

## Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships Programme for Interdisciplinary Resilience Studies (PIRS) University of Southampton

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**RECRUITMENT CYCLE for studentships starting: October 2024**

### **SUPERVISORY TEAM**

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### **STUDENTSHIP PROJECT TITLE**

**Searching for meaning and direction in resilience to extreme heat**

### **OVERVIEW**

Despite the integration of ‘resilience’ into most UK government policy since 2004, and its adoption in wider UK language relating to personal capability, there is little understanding of what resilience looks like in practice. This project explores the lived experience of resilience to extreme heat through community perspectives, narratives across diverse forms of literature, and government policy.

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### **SUMMARY**

The drive to create resilient communities able to cope with and thrive through climate change is hindered by: disagreement over the meaning of resilience; a lack of empirical evidence of resilience in practice; and a lack of focus on the quality/ies of climate resilience. This project will contribute to these research gaps by analysing the lived experience of resilience to heatwaves in the UK, analysing a range of texts and perspectives to reveal the narratives and understandings that exist in relation to resilience. Working with households affected by extreme heat in the UK the student will explore social, political and cultural interpretations of resilience, using the experience of the 2022 UK summer heatwave.

The student will: 1) deliver a literature review of household resilience to heat extremes internationally; 2) Explore the multiplicity of meanings of resilience to heatwaves in archival literature, in social narratives and in government policy; 3) Identify social perceptions of resilience to heat (among different groups including UK nationals, international migrants and refugee communities); 4) Create an evidence base of perceived actions to create resilience to heat and exemplar scenarios of heat resilience; and 5) Develop a theory of place based resilience to heat.

This research will generate scenarios of resilience to extreme heat, showing the multiplicity of lived experiences of resilience in the UK that will contribute to a UK specific theory of resilience to extreme heat. This exciting PhD opportunity will contribute to improving clarity of resilience policy and practice in relation to climate hazards in the UK, and a first exploration of what resilience means in reality in scenarios of extreme heat in the UK.

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## PROJECT CONCEPT

### **Rationale:**

Resilience is an appealing term: it reframes crises, not as something to be feared, but as an opportunity to triumph and improve the wellbeing of society (Lonsdale et al., 2023). Yet the term has also been criticised for being vague, value-laden and lacking consistency (Cretney, 2014). The UK Civil Contingencies Act (2004) placed the notion of resilience at the heart of disaster planning in the UK, restructuring government institutions and policy around this e.g. creating Local Resilience Areas (LRAs) and Forums (LRFs) and primary and secondary responders to plan for and address disaster risk (Walker & Broderick, 2006).

A recent analysis of the use of resilience in government policy found nearly 1,000 mentions of the root word 'resilien\*' across all government flood risk management policy and strategy guidance between 2011 and 2019 (Townend et al 2021). The term resilience is now ubiquitous in UK government policy, however, it has become apparent that pursuit of resilience policy is not without consequences. For example the Environment Agency notes in its 2020 National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England that "*Resilience includes accepting that in some places we can't eliminate all flooding and coastal change, and so we need to be better at adapting to living with the consequences. For example,*

*by designing homes that can be restored quickly after they've been inundated with water"....* This is a different narrative to one of resounding triumph, and is more about making trade-offs, living with risk and accepting loss. While some work has been undertaken to interpret the concept of resilience in relation to coastal flooding (e.g. Brown et al., 2023), much less has occurred in relation to other climate driven hazards that are expected to worsen in the UK, notably understanding what it means to be resilient to extreme heat.

It is not just the policy arena that has seen a rapid rise in the use of the term resilience to communicate the importance of bouncing back quickly after adversity. Creating resilience has become more common within society (Park et al., 2013), for example there is a growing recognition of the need for individuals to be more 'resilient' at work (e.g. Lebrague et al., 2021) and socially (e.g. Saja et al., 2019). In relation to resilience, there is a large but rarely accessed body of archival information —including creative literatures and present day fiction that describes and reflects on resilience – yet this is a largely untapped resource for understanding the complexity of resilience, and what it means to be resilient in the context of extreme heat. We focus on place-based resilience, recognising the growing demand for understanding of local contextual factors affecting resilience.

This PhD provides an opportunity to explore the meaning and implications of place-based resilience to extreme heat in policy and practice in the UK.

**Key objectives include:**

- Explore the multiplicity of meanings of resilience to heatwaves in literature and in government policy
- Identify social perceptions of resilience to heat (among different groups, especially those deemed vulnerable)
- Collate an evidence base of perceived actions to create resilience to heat
- Generate scenarios of lived experience of resilience to heat
- Develop a theory of resilience to extreme heat

**Methods:**

This is an interdisciplinary PhD involving:

- Archival review of meanings and interpretation of resilience in a diverse range of literatures, including Literary critical analysis of popular Climate Fictions of late 20th and 21st fictions featuring extreme heat events
- Analysis of policies/ regulatory frameworks around resilience and policy areas affecting experiences of heat (e.g. housing, transport)
- Qualitative research to assess perceptions of resilience to extreme heat and the reality of household environments in extreme heat
- Theoretical analysis of the reality of resilience policy and practice.

**Wider implications**

This work focusses on resilience to extreme heat events in the UK which remain under-researched (Brimicombe et al., 2021). It also contributes to the wider understanding of resilience in society, to the shaping of more effective and specific resilience policy, and to clarity over the trade-offs associated

with pursuit of resilience objectives. This work builds on Tompkins' ongoing research on resilience, and Jones' work on heat and drought searching for a way to make the concept meaningful and useful in a changing world with a growing array of interconnected and compound climate risks. The project will also contribute to the development of interdisciplinary methods between humanities, geography and policy.

## References

- Brimicombe, C., Porter, J. J., Di Napoli, C., Pappenberger, F., Cornforth, R., Petty, C., & Cloke, H. L. (2021). Heatwaves: an invisible risk in UK policy and research. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 116, 1-7.
- Brown et al. (2023) Transitions in modes of coastal adaptation: addressing blight, engagement and sustainability  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2023.1153134>
- Cretney, R. (2014). Resilience for whom? Emerging critical geographies of socio-ecological resilience. *Geography Compass*, 8(9), 627-640.
- Labrague, L. J., & De los Santos, J. A. A. (2020). COVID-19 anxiety among front-line nurses: Predictive role of organisational support, personal resilience and social support. *Journal of nursing management*, 28(7), 1653-1661.
- Lonsdale, K. et al. (2023) Climate Resilience: Interpretations of the Term and Implications for Practice [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-39729-5\\_2](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-39729-5_2)
- Park J, Seager TP, Rao PSC, Convertino M, Linkov I (2013) Integrating risk and resilience approaches into catastrophe management in engineering systems. *Risk Analysis* 33(3):356-368
- Saja, A. A., Goonetilleke, A., Teo, M., & Ziyath, A. M. (2019). A critical review of social resilience assessment frameworks in disaster management. *International journal of disaster risk reduction*, 35, 101096.
- Townend, I.H. et al. (2021) Operationalising coastal resilience to flood and erosion hazard: A demonstration for England  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2021.146880>
- Walker, C. and Broderick, J. (2006) *The Civil Contingencies Act 2004: risk, resilience and the law in the United Kingdom* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

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## Contribution to interdisciplinary resilience studies:

At present resilience is an often misunderstood, overwrought, or confusing term. This project will integrate methods drawn from and shared by the disciplines of English literature and environmental social sciences to explore the meaning of resilience in relation to natural hazards (heat). This will enable the development of more effective resilience policy in the future. As climate change impacts worsen, there is a growing need to ensure people can cope with, adapt to, and thrive within a changing climate. This project will contribute both theoretical development and empirical evidence to support the advancement of our knowledge of the reality of resilience. The project will also develop scenarios of the lived experience of resilience

offering the first study of its kind to consider what it means to be resilient (or not) in a specific context.

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**Please list and describe any specific/additional technical training or support to undertake and successfully deliver this project. *Note that students recruited into this programme will undertake a bespoke training curriculum. Students and their supervisory teams will also identify generic skills gaps to address through training courses offered by the University's Doctoral College.***

- Understanding resilience and disaster risk – delivered by Tompkins
  - Analysis of policy documents – delivered by Tompkins
  - Attend Tompkins’ module on Adapting to climate and weather hazards (GGES3019)
  - Methods to analyse diverse forms of literary texts – delivered by Jones
  - Attend Jones’ module (ENGL3089) Literatures of Islands and Oceans
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