this sense, the EU is called upon to provide structural funding for culture with 2% of the EU budget between 2028 and 2034, highlighting the need for long-term funding instead of the current project-based approach. This demand must be mirrored at the urban level. It requires the allocation and use of cross-cutting resilience funds that explicitly enable collaboration with the cultural sector, such as Barcelona's Cultural Rights Plan. Multi-year funding comes from the overarching city council, complemented by contributions from other departments. Here, culture is not reduced to an economic sector or location factor but framed as a democratic instrument. When culture is structurally funded like that, cities do not have to choose between basic services and culture. As Interviewee 01 explains, "*People want to see their bins emptied and their streets clean. I understand that, but we as a city have been really, really careful about not doing that – maintaining our libraries, maintaining our arts funding as best we can*". When culture is embedded into the fabric of urban governance and funding, resilience becomes what it is meant to be: an inclusive, democratic, and transformative process. The participatory processes then do not only institutionalize resilience in municipalities but also anchor it in civil society.

This is particularly important in times of increasing populism and anti-democratic tendencies, as resilience is then less susceptible to political shifts. Anchoring the concept both in political institutions and in cultural practices strengthens its foundations and transforms it from a technocratic policy into a living democratic project.

6   Conclusion

This thesis investigated what role is assigned to culture in urban resilience strategies in Europe and how municipal governance dynamics influence its integration. This was done by analyzing 30 European resilience strategies and conducting seven expert-interviews. The thematic content analysis revealed that culture is used to reinforce the status quo and focuses on policies that are easily measurable, particularly in the economic dimension around cultural heritage and tourism. Building on recent critiques such as Betzler et al. (2023), it extends the discussion to the municipal level and reveals how internal governance dynamics shape the exclusion of culture as a transformative force. The expert interviews identified conflicting logics and limited cultural awareness as key determinants of the performative and technocratic integration of culture.

The measures found in the policy documents indicate a static, technocratic understanding of resilience that contradicts the processual and dynamic nature of the concept. Moreover, vague formulations and short-term interventions emphasize that culture is deprived of its political, multidimensional and transformative role. Such an approach underscores how resilience is being used: to implement neoliberal agendas rather than to transform societies. This performative and managerial approach is mainly due to the cultural departments being structurally isolated in these efforts. The latter is particularly interesting, as academic literature identifies the exclusion of specific sectors as a main barrier to successful resilience policies. Two central obstacles for integrating cultural departments into resilience policymaking emerged from the expert interviews and policy analysis.

The first obstacle concerns conflicting logics between departments. Although resilience is highly difficult to capture quantitatively, the municipalities are guided by a narrow focus on measurable outcomes, which crowds out contextual and value-based dimensions of governance that are essential. The latter explains the economic focus of the analyzed strategies and provides insights why participatory processes are often neglected. These could, however, make the resilience strategies more locality-specific. Moreover, through the inclusion of cultural departments and citizens, legitimacy could be enhanced through democratic negotiation. This grounds the strategies on a multitude of participants, thus making them more independent on political change that is increasing in Europe today. Thus, this thesis argues for a shift of the resilience understanding away from a static, towards a dynamic approach that acknowledges culture's political and transformative potential, as well as its function as a role model that embodies important factors such as collectivity and solidarity.

The second barrier to integrating culture in resilience policymaking is a lack of awareness, which was found to be rooted in the proximity of the concept to sustainability. Sustainability policy is often dominated by technical and economic values, which means that less tangible values are neglected. In this sense, resilience thinking perpetuates this narrative. Additionally, many CROs often have a professional background in this field. Combined with the lack of systematic links to the cultural sector, this prevents it from being strategically integrated. This is also due to the lack of resources in this sector, which further isolates culture. However, this conflict can be resolved by integrating resilience values such as collectivity to see different departments as one team and share budgets.

To achieve this, three recommendations are proposed. Firstly, resilience policy must be reimagined as dynamic and inclusive to realize its critical potential. Secondly, a framework needs to be designed that embeds culture in a multidimensional and transformative manner. Thirdly, culture's potential must be acknowledged by municipalities and must correspond with respective structural funding. These steps are essential to move resilience from static and technocratic crisis management to a tool for transformation.

The findings of this thesis are, however, limited by certain conceptual and methodological constraints. On a conceptual level, as in any qualitative study, the subjectivity of the researcher influenced the interpretation of the findings. In this thesis, the normative-critical stance, particularly towards neoliberalism, enabled an in-depth theoretical analysis but may have biased the interpretation of the data. Moreover, the theory-based background of the researcher might lead to the recommendations not fully reflecting the complexity of municipal governance. Methodologically, the focus on municipal governance dynamics limits the consideration of external actors such as networks, even though their relevance is highlighted in many studies. Furthermore, the interviews indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly changed resilience thinking, yet most of the strategies were published prior to the pandemic and its impacts, which limits the timeliness of the research.

Thus, further research could examine the respective networks and their partners to understand resilience strategy development on a deeper level. Moreover, cultural departments could be an important focus for future research to better understand the actual exclusion of their departments and the cultural sector in city-wide policymaking. This approach could reveal forms of cultural practice that already contribute to resilience but remain invisible within technocratic policy frameworks.

To conclude, the present thesis contributes to academia by highlighting the present static resilience understanding in urban policy through the lens of cultural measures. Additionally, it

provides insights into barriers, namely conflicting logics and lacking awareness, that hinder the culture-in-all-policies desires. Generally, because of cities' innovative modes of governance, these insights also inform broader policy developments. It is therefore all the more important that culture is no longer used as a technocratic or performative tool in times of polycrisis. Its transformative potential must be recognized as a central factor for urban resilience, as it can master the challenges ahead with imagination, solidarity and collective strength.

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Appendix A
Overview of Analyzed Cities

Table A1

Distribution of Analyzed Cities by Region and Size

City Size/ Region	Large Metropolitan City (≥ 1.5 Mio)	Metropolitan City (500k–1.5 Mio)	Medium-size City (200k–500k)	Small City (50k–200k)
Eastern Europe		Katowice (POL), Tblissi (GEO)	Burgas (BGR)	
Northern Europe	Greater Manchester (GBR), London (GBR)	Belfast (GBR), Glasgow (GBR)	Bristol (GBR), Malmö (SWE),	Velje (DNK)
Southern Europe	Athens (GRC), Barcelona (ESP), Lisbon (PRT), Rome (ITA)	Thessaloniki (GRC)		Ionnina (GRC), Potenza (ITA)
Western Europe	Paris (FRA)	Antwerp (BEL), Rotterdam (NLD), The Hague (NLD)		

Note. Regions are based on the classification by the United Nations Statistics Division (1999). City sizes follow the OECD (2014) typology. Tbilisi was manually added to the Eastern Europe category. Although Georgia's accession to the EU remains politically challenging, its European orientation is evident in the self-perception of its population (James, 2023) and its active participation in EU city networks, which is it was included in the sample. Furthermore, Greater Manchester was included as a metropolitan region due to its functional urban governance and its own resilience strategy, reflecting its role within the 100 Resilient Cities initiative

Appendix B
Interview Sample by City Context

Table B1

Interviewee Overview by Region and City Size

Interview-ID	Relevant Position	Position Status	Professional background	European Region	Note	City Size
I- 01	CRO	Current	Urban policy and sustainability	Northern Europe		Metropolitan City
I- 02	CRO	Current	Urban policy and sustainability	Northern Europe	Employed after strategy publication	Large Metropolitan City
I- 03	CRO	Current	Urban policy and international relations	Eastern Europe		Metropolitan City
I- 04	Deputy CRO	Former	Urban Policy and resilience	Western Europe	Previously worked in city's culture department	Metropolitan City
I- 05	CRO	Former	Urban policy and water management	Western Europe		Metropolitan City

Note. The cross-case interviews are not included as they are not assigned to a specific case

Appendix C
Interview Guide

Table C1

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Question	Sub-questions	Theoretical Foundation
Introduction		
1.What are your tasks and responsibilities in your position at the organisation?	Could you please describe what a typical working week looks like in your position.	
Context		
A) About the Interviewee		
2. What is your role in your city's resilience or resilience strategy?		
3. What is your professional background?		
4. How did you first engage with the topic of resilience?		Hoffman (2021) Booher and Innes (2002)
B) About the City and Its Strategies		
5. What were the main drivers for developing a resilience strategy? Rückfrage: shocks/ triggers	What made you need to look at resilience as a topic? Were there any specific shocks or triggers?	Horgan and Dimitrijević (2020) Hannibal et al., 2022

6. How did you get involved in the network?	Who and how did you decide?	
7. What are the capacities or services that are built through these relationships?		

Process

C)Strategic Decisions

8. Resilience is seen as a boundary object, does that count for the cultural department as well?		Hannibal, 2022 Amirtahmasebi & Schupbach, 2024
9. Is the work with resilience and culture connected to the culture department?	Are there any formal connections, such as regular meetings?	
10. Who are the main actors involved in cultural resilience work?	Were grassroot initiatives or independent actors included?	
	Why do you think there is such an immense focus on cultural heritage?	
11.How did you decide with whom to collaborate?	Did you rely on fixed networks or flexible coalitions?	Galès, 2001
12. How would you describe the level of participation for		

the strategy?

	Who was included in the decision-making? Who was in the focus (e.g. artists, the public, certain neighborhoods)?	Arnstein, S. R. (1969)

D) Role of Networks

13. Was there room for experimentation or bottom-up learning, community engagement?	Were resources allocated for this realm? If applicable: Differed that depending on the network?	Hannibal et al., (2022)
14. How influential is the network on your city's strategy?	Could you describe if there was room for local characteristics, or did you follow a standardized model (framework of the network)? How influential are the proposed partners especially in 100RC network- are they helpful or restricting?	Acuto & Rayner (2016) Galès (2001)

Impact		
E) Implementation and Visibility		
15. How would you describe the use of the strategy?		Acuto & Rayner (2016) Mandelkern (2023):

16. What has actually been implemented as part of the cultural strategy?	What is the impact on the cultural sector?	Galès (2001) Hannibal et al., (2022**)**

F) Collaboration and Learning

17. Have new partnerships formed as a result of the strategy or network?	Are there any particular inside but also outside the city?	Acuto & Rayner, 2016 *Acuto & Leffel, 2020)* *Haag et al. (2024)*
18. How is the relationship after the strategy publication?	Can you describe the collaboration of the city with the network?	
19. Are there follow-up activities, evaluations, or institutional learning processes?		

Concluding Question

G) Broader Cultural Vision?

20. What do you see as the most underused potential of culture in resilience-

building?

21. Is there anything you
want to share of your vision/
about your work?

Note. The interview was to be conceived according to the rules of successful interviewing. Thus, various factors such as active listening, no interruptions, unambiguous questions and a certain degree of informedness were considered to create a pleasant, information-generating and somewhat natural atmosphere (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, p. 172-195). The emphasis was on factors such as openness in order to provoke a flow of conversation on the part of the interviewee and to elicit descriptive and explanatory passages, as well as avoiding suggestive questions (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, pp. 120-149).

Appendix D
Codebook for Content Analysis

Table D1

Code Categories and Examples Across Dimensions

		0. Inductive Indicators	
	Subcode	**Description**	**Example**
	0.1 Discursive construction of culture	How culture is described in the narrative of the strategy	Described as a legacy, resource, symbol, or challenge.
	0.2 Cultural sector	The specific cultural domains addressed in the strategy	Cultural Heritage, Arts
	0.3 Type of organization	The kinds of cultural actors involved	public institutions, NGOs, grassroots, informal initiatives
	0.4 Target groups	Specific groups that the actions are targeted at	Young entrepreneurs
Dimension		1. **Natural**	
Frigotto et al., (2022)	**Subcode**	**Description**	**Example**
Absorptivity	1.1 Cultural appreciation of ecological goods	Cultural meaning, awareness, or continuity of natural environments and physical landscapes are recognized and supported	Strategies aim to foster appreciation of natural assets and landscape identity through cultural engagement
Adaptability	1.2 Cultural engagement in	Strategies refer to cultural content and storytelling as a way to	Use of cultural programming to communicate

	environmental behavior change	shape ecological awareness and adaptive practices	climate adaptation measures in flood-prone neighborhoods
Transformability	1.3 Cultural visions of ecological futures	Culture is used to question dominant environmental narratives and foster new relationships between communities and ecosystems	Resilience plans include cultural visions of ecological futures (e.g. co-creation of "climate imaginaries" with local artists)
Dimension	**2. Economic**		
Frigotto et al., (2022)	**Subcode**	**Description**	**Example**
Absorptivity	2.1 Stabilization of cultural-economic assets	Cultural heritage, institutions, and activities are treated as valuable economic resources and supported to maintain income and identity after disruption	Promotion of guided heritage tours or targeted tourism campaigns to restore local revenues after crisis
Adaptability	2.2 Adapting cultural delivery formats	Cultural offerings are made economically more resilient through flexible or hybrid access formats	Implementation of digital cultural programs in municipal services (e.g. virtual museums in Lisbon)
Transformability	2.3 Culture as a driver of new economic models	Culture is positioned as a long-term lever for local economic transformation, including structural support for the cultural sector itself	Establishment of cooperative cultural production hubs, providing infrastructure, training, and local employment

Dimension	3. Social		
Frigotto et al., (2022)	**Subcode**	**Description**	**Example**
Absorptivity	3.1 Protection of collective identity	Cultural formats help maintain a sense of community and belonging during times of disruption	Local neighborhood festivals continued in scaled-down versions to maintain routines
Adaptability	3.2 Cultural strengthening of social connectedness	Cultural strategies support spaces and programs that foster interaction, trust, and mutual recognition across diverse social groups	Resilience plans promote cultural initiatives that link newcomers, long-term residents, and marginalized groups
Transformability	3.3 Culture as a tool for reimagining social relations	Cultural strategies actively challenge inequality and foster new models of inclusion and solidarity	Creation of participatory cultural platforms for marginalized communities (e.g. youth-led cultural hubs)
Dimension	4. Physical		
Frigotto et al., (2022)	**Subcode**	**Description**	**Example**
Absorptivity	4.1 Cultural integration into resilient use of physical infrastructure	Support of the preservation, repair, or reactivation of physical structures through cultural functions and uses	Stabilizing small cultural venues or historical community halls

Adaptability	4.2 Spatial integration of cultural practices	Cultural needs, actors, and activities are incorporated into the adaptive reuse, design, or allocation of urban spaces	Temporary cultural use of vacant buildings
Transformability	4.3 Culture-informed reconfiguration	Cultural values and actors are incorporated to reshape the use, design, or governance of physical space.	The implementation of cultural land trusts or artist-led redevelopment of disused infrastructure.

Dimension		5. Institutional	
Frigotto et al., (2022)	**Subcode**	**Description**	**Example**
Absorptivity	5.1 Utilization of existing cultural governance structures	Resilience strategies refer to existing cultural governance mechanisms as stabilizing institutional structures	Integration of cultural institutions into emergency response coordination (e.g. heritage departments involved in post-disaster site recovery)
Adaptability	5.2 Institutional learning through cultural participation	Culture is integrated into institutional planning processes	Cultural stakeholders participate in municipal resilience contribute to adaptation plans
Transformability	5.3 Culture-driven reconfiguration of governance logics	Cultural governance is used as a transformative lens to rethink institutional structures,	Cultural institutions are given strategic roles in resilience planning, shifting from service

| | participation, and | providers to drivers |
| | decision-making | of policy innovation |

Appendix E
Overview of Interview Codes

Table E1

Overview of Interview Codes

Category	Sub-category	Description
Resilience	Definition & Evolution	How resilience is understood and how its meaning has shifted over time
	Measurability	Reflections on the (im)possibility of measuring resilience and cultural impact; critique of quantitative KPIs
Urban Policy	Governance Conflicts & Dependencies	Conflicts between administrative levels, departments, or between political and technical logics; dependency on individual actors.
	Participatory Processes	Presence or absence of participatory processes; level of structural anchoring at the citizen level.
	Resources	Reflections on financial, human, and structural resources as enabling or limiting factors
	Collaboration	Approaches to cross-sectoral cooperation, both formal and informal, within the city administration
Culture	Role of Culture	Ways in which culture is understood and positioned within broader urban development and resilience agendas
	Connection to the Cultural Department	Descriptions of the relationship between resilience teams and cultural departments
	Type of cultural institutions involved	Type of cultural institutions involved (e.g., grassroots, mueseums, etc.)
	Reason for Inclusion	Justification for the inclusion (e.g. formalized networks, peronal connections, etc.)
External Influences	Type of influences outside the municipality	Influence e.g. by city networks and frameworks (e.g., ARUP, 100RC network) on city strategy design and implementation