

## *Resilience and Institutional Adaptation in a Context of Systemic Transformations*

*Let us be direct: what we call „resilience“ has become a convenient substitute for institutional failure.*

*Across policy documents, strategic frameworks, and managerial discourse, resilience is presented as a desirable outcome. Systems should be resilient. Organisations should adapt. Societies should absorb shocks. Yet the evidence reflected in the contributions to this issue suggests a different reality: resilience is increasingly required not because systems work, but because they do not.*

*This distinction matters.*

*A persistent assumption in public policy is that crises are external: economic shocks, technological disruption, geopolitical instability. But the cases analysed in this volume point in another direction. Failures do not originate primarily in shocks. They originate in institutional design choices that systematically prioritise efficiency over robustness, speed over control, and formal compliance over real capacity.*

*In governance systems, this is visible in its most explicit form. Delegation expands, but oversight does not. Information circulates unevenly, but decisions continue to rely on incomplete signals. Incentives reward delivery, not accuracy; speed, not verification. When breakdowns occur, they are framed as exceptions. In reality, they are logical outcomes of how systems are built.*

*The same pattern appears in policy frameworks. Digitalisation strategies promise transformation. Energy policies promise transition. Sustainability agendas promise integration. What is consistently missing is structural alignment. Systems are not redesigned; they are layered. New objectives are added without removing old constraints. The result is not transformation, but institutional overload masked as progress.*

*This is particularly evident in the public sector, where reform is often reduced to tool adoption. Lean, digital platforms, performance indicators—each introduced as a solution. Yet the evidence remains clear: no managerial instrument compensates for structural deficits. Without autonomy, resources, and coherent governance, improvement initiatives remain performative. They exist in reports, not in outcomes.*

*At the societal level, the gap becomes even more visible. Where institutions underperform, individuals and communities adapt. Informal networks substitute formal coordination. Resilience emerges despite the system, not through it. This dynamic is often interpreted optimistically as social strength. It should be read differently: as a redistribution of responsibility from institutions to individuals.*

*In this sense, resilience becomes a burden. It shifts risk downward. It normalises instability. It allows systems to persist without addressing their underlying weaknesses.*

*This raises a policy question that is rarely asked explicitly:*

*Are we building resilient systems, or are we expecting society to compensate for fragile ones?*

*If resilience depends primarily on informal adaptation, then institutional reform has already failed. If communities must continuously absorb inefficiency, uncertainty, and inconsistency, then resilience is no longer a property of the system—it is a requirement imposed on those operating within it.*

*The contributions in this issue do not converge toward a single solution, but they point toward a common constraint: adaptation without structural reform is not resilience—it is prolonged dysfunction.*

*From a policy perspective, the implication is clear and uncomfortable. The current model—incremental adjustment, layered reform, and symbolic adoption of „best practices“—is insufficient. Systems designed for stability cannot operate effectively in conditions defined by continuous volatility. Yet instead of redesigning them, policy responses continue to optimise within the same constraints.*

*This is not a technical limitation. It is a governance choice.*

*Until that choice is addressed, resilience will remain what it increasingly is:*

*not a sign of system strength, but evidence of how much failure the system can absorb before it is forced to change.*

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