



# Biographic Turning Point in Lifetime of Individuals Living in Degraded Context: The Role of Resilience

**Prof. Lorenzo Ferrante\***

Aggregate professor of Sociology at DEMS-Department of Political Sciences and International Relations, Università degli Studi di Palermo, Italy

Email: [lorenzo.ferrante@unipa.it](mailto:lorenzo.ferrante@unipa.it)

**Dott Elisabetta Mura**

Psicologo, Cismai – Coordinamento italiano dei servizi contro il maltrattamento e abuso all'infanzia, Italy

## Article History

**Received:** June 2, 2020

**Revised:** June 22, 2020

**Accepted:** July 1, 2020

**Published:** July 3, 2020

## Abstract

In the course of their lives all people experience events such as the loss of a parent, a child, job or sometimes violence, after which life is no longer the same. In these moments the regular, repetitive and comforting course of life changes because the event is the *turning point* that changes the direction of the subject's lifetime. The paper is focused on a study of 60 cases in which resilience intervenes in the biographies of individuals, living in conditions of socio-spatial marginality and high social vulnerability, to restore the existential imbalance of a biographical discontinuity represented by a traumatic event. The problem of the research focuses on understanding the role of resilience in facing a turning point and leaving the circuits of social marginality, characterized mainly, but not exclusively, by delinquency, poverty, violence (suffered and played in its biographical path) through the reorganization of the course of one's life. The study was carried out through life stories of individuals living in degraded context on which the turning point had an impact. To analyze life stories, the methodological approach used is the biographical one, according to the "analytical" model scheme of Demazière and Dubar (2000). Like a step-by-step process, resilience is cumulative and progressive of: traumatic event or a succession of them, reflexivity and awareness of a change, identification of ultimate concerns, formulation of a new project. With the categories of active and immovable fatalistic resilient the research shows, on the one hand, the cases in which the context psychologically imprisons the comforting immobility of psycho-social security; and on the other the breakdown of these models, often autopoietic of gender marginality and subordination.

**Keywords:** Resilience; Turning point; Reflexivity; Marginalization; Vulnerability.

## 1. Introduction

The article aims to understand the phenomenon of turning points in the biographies of individuals living in conditions of socio-spatial marginality and high social vulnerability. It is focused on a cases study in which resilience intervenes to restore the existential imbalance of a biographical discontinuity represented by a traumatic event. The problem of the research focuses precisely on understanding the role of resilience in facing a turning point and leaving the circuits of social marginality.

In the course of their lives all people experience events such as the loss of a parent, a child, job or sometimes violence, after which life is no longer the same. In these moments, the regular, repetitive, and comforting course of life changes because the event is the *turning point* that changes the direction of the subject's lifetime. The history of the individual undergoes an alteration that requires the use of resilience as an existential response to re-establish the psycho-social equilibrium lost in the interval between a "before" and an "after". This need moves the individual from one situation to another, in a resilient process of recognition, attribution of sense and construction of identity that requires him to "be other than what he/she has been so far" (Bonica and Cardano, 2008). These events divide individuals on the one hand in those who undertake or reproduce paths of violence, deviance or descending mobility, in their life course; on the other in that of individuals who instead carry out biographical discontinuities, through the reorganization of their biographical path. They do this by taking paths of positive sociality, reducing social differentiation, redefining their social destiny. If some people succeed in assigning new symbolic and objective meanings to their existence, others can't make it. They are people who more than others are unable to cope with the effects of turning points and to activate forms of resilience. They are individuals with high social vulnerability because they live in degraded, marginal, contexts configured as real areas of social segregation. These are economically disadvantaged, culturally backward or "frozen areas"<sup>1</sup> compared to modernization processes. The individual biographies built in these areas link characteristics of immutability to those of marginality, also conditioning the construction of new post-traumatic identity projects from a psychological point of view. In the risk society (Beck, 2000) the chances of facing events that change the course of life without any social parachute, increase. Because in these cases social risk factors and psychological responses intersect, it was considered

<sup>1</sup> With this ideal-typical category we intend to refer to the daily phenomenology of degraded urban contexts, in which a certain structuring of tendentially stable values, on the one hand ensures belonging and recognisability to the residents, on the other it binds them to the staticity in the paths of social mobility.

\*Corresponding Author

appropriate to use an inter-disciplinary psycho-sociological approach with which summarize analysis and operational proposals.

The interest in studying the course of life and biographical transitions has grown, due to changes during life and the meanings assigned to it. The life course of individuals, before the transformation of traditional societies into complex forms, took place within a social map in which the borders ensured uniqueness to the biographical paths. The time of the complex societies in which we live is increasingly defined by the de-modulation of life courses. The overall structure of the life course changed profoundly, becoming more "individualized", "de-institutionalized", increasingly "individualized" (Macmillan, 2005). The certainty of the predictability of events or transitions in the lives of individuals has left room for both the uncertainty of everyday life, both in existential and professional dimensions. The strong unpredictability increases the difficulty of drawing and implementing self-reinvention projects. From a psychological perspective, terms such as resilience, marginalization, vulnerability, post-traumatic stress disorder, are increasingly recurrent and intervene to describe the phenomena in question. The irregularity in the construction of personal identity is tied to biographies in which it is difficult to trace the beginning and end, according to models of "identity revisionism" that refer the individual to the autonomous construction of the sense of his own identity (Cesareo, 2005). To what extent it is possible to imagine that these hypotheses of social reproduction involve culturally and poor urban contexts that welcome individuals and groups who are unable to advance on the social scale or undertake descending mobility paths. In these scenarios lies the difficulty of therapeutic and social interventions to restore individual well-being and reduce the social marginality of subjects at greater risk of vulnerability, in which a traumatic discontinuity immobilizes them in the direction of exclusion and social marginality.

## 2. Scientific Reference Literature

For the social sciences, the state of the art of literature has not yet found a unique way to define and measure the resilience. It is a property that binds individuals or communities to the way they respond to certain events. It is not a visible element, and therefore it is not directly observable and measurable. In general, the scientific literature agrees in framing resilience such as: ability to activate resistance, response, recovery of equilibrium, creation of new options following a traumatic event. If generally the term resilience refers to the phenomenon of overcoming a stressful event or an adversity, according to Williams and Drury (2009) individual resilience is an individual's ability to react in adverse situations and circumstances. The concept of resilience is however broad and subject to method indications, as numerous studies show (Anthony, 1987; Egeland *et al.*, 1993; Fonagy *et al.*, 1994; Haggerty *et al.*, 1994; Luthar, 1993; Rolf *et al.*, 1990; Siefer, 1995). In these contributions, scholars point out that if on the one hand the dynamic aspect of overcoming the stressful or traumatic event is evident, in reality this is different from the acquisition of social skills (Masten *et al.*, 1995), from self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995;1997) or by positive mental health (see (Ryff and Singer, 1998)), therefore by psy-social conditions to be conquered or enhanced.

In the psychological reference literature, subjective characteristics, vulnerability to family genetic risk factors and environmental characteristics, although they are decisive in the processes of resilience, have a significant weight and influence the conditions of vulnerability and social marginality. The contribution of literature alternates methods and warnings. A first warning of analysis is that the phenomenon of resilience requires attention to a series of possible psychological outcomes. Therefore, the *single stressor-single output* approach that tends to focus an unusually positive aspect of the individual towards a traumatic condition, or super-normal functioning should be avoided. According to Rutter (1999), it would be a mistake to investigate the resistance of subjects to stress and adversity without first verifying that an individual has suffered experiences that carry a risk of developing a psychopathology. In these verifications it is necessary to distinguish between risk factors and risk mechanisms. There are in fact many variables that show a statistically significant association with psychopathological aspects. Not because they represent a risk process as such, but because they predispose to other experiences that mediate the risk. Among the risk factors hypothesized to represent different types of environmental risks, imply some genetic influence (Plomin, 1994; Plomin *et al.*, 1997). This is especially true for family risk factors when both parents pass on their genes to their children and shape education. Parents who provide greater genetic risks for their children also tend to be more likely to provide suboptimal environments for good growth. In studies on adult crime, biological risk is related to antisocial behaviour related to drug or alcohol problems of parents (Bohman, 1996). In some circumstances, the association between psychosocial risk factors and psychopathology can represent subjects' influences on their environment (Rutter, 1999) (ibidem). For example, although the loss of a parent due to divorce or death may pose an environmental risk, in reality most of the risks derive from the climate of family discord and from the conflict that precedes the breaking up of the family. Among the risk mechanisms, contributions underline that: multiple risk and protective factors are involved; family experiences tend to affect individuals in different ways; the reduction of negative reactions, and the increase of positive ones influences a chain extension to which the effects of adversity persist over time; the new experiences that open up can provide beneficial effects in "turning points"; even if positive experiences in themselves do not have a very protective effect, they can be useful if they serve to neutralize some risk factors; finally, cognitive and affective processing of experiences can influence the development or otherwise of resilience.

Sociologically the turning points are events that change or correct the direction of the individual life course. They modify the development directions of the subject's story. "A turning point involves a fundamental change in the sense, purpose or direction of an individual's life and must include self-reflecting awareness or intuition about the meaning of change" (Wethington *et al.*, 1997). Mies (1983) uses the concept of *click moments* to define the occasions in which occurs a strong break of everyday life. These are traumatic events or moments in which there is a

sudden change in one's "fields of the possible". They force him to make himself explicit of values, intentionality and projects. According to Archer (2003), the human subject "in relation to the world" through reflexivity operates an active mediation between the forces, tendencies and influences that, on the one hand, society places on him, and on the other, what he wants and decides to be. The outcome of this mediation does not depend only on social conditioning, nor on individual interests in utilitarian terms, but by the subjective ability to "dominate" the social complexity and to establish existential priorities for themselves, based on "ultimate concern", that is what we really care about. These priorities serve to transform or reproduce the pre-existing social situation. The reflexivity emerges as "internal conversation" that is an introspective dialogue, private, that the person has with himself in his relations in various practices and social dimensions. In Archer's hypothesis, reflexivity unfolds in people within an identity and self-commitment process that involves phases of discernment, choices, actions and biographical discontinuities. Useful phases to establish and pursue engagement with the world in which to evaluate one's resources, objectives or goals to be achieved, and finally specify projects and methods to achieve them, assign them a place in one's life (Thévenot, 2006).

### 3. Methodology

After more than a century from the *Chicago approach of studies* on social relations and urban contexts, in the studies on marginality and social exclusion the socio-environmental contexts is still evoked as a significant factor of differentiation and social mobility (Brodwin, 2001). About the choice to focus attention on marginal contexts, the general hypothesis lies on that structures, interpersonal relationships, social dynamics that involve residents are culturally tied to the objective conditions of economic and social deprivation of the context. Their typical forms mobilize social actors and cultural issues in the configurations of biographical paths with high vulnerability and conditions of marginality and exclusion (Scanagatta and Maccarini, 2011)<sup>2</sup>. In this scenario the question is: Why do some people who are born and living in economically and culturally degraded environments, can change the course of their lives following a traumatic event, while for others or for its affiliates (family members or residents) would it seem to repeat itself in immanent ways with results of personal degradation or social marginality?

In the qualitative research we present, also with interview extracts, the problem of the study is focuses on understanding the role of resilience in facing a turning point and leaving the circuits of social marginality, characterized mainly, but not exclusively, by delinquency, poverty, violence (suffered and played in its biographical path) through the reorganization of the course of one's life. The study was carried out between 2018 and 2019 in some Sicilian cities (Palermo, Trapani, Agrigento), through 60 life stories of individuals of both sexes, aged between 30 and 50, resident or originating from urban areas and socially marginal of the aforementioned territories<sup>3</sup>. The identification of the profiles of the subjects to be interviewed was focused on individuals: a) whose "routine" life path has been discontinued or has been subjected to situations that have had a strong impact on the choice of biographical paths; b) in which, one's life path was marked by episodes of violence, involvement in the criminal circuit; c) belonging to families with members with a full-blown deviant career. Among the women interviewed, several were guests (or have had hospitality experience) in emergency assistance structures (housing community, host community for single mothers and women in socio-economic difficulties). Among men, they were guests or users of charity sector structures and social volunteering, (homeless communities), canteens for the poor, social centres for the unemployed. There were also interviewed 8 key informants involved in various services of institutional custody matter, treatment, and care, to collect context data and interpretations on marginal paths, desistance from deviance, discontinuities in vulnerable situations.

To analyze life stories, the biographical methodological approach was used, according to the "analytical" model scheme that Demazière and Dubar (2000) indicate necessary to comprehend the perspective of meaning of the interviewee's autobiographical narrative. We therefore proceeded to identify, in the unravelling of the stories of the people interviewed, the occurrence of salient events and management strategies, relationship dynamics, relationships with institutions, transformations in the construction of perceptions and meanings.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Crisis and Paths of Discontinuity

In the stories analyzed, where turning points, events, decisions are placed, it is not possible to trace determinisms and statistical evidence in the recurrence and causes of changes in the trajectories. It is however possible to capture a procedural trend of the paths of discontinuity of interviewed individuals. In a chronological procedure, there is a beginning with a traumatic event in an individual's life. There follows the awareness that, through the self-reflexive ability, reveals the effects of the event and sets its existential priorities (*ultimate concerns*) to the individuals. The formulation of a new existential project is the defining phase of discontinuity. In this procedural model, resilience is a prism that reflects the characteristics capable of activating a process of evolutionary change that from a crisis generates a new horizon of existential meaning. In the biographical path of the interviewees it seemed important to distinguish a crisis as a dynamic process or as a state. In this regard, the moment, and the response methods in defining the event that generated the crisis were decisive. In the first case it is probable that the individual, after a moment of confusion or disorientation, reducing it to handle the transition within the confines of

<sup>2</sup> This general hypothesis is supported by the extensive reference literature and previous research on marginal urban neighbourhoods (Scanagatta, Maccarini 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Sicily is among the Italian regions with the highest indicators of economic poverty, higher youth and female unemployment, risk of social vulnerability of the inhabitants.

their individuality through: coping strategies, interpretation of privacy and of shame, self responsibility; in the second case, the static nature of the concept of crisis is the drift of a path in which the individual cannot use strategies, experiences or resources to change the direction of things. This general pattern, in the case of individuals living in degraded contexts takes on specific connotations because of the influence of the environment throughout the life of the residents.

## 4.2. Recognize and Manage Crises, the Influence of the Context

From the analysis of life stories, the importance of the context in the individual biography is evident. The degraded territorial spaces accept the expressive aspects of the values and cultures of residents. Declining them symbolically in all codified forms of sense of language, rituals, consumption. These cultural or symbolic means and forms constitute the mediation of reciprocal relations, when internalized by individuals and legitimized by common sense. In this interweaving of cultural values and individual decisions, the stakes are the local cohesion, acted out by the tension between composition and decomposition of the group. The comparison between modernity and tradition is not faced in ways that improve the conditions of active citizenship. The influence of the context on the management of the turning points cannot be generalized to all social actors of these areas by the traditional static nature of the biographical paths.

Staticity is interrupted when individuals, socialized in family networks with criminal careers or victims of physical and psychological violence, break the circuit of family reproduction of criminal biographical paths of violence or marginality. This change is part of a wider plan of the micro-macro social relationship in which identities and social roles become evolutionary models characterized by high unpredictability and disorder for the same context.

Recognizing and facing a crisis is an operation made difficult, if not impossible, by the paths of family genesis and the biographical ones that are inexorably reproduced. It repeats a cycle in which a starting condition returns in the various generations. The attitudes of renunciation and resignation with which some individuals experience the unexpected events of their life as real existential drifts are frequent. In these cases, fatalism and resignation are the cause of the lack of planning of one's existential dimension. Upon the occurrence of an unexpected event, a fatalistic renouncing attitude prevents the individual from activating a reflection on the conditions useful for recognizing and facing a crisis.

The same traits also contribute in determining specific lifestyles and paths that repeat over time because they are deeply rooted in the collective identity to which one belongs. From the analysis of segments relating to events in life stories, the individual dimension is constituted through one's family role, where the person demonstrates to himself and to others a socially recognized role. Thus, early family formation is noted. Frequent is the son conceived before marriage. The job is not seen as an element of self-realization, but as a means of survival for oneself and one's family. The precariousness of the job is often a grafting factor of man in the circuits of violence, alcoholism, crime or deviant behavior. The woman is always considered the only person responsible for the conduct of domestic life, and hardly carries out jobs other than housekeeper or assistant to the elderly. The social capital is absent or degraded. In this valence it participates in the construction of civic coexistence modes in which personal and environmental decorum are an expression of marginalization and exclusion. Psychological and cultural traits accompany the protagonists of these paths in the formation of tribes of poor. They come to accept the blockade of their moral career, exchanging this blockade for entry into a circuit of organized margins (Mazzette and Sgroi, 1999). Lack of perception of the future time. Absence of planning. Difficulty in considering the possibility of making changes unless an event (also unexpected) such as a lottery or instant lottery winnings. Lack of perception of the citizenship rights' ownership. These are some of the phenomenological factors that activate mechanisms of survival and social integration, although limited and subordinate to its context. The patterns of social reproduction of these areas tend to validate a constant structure mechanism about the processes of poverty, according to which, the answers to the original conditions of deprivation tend to produce new states of deprivation (Negri and Bosco, 2004), in autopoietic way. In interviews, often the cause/event that leads to the turning point, assessed by the interviewees as discontinuity, is considered linked to another series of events. In the cases we analyzed, the mechanism in question was found, when for example the path of marginality of an individual infects and falls on his family members, determining their social destiny.

*My father had a company. He started drinking and the company went bankrupt. He started working again as a gardener and then because of alcohol he lost it and destroyed everything. Family and work. Now my mother is separated from him and works in a cleaning company. I had to grow up my brother because she worked and my father was absent. And I could not study as I wanted. (man, 42 y. o., unemployed).*

This effect is hypothesized by Smith (1985) who defines *cross-career effects* as the connections between events that occur in a career accompanied by events that concern other careers. For example, a serious accident during the working hours of an individual reduces its productive capacity and profitability, but others bounce effects on his family career, when they change its role and involve other people in his care. In such cases, vulnerability, erosion of social capital and marginalization can be considered the result of a deficit of resilience, that is as one of the individual skills necessary to transform the endowments of available resources into operations capable of generating well-being.

The crises in the biographical path are never anticipated by efforts to prevent their negative effects but accepted with resignation. The inability to evaluate the consequences of actions, even posteriori, acts as a strategy for justifying their failures. In these cases, the origin of the failures tends to be identified as an unpredictable fact. In this self-exculpatory mechanism, decisions and choices are "forced" because without options. Thus, a discontinuity in an

existential journey is complex and hazardous. It is fraught with uncertainty and insecurity symbolic as well as material. This discontinuity is often the product of a previous discontinuity that generates others in a chain. So, life is always conjugated in the present, but rarely to the future. Ultimately, the vision of the future rests on fatalistic situations and in any case independent of the individual determination to implement actions and/or willingness.

In the narratives of life stories, the degraded or absent social capital entangles in the networks of marginalization or deviance. Immobilizes through the validation of behavior models and penalizing values in turning points. Precisely in the moments in which human and social capital play a decisive role in the structuring of coping strategies.

*I started working as a mechanic. I was sued for fencing a stolen motorcycle to help some friends. I married. My son was born. But I no longer worked because without a qualification they exploited me. Then bad friendships. Drugs ... and I needed to feed my family. (man, 35 y.o.)*

### 4.3. Reflexivity and Awareness

Recognizing and facing a crisis therefore determines the awareness of the effects that a turning point has over time. In the interviews the intertwining of two temporal dimensions is recurrent in which *Krónos* is the chronological time that flows and that is intertwined with *Kairós*, the moment of a time in which something special happens. The time of continuity is interrupted and the biographical course forks. The location of the events in a chronological time opens the scenarios of the retrospective evaluation of the turning points decisive for a change in the biographic trajectories, as assumed by [Kearney and O'Sullivan \(2003\)](#). In the analysis of biographic trajectories and turning points, the social actors through reflexivity focus on decisive moments perceived as a fracture between a before and an after. This triggers a change in one's life trajectory, recognized as important later. The retrospective evaluation thus intervenes to reflect on the possibilities of building new subjective and collective identity configurations. In this sense, the data that assumes particular relevance in the narratives, is the moment of activation of resilience. This coincides with the awareness that a turning point, or a succession of them, constitute points of no return in the biographical trajectories ([Olagnero, 2008](#)).

*My husband beat me and did bad things to my daughters. After a stay in the hospital the police took us to a community. There we had a peaceful break in life. I had to report my husband not to return to that life in the same place where I could never return. (woman, 45 y.o.)*

The transitions would not be exclusively "individual" or linked to "evolutionary stages" of the individual. Rather, they are determined in various types of circumstances which the individual retrospectively represents as turning points. This is in line with the theory of [Laub and Sampson \(2006\)](#) on turning points in the course of life, in whose definition the turning point is "an alteration or deflection in a long-term path or trajectory started in a previous point", distinguishing it from a temporary modification or a pure fluctuation of behavior.

*My life changed when we got married and we went to live in the city center, where my daughters grew up. But the environment in the city center is totally different from that of the suburbs where I lived. In the city, there is more freedom. In town, I saw women going to the gym. In the old neighbourhood I lived like all women who have not freedom. Today I go out for an ice cream. I have more freedom than before (woman 38 y. o.).*

The biographical paths analyzed form a repertoire of meanings and identity sources for individuals, crystallize in identity maps. When the individual becomes aware of the retrospective evaluation of the effects of the transition, he undermines the belonging's cultural model. He changes the social network to which he belongs with an identity betrayal. He does this by assigning a different value to emerging events and transitions in the relationship between individual and individual, between individual and belonging groups. Inclusion/exclusion mechanisms are determined on the one hand as result of the strong self-reference of the residents of the areas at risk, on the other by the psychological difficulties in modifying the destructuring course of one's identity in moments of "crisis". In the life paths analyzed, the "inner conversation" has the effect of increasing awareness to answer lacerating and painful questions: who I am, who I was, who I want to be. Reflexivity and awareness of events, crises and discontinuities thus become biographical bifurcation pressures.

In these backgrounds, the individual presents himself to the social scenario as a subject who in a resilient way elaborates and overcomes the risk of his being. Able to get through a critical moment. The hypothesis is that, the analyzed life courses are transformed through reflexivity. Modified the pre-existing situations at the turning point by the individual, he comes to a new biographical project with the awareness of the costs of the decision. This condition was clearly, in the analysis, when the turning point is evaluated by the individual as a turning point in a routine biographical path of social marginality or existential unease.

### 4.4. Towards a new Project

Schematically, the discontinuity that gives shape to a new identitarian project occurs through the reflexivity that: 1) intervenes in the awareness of causes of discomfort or suffering, and 2) to reformulate new *ultimate concerns* in positioning strategies in the world ([Archer, 2003](#)) (ibidem). In the analysis, the turning decisions take social meanings along a biological trajectory. In this effort it is important to understand the relationship between turning point and motivations for change. The analysis of the circumstances in which a new project is created reveals that this change takes place in a complementary function of the conditions (beliefs, expectations, will, occasion) in which people act and the *ultimate concerns* redeveloped in a historical time between a moment preceding an unexpected event and a subsequent one. In most of the stories analyzed, in the retrospective evaluation of the events and the decision to change in one's biography, the intensity of the effects of the turning point intervenes.

This intensity was detected during the interviews, on a Likert scale, through the assignment of the degree of displacement that the effects of a turning point have had in the biographical path. The greater the intensity of the effects will be assessed the greater will be the motivation for change. In the re-configuration of one's biographical path towards a new project, effect intensity and motivation to change are the dependent variables of two basic conditions: 1) feeling useful for something through work; 2) know to be important to someone through a strong emotional bond family or couple. Socio-productive and emotional protagonism become the ultimate concerns useful to re-configure one's biographical path towards a new project, and so seek the participation in "action areas" (Alexander, 1990) or different social spheres (Dubar, 2004).

*I also attempted suicide. I once jumped out of the balcony. I was in a coma for 3 days. I woke up with my son on the bed crying. But I did not give a damn because I was desperate. The thing changed when my young son said to me: mom if you die who takes me to the garden? And I understood that I was useful to someone. Now I have forgotten everything, except when I left home, and my daughter said to me: mom if you make peace with dad, I will not look you in the face anymore. Because he beat me but made my children suffer. The same thing happened to my mother. It was natural for me to suffer violence! My father with my mother and he with me. I knew that reality, then growing up I knew another reality. And then you put together all the pieces of the mosaic. Now I am happy. I work at the (Social) Center, I do everything. The thing I like most is helping people because I can be useful to many people, thanks to my experience. Now many people are looking for me to talk to me about their problems and they are looking for me, and this flatters me. (woman 47 y. o. separated).*

Resilience is determined as a reaction acted to face the crisis. The analysis led to classifying two types of resilient reactions inherent in a change, which characterize groups of individuals. These are two opposite categories with respect to the formulation of a new identity project as the final outcome of resilience as a process. In the first case we will talk about *active resilient*s. In the second of *immovable fatalistic resilient*s. The constructed categories emerge from biographical narratives focused on behaviours related to external real situations experienced by the individuals. These categories, not representative of the totality of the collected stories, constitute a useful taxonomy to represent the synthesis of the relationship between events, use of resilience and biographical continuity / discontinuity.

The significant characteristics of the *active resilient*s assets focus: on the ability to reorganize the life course using the turning point as a stimulus for the change and development of generalized educational and social capital; they invest emotionally and concretely on new reformulated objectives and priorities; they manifest an inner conversation in which important decisions are made together and in relation with significant others (family, friends, members of communities of temporary or traditional affiliation); enhance their autonomy; they increase responsibility towards relatives; they have a propensity for social mobility based on the *ultimate concern*; they appropriate emulative modes of behavior that bring them closer to their authentic identity.

For the *immovable fatalistic resilient*s the characteristics seem to be fixed: on the on the inability to activate an inner conversation useful for analyzing the facts and producing significant solutions connected to reality; on the inability to develop useful strategies to face a crisis; on the absence of educational and community capital that could lead to improvement; on the organizational and planning stalemate for a new project; on complaining, resignation and discomfort with respect to the immanence of events; on attempts to restore a temporarily interrupted biographical trajectory, but not changing the *ultimate concerns* of the previous life. Often the end point is a reductive modelling of their self-fulfilling hopes and ambitions.

Ultimately, a comparison between the two categories seems that some reflexive reactions can activate forms of resilience adapted to support the challenge more effectively in the new construction projects. On the one hand, individuals who are pushed by a crisis using resilience and social capital effectively, pursuing a strong planning. On the other, individuals who consciously assume the crisis as a natural occurrence because it recurs.

## 5. The Psychological Dimension of Mechanisms and Risk Factors

In the path of resilience hypothesised, the effort of individuals to search for their position in the world takes place through the management of events in life trajectories. These unfold between events and changes, between discontinuity and continuity. The trajectory that is built is a social and relational trajectory. In this plot builds its own identity. When it moves towards the formulation of a new project, takes on the value of authenticity. In the construction of identity paths, authentic identity is a configured individualizing refrain: as an attitude of awareness towards what the subjects' existential condition represents, with the intent to adhere to it consistently with the structural and stable elements of their identity, regardless of their actions; b) a motivational tension towards the effort to give an account to oneself and others of one's own identity. In the psychological sphere, we can therefore refer to the search for authenticity as a condition of awareness that the individual, in building his own identity, assumes towards the facts of life, which represent and are significant of his own existential situation. This is not a static and coherent hatch of man's actions regarding his biographical project, but a threshold towards which the individual approaches to judge his own authenticity. It corresponds to the criteria and procedures with which the individual with awareness and autonomy defends itself from the forms of normalization and social control that are imposed from the outside. Authenticity and identity converge through the acceptance of what you want to be, become, live, evoking, from the term "authentic", what comes close to the original and truthful freedom with you lead your life.

Psychological analysis revealed that the biographical transitions and the outlined resilience process is not linear. Sometimes it is discontinuous, disordered. It undergoes "stop & go". It advances and then goes back because of the psychological characteristics of the subjects. Sometimes in an individual the self-healing abilities do not activate. Individuals unable to rebuild their history, transforming the traumatic memory and process mourning. Traumatic or sometimes multi-traumatic life experiences sometimes do not allow individuals to reorganize their lives positively. These are the cases in which the resilience process is not activated starting from the recognition of the crisis. The individual does not recognize the turning point. They are individuals who cannot get in touch with the pain of the traumatic event because too much to bear. So, the pain and sorrow are crystallized in one's life to the point of deactivating or anesthetize each reaction, also giving up the chance to give himself another chance at life. It is clear that the influence of the environment is a risk factor in which resilience can be strongly influenced by models of interpersonal relationships and life context.

The resilience process is multidimensional. In the analysis, no hypothesis can be traced that the response to the traumatic event lies in the way in which the individual deals with a traumatic event as a negative experience. There is no relationship with the idea that protection from trauma and adversity lies in positive experiences. Neither it seems decisive traits or personal psychological characteristics, which if anything intervenes subjectively, participating with other factors, to determine the effectiveness resilient outcomes. In the response to the crisis, the moment of reflection on the effects of it in the overall life story of individuals appears decisive. The most important of these factors is the moment of reflection on the effects of the turning point in the overall life story of individuals. This moment occurs most frequently in individuals: a) in possession of educational capital; b) in those where the socio-family relations or institutional system support stimulates, supports and enhances this characteristic. In these cases, these systems have the value of protection factors.

*I was going to school but in secondary school I was rejected, and I did not go to school anymore.*

*Then my grandfather, to whom I was attached died. I missed that affection that only he gave me.*

*With him I felt loved and protected. He guided me. (32 y.o., man, unemployed).*

From the research protective factors, multiple risk factors and risk mechanisms are involved in the phenomenon of resilience. To distinguish mechanisms and risk factors, the preliminary analysis shows that contextual structural variables (poverty, scarce educational resources, etc.) are intertwined with psychological variables.

The influence of the environment on individuals is an important risk factor. The analysis shows that resilience can be strongly influenced by patterns of interpersonal relationships and life context. The risk of the occurrence of a traumatic event is associated with psychological factors and mechanisms that condition the intensity of the effects and the outcome of the resilience process. The assessment of the intensity and quality of the effects of the turning points is a balance between: environmental and proximity risk factors (personal and environmental conditions preceding the event); event characteristics (frequency, duration, suffering, insufficient coping, traumatic reactivations) and protective factors (social, economic, educational capital; individual and family resources, psychosocial, health, judicial interventions). The narrative segments of the socio-cultural background analyzed highlighted that these autopoietic circuits of marginalization are influenced both by psychological variables that hinder the modification of the construction of one's identity in moments of "crisis"; either by context variables that immobilize to the condition of vulnerability, as in the case of domestic violence circuits. The *cross-career effects* previously defined recur in biographies analyzed and consisted of the psychological mechanisms of risk.

*In order to escape from the violent domestic context, I got married at the age of 14. I had chosen a master father. Already at 20 I had 3 children. I often complained but I did not have the strength to get out of it. Then you cannot go out with young children. I was a prisoner at home. I was trying to get out of the prison that was my home. But my husband threatened me with physical and psychological violence. I felt in prison. I was smaller than my husband., I did not know anything about life. But there was another life. As soon as my children grew up, I noticed. I tried to leave. But I did not have the strength. In the end I always came back because my husband threatened me ... he left me without money. He always worked, if he did not work, he was at home and he said to me: you must go out only with me. (50 y.o. woman separated).*

Among the various risk factors that intervene when traumatic events occur. Economic disadvantage, parent-child interaction misfit, marital conflict, addictions to alcohol, drugs, gambling addiction, separation of parents, death of his / their parents, are recurrent. It will be noted that the main proximity risk factors are present in this list. These mainly lead to alterations in family functioning and family relationships as well as economic deprivations. On the one hand, risk factors influence responses to traumatic stress and psychosocial adversity as an action linking their vulnerability to risk factors. On the other, they predispose to experiences that predispose to risk. This is a typical risk mechanism found in research. In the analysis, the environment as a risk factor is not dissociated from proximity risk factors. The consequence is that the cumulative effect often involves a synergistic interaction between risk factors. In the formulation of a new project, the categories outlined of active resilient and fatalistic immobiles individuals seem to possess specific subjective and contextual general psychological characteristics. These were not derived from measurements through diagnostic tools but from the analysis of life story segments. Although therefore they do not have scientific reliability, they are nevertheless recurrent in the interviewed subjects, allowing to outline methodologically sustainable indications. In the analysis of life stories, keywords such as autonomy, existence, freedom, change are recurring in analytical clusters of categories. The psychological characteristics in the *active resilient*s are focused in the ability to recreate affective, cognitive, and relational psychic connections interrupted when the traumatic event occurs. The individual does not create *ex novo* a psychological subjectivity but restores an authentic identity balance with which to guarantee the continuity of being in the world. In the stories analyzed, the

*active resilient*s are found most frequently among individuals who have the capacity to conclude that they have benefited from the adverse events, in some way.

Instead the *fatalistic immobile*s cannot answer the simple question: what do I do now? They are unable to find an inner response that is the result of reflective work and a recomposition of fragmented parts of the self. Rather they act this disintegration without finding new trajectories that reconnect the past to the future. Thus, living in a perennially dissociative or traumatic existential condition.

From background interviews to key informants emerge that to enhance, experiment or renew reflexivity, the presence of an external agent (social worker, educator, social worker, psychologist) was found to be essential to accompany the transitions. These circumstances have increased effectiveness when the external agent has a charismatic role as guide and example of legality or positive values.

*My mom didn't want me to stay at home she said, "go to the community, they do the washing", they make you clean. To me, they were nonsense. We went to talk to a community psychologist and went inside. They taught me things to grow, to be judicious. I met Roberto at the social center. Roberto always told me that I had to be a decent boy, a boy who must always go the right way. Today I do not want to make trouble, I want to be a decent, respectful, and selfless boy ... I want to help people). In these interventions, everyone has characteristics and times of adaptation to the resilience process which vary according to the severity of the conditions and psycho-social characteristics (man, 20 y. o.).*

The recognition of the need for support is usually very gradual. The sense of estrangement perceived and experienced in the early stages provokes hugely different reactions: rejection, hostility, a desire to return to the suffering that you came from. The "pact" that is built between the subject and the operator is the result of a path in which the "old" and "new" or if we want the "passivity" and "dynamism" must necessarily be managed.

## 6. Conclusions

Defined resilience as the ability to activate resistance, response, recovery and creation of new options following a traumatic event, in the analysis of life stories, resilience is the cause and subjective force that reveals the subject's access to the possibilities for change. Like a step-by-step process, resilience is not divine illumination nor thaumaturgical ability. It is cumulative and progressive of: traumatic event or a succession of them, reflexivity and awareness of a change, identification of ultimate concerns, formulation of a new project. In this process by uncertain outcomes, the context is decisive in the first two phases, but directly or indirectly influences the remaining ones. The research clearly shows that the endowment and use of social and educational capital is fundamental in the phases of recognition of the crisis and in that of reflexivity. The uncertainty of the outcome of an identity reconfiguration, whether positive or negative, depends: on the intensity of the effects of the turning point; of reflexivity that illuminates the sphere of authentic subjective identity and pushes towards its completeness; by the psychological conditions that make the cost of a change bearable (or unbearable). Among the factors turning biographical recur the affective dimension and professional (have a love and the feeling of being socially useful through job). The possibility that resilience can also be enhanced in subjects in which the influence of the social and family context affects individual responses to traumatic events in one's biography emerges. With the categories of active and immovable fatalistic resilient were shown, on the one hand, the cases in which the context psychologically imprisons the comforting immobility of psycho-social security; and on the other the breakdown of these models, often autopoietic of gender marginality and subordination.

## References

- Alexander, J. C. (1990). *Teoria sociologica e mutamento sociale. Un'analisi multidimensionale della modernità*. Angeli. Milano.
- Anthony, E. J. (1987). *Risk, vulnerability, and resilience: An overview*. In E. J. Anthony and Cohler. B.J. (Eds.), *The Guilford psychiatry series. The invulnerable child*. Guilford Press. 3-48.
- Archer, M. (2003). *Structure, agency and the Internal Conversation*. University Press: Cambridge.
- Bandura, A. (1995). *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Freeman: New York.
- Beck, U. (2000). *La società del rischio. Verso una seconda modernità*. Roma: Carocci.
- Bohman, M. (1996). *Predisposition to criminality: Swedish adoption studies in retrospect*. In: Bock, G.R. and Goode, J.A. (eds) *Genetics of Criminal and Antisocial Behaviour. Ciba Foundation Symposium*. John Wiley and Sons: Chichester. 99-114.
- Bonica, L. and Cardano, M. (2008). *Punti di svolta, analisi del mutamento biografico*. Il Mulino: Bologna.
- Brodwin, P. (2001). *Marginality and cultural intimacy in a trans-national haitian community, occasional paper no. 91 october*. Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee: USA.
- Cesareo, V. (2005). *Ricomporre la vita*. Carocci: Roma.
- Demazière, D. and Dubar, C. (2000). *Dentro le storie. Analizzare le interviste biografiche*. Raffaello Cortina: Milano.
- Dubar, C. (2004). *La socializzazione. Come si costruisce l'identità sociale*. Il Mulino: Bologna.
- Egeland, B., Carlson, E. and Sroufe, L. A. (1993). Resilience as process. *Development and Psychopathology*, 5(4): 517-28.

- Fonagy, P., Steele, M., Steele, H., Higgitt, A. and Target, M. (1994). The Emanuel Miller memorial lecture, The theory and practice of resilience. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 35: 231–57. Available: <https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1994.tb01160.x>
- Haggerty, R. J., Sherrod, L. R., Garmezy, N. and Rutter, M. (1994). *Stress, risk, and resilience in children and adolescents: Processes, mechanisms, and interventions*. Cambridge University Press: New York.
- Kearney, M. H. and O’Sullivan, J. (2003). Identity shifts as turning points in health behavior change. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 25(2): 134-52.
- Laub, J. H. and Sampson, R. J. (2006). *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.
- Luthar, S. S. (1993). Annotation: methodological and conceptual issues in research on childhood resilience. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 34(4): 441-53.
- Macmillan, R. (2005). The structure of the life course: Classic issues and current controversies. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 9: 3-24. Available: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S104026080409001X>
- Masten, A. S., Coatsworth, J. D., Neeman, J., Gest, S. D., Tellegen, A. and Garmezy, N. (1995). The structure and coherence of competence from childhood to adolescence. *Child Development*, 66(6): 1635-59.
- Mazzette, A. and Sgroi, E. (1999). *Vecchie strade. Consumo e povertà nei centri di palermo e sassari*. Angeli: Milano.
- Mies, M. (1983). *Towards a methodology for feminist research*, in Bowles, G. and Duelli Klein, R. *Theories of women’s studies*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London.
- Negri, N. and Bosco, N. (2004). *Corsi di vita, povertà e vulnerabilità sociale*. Guerini Scientifica.
- Olagnero, M. (2008). *Corso di vita e transizioni biografiche in Bonica, L., Cardano, M. (a cura di) Punti di svolta. Analisi del mutamento biografico*. Il Mulino: Bologna.
- Plomin, R. (1994). *Genetics and experience: The interplay between nature and nurture*. CA: Sage Publications.: Thousand Oaks, .
- Plomin, R., De Fries, J. C., McClearn, G. E. and Rutter, M. (1997). *Behavioral genetics*. 3rd edn: W.H. Freeman and Co.: New York.
- Rolf, J., Masten, A., Cicchetti, D., Nuechterlein, K. and Weintraub, S. (1990). *Risk and protective factors in the development of psychopathology*. Cambridge University Press: New York.
- Rutter, M. (1999). *Resilience concepts and findings: implications for family therapy*. Blackwell Publishers: Oxford.
- Ryff, C. C. and Singer, G. (1998). The contours of positive human health. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9(1): 1-28.
- Scanagatta, S. and Maccarini, A. (2011). *Vite riflessive. Discontinuità e traiettorie nella società morfogenetica*. Angeli: Milano.
- Siefer, R. (1995). Perils and pitfalls of high-risk research. *Developmental Psychology*, 31(3): 420-24. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.31.3.420>
- Smith, K. R. (1985). *Work life and health as a competing career: an event history analysis*, in Elder, G. (a cura di) *Life Course Dynamics: Trajectories and transitions, 1968-1980*. Cornell University Press: N.Y.:
- Thévenot, L. (2006). *L’action au pluriel, Sociologie des regime d’engagement*. La Découverte: Paris.
- Wethington, E., Cooper, H. and Holmes, C. (1997). *Turning points in midlife*. In I. Gotlib and B. Wheaton(Eds.), *Stress and adversity across the life course: Trajectories and turning points*. Cambridge University Press. Characteristics and Impact of Life Turning Points for Older Adults: New York: . 215-31.
- Williams, R. and Drury, J. (2009). Psychological resilience and its influence on managing mass emergencies disasters. *Psychiatry*, 8(8): 293-96.