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Pragmatist Power Europe: Resilience and evolution in planetary organic crisis

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Abstract

In this article, we join others in revisiting the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE) through the lenses of pragmatist theory to engage with the emergent challenges of the planetary organic crisis. We argue that NPE rests on the binary distinction between moral and instrumental action and this, we argue, limits our ability to conceptualise resilience as evolutionary and to develop responses to the current crisis. Drawing on pragmatist philosophy, we argue that the project of conceptualising and pursuing planetary politics must start in the ongoing activities of actors, as an intervention into a stream of action with momentum and inertia. Our empirical analysis shows that although the European Union's (EU) resilience turn shares some key normative commitments with a pragmatist approach, so far its resilience policies have been pragmatic rather than pragmatist. However, a closer look at the EU's response to Russia's war in Ukraine reveals that the EU can cultivate resilience by transforming itself. We conclude by highlighting some ways a pragmatist view on normative power and resilience-through-evolution can guide reflection and action on the threats the planetary organic crisis poses to our continued survival.

Keywords

crisis, European Union, Normative Power Europe, pragmatism, resilience

Introduction

Crises contain within them both emergencies and opportunities, even when they are 'planetary' in scope. This is true even of the planetary organic crisis – understood here as 'interacting and deepening structural crises of economy/development, society, ecology, politics, culture and ethics – in ways that are unsustainable' (Gill and Benatar, 2020: 171; Manners, in press). Just as war has, in social and political thought, been viewed as 'ontogenetic' (Bartelson, 2018) – creating new modes and forms of communities, institutions and movements – the planetary organic crisis the world now confronts has similar

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generative potentials. Yet, too often, our collective notions of resilience are too fixed on achieving survival by sustaining a given set of institutions or practices rather than by evolving together with them. By resilience we mean the capacity, potential or manifest, to overcome disruptions to a form of life, mode of being or way of organising social practices, such that it recognisably and meaningfully continues. As we will argue, resilience can be produced not just by shielding, defending or preserving these things against threats, but also participating in their transformation, in ways that retain their value and common membership. In other words, knowing how to adapt without losing oneself gives rise to a kind of resilience-through-evolution. We develop this argument through a critique of the influential concept of 'Normative Power Europe' (NPE), which can help appreciate the nature of 'evolutionary' resilience and contribute to a broader discussion on NPE and the planetary organic crisis, oriented around Ian Manners' retrospective and prospective provocation in this Special Issue.

Our critique draws heavily from pragmatist social theory. Pragmatism is a diverse philosophical movement, but we find greatest insight in the work of John Dewey and his later interlocutors. For Dewey, pragmatism is a philosophy of growth, and his many reflections – on experience, logic and truth, cognition, politics, education and aesthetics – all revolve around process, change and relationality. While pragmatism is often read as a form of practical epistemology (see Bauer and Brighi, 2009; Sil and Katzenstein, 2010; Wood, 2011), we emphasise its *ontological* meanings as a theory of being and action, and this informs our views on normative power and planetary politics. This allows us to approach resilience as the outcome of continual revisions, small or large, in practical decision-making, including in ethical judgement and problem-solving. As we will explain, while all new situations require new responses, crises are characterised by the need for significant changes in political commitments and decisions. A pragmatist view of this captures the interplay of transformation and maintenance that this process comprises. We thus propose a two-level pragmatist view of resilience and normative power. On the level of critical social theory, we argue that pragmatism provides a useful framework for describing and analysing possible responses to crisis and to the use of power during them. On the level of analysis of *praxis*, we argue that policymakers and stakeholders who embrace evolution as a crisis response – who are more pragmatist in a self-aware sense – will do a better job of cultivating resilience.

This article begins with a critical discussion of the relationship between normative power and resilience, which are essentially related but often understood in ways that make it hard to recognise how that relationship works. We answer the questions this critique raises by outlining a pragmatist view of resilience, aimed at linking theory and practice around the cultivation of a concrete, *evolutionary* form of normative power. Then, to illustrate the approach, we examine the case of the European Union's (EU) resilience-building practices over the past decade. This analysis shows that although the EU's resilience turn shares some key normative commitments with a pragmatist approach, so far its resilience policies have been *pragmatic* rather than pragmatist – meaning overly fixated on immediate adaptations without long-term reflections on possibilities and trajectories of evolution. However, a closer look at the EU's response to the current war between Russia and Ukraine, and the European (and global) crisis it represents, reveals that the EU can cultivate resilience by transforming itself. We conclude by returning to

Manners' concept of planetary organic crisis and highlight some ways a pragmatist view on normative power and resilience can guide reflection and action on the threats it poses to our continued survival.

Resilience and normative power

Our notion of resilience moves away from engineering understandings of resilience, which see resilience as 'a stability property of systems' or a 'state of steady equilibrium', in favour of ecological resilience, which draws on complexity thinking and opens up opportunities for reorganisation and transformation (see Brand and Jax, 2007; Holling, 1973; Rega and Bonifazi, 2020). We define resilience as the capacity, potential or manifest, to *overcome* disruptions to a form of life, mode of being or way of organising social practices, such that it recognisably and meaningfully continues. This definition of resilience as overcoming emphasises three things: a response to a situation that might force us to stop practices which we feel we must continue; a focus on the political or institutional arrangements that depend on those practices; and a deliberately open-ended set of possible ways those practices may continue – one which rests the question on the values and judgements of those engaged in them. To some degree, this is an analytical choice arising from the anthropological observation that forms of life are best examined internally, by those engaged in them. But it is also an ontological choice, arising from the constructivist observation that many different actions can accord with the same fundamental norms, and thus that institutional design is a flexible process of interpretation (and contestation).

Understood in these terms, resilience is an expression of normative power. It links the flexible continuation of practices and institutional arrangements to the evolution of normativity and ethical judgement, much as Manners (2002) does in his normative power approach developed over 20 years ago. However, his concept of NPE rests on the binary distinction between moral and instrumental action and this, we argue, limits our ability to conceptualise resilience and to develop or display resilience in response to our planetary organic crisis. A close look at this distinction shows how it rests on reified boundaries between norms and strategies, and while these boundaries are conceptually useful within a given configuration of laws, bureaucracies, policies and agencies, they also conceal the institutional plasticity that we argue is essential to a more ecological notion of resilience. In other words, NPE calls attention to how resilience works as a social process but also makes it hard to recognise possible futures that could generate resilience as an outcome.

In its original articulation (Manners, 2002), NPE poses a distinction between self-interested action and value-oriented action, and second, it distinguishes between influencing the actions of others by appealing to their self-interest and influencing others through suasion, tutelage or role-moulding to generate changes in their values. In these terms, people may do what they think is most profitable or they may do what they think is righteous, but these are distinct from one another and pathways to influence may appeal to only one of the two. This aligns with the conventions of contemporary constructivism in the field of International Relations (IR), which proposed explanations oriented around a 'logic of appropriateness' that either competed with, or expanded upon,

the 'logic of consequences' supposedly dominant in policymaking (March and Olsen, 1998). While differentiating action in this way has a long and distinguished sociological history (Habermas, 1984; see Risse, 2000), doing so makes it harder to see the interlocking configurations of practices – encompassing values, institutions and movements – which comprise the heterogeneous field where the planetary organic crisis plays out, and where resilience through evolution may occur at large scale. If NPE were entirely limited by these terms, then the approach would be as unhelpful as the rest of the early constructivist literature in adequately seeing and practicing the ecologically self-aware, evolutionary resilience we propose in this article.

Yet the notion of normative power remains relevant to the problem and cannot be dismissed or avoided – especially not in the context of European politics, where questions of value are consistently raised and contested in discussions of crisis response and institutional survival. Moreover, critiques of NPE as 'hegemony' seem to go too far in reducing the concept to simple domination, in ways that can elide the potential for solidarity to which it refers. For example, Diez (2013) questions the ontological distinction between norms and interests as we do, but suggests that Gramsci's concept of hegemony offers a more accurate definition of normative power. According to this critique, normative power should be understood as a form of cultural hegemony, European policies which appear selfless and 'expensive' in the short term will solidify the normative arrangements that constitute Europe, and in these arrangements cosmopolitan moral commitments and European wealth seem strikingly harmonious (Langan, 2012). If Gramscian cynicism is too much, there is also an ontological security argument here (Klose, 2020), according to which the EU affirms its cosmopolitan self-image through consistent but sometimes 'costly' performances of liberalising interactions. Yet the problem with this line of critique, we feel, is that it omits practical judgement from the actions of policymakers. Empirically, it is hard to sustain the view that EU officials lack self-awareness of their structural role, and analytically, it seems necessary to engage with the ways they resolve competing imperatives. This form of practical judgement can knit together various stakeholders, actors and participants – and practices themselves – within the search for resilience, especially in times of crisis, and we view it as fundamental to theorising and responding to any serious emergency. Simply put, when we actually look at how EU actors and stakeholders manage existential risks, we see that they do so through practices of explicit normative orientation in which justification is a core practice, and this dynamic is precisely what NPE highlights.

The limiting terms of scholarly debate over normative power thus counterpose two distinct theories of the actor, neither of which supports a deeper reflection on resilience during existential crises. On one side is a liberal theory of the actor, as a moral and/or efficiency-maximising agent, and on the other side is a structural theory of the actor, cast either in Gramscian terms as the outcome of hegemonic struggles between social forces or in psychoanalytic terms as (blithely?) pursuing self-security. Herein lies the need to find an alternative theory of actors or of action that is not reductive in one direction or the other. Empirical research shows that European policymakers and diplomats draw on norms and values as tools or instruments of consensus-building and problem-solving (see, for example, Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014; Bicchi and Bremberg, 2016), in ways that may leave behind the norms/interests binary, but must be explained in

terms of practice rather than structure alone.[1] The EU, it seems, has normative power, but on this account norms are part of a cultural toolkit (Swidler, 1986). There is also, however, a problem in taking a purely 'practice theory' approach: if norms are cultural toolkits, then they become instruments of action rather than sources of political guidance, moral orientation and ethical foundation. Central to our view, which we will bolster with evidence from EU resilience-building policies, is that managing crises involves self-aware ethical reasoning, choosing to compromise or transform along some lines in order to remain 'steadfast' along others. This is the 'evolutionary' approach we find in pragmatist theory and manifests through normative power when both are understood in relational terms.

In summary, normative power is a fundamental source and expression of resilience, as both a concept and outcome. The focus on planetary organic crisis also helps us clarify the links between the two as we seek to re-envision the way the EU might engage with the challenges posed by this crisis. But we propose a pragmatist reconceptualisation of the processes through which normative power functions to avoid reifying agency and structure and to show how resilience-through-evolution works in practice. There are two objectives to this: first, to get beyond the norms/interests binary without leaving the agency of the actor behind in the process; and second, to incorporate the practical dimension of norms in European resilience-building without reducing them to cultural resources or deflating normativity as a meaningful social force. As the next section shows, pragmatism offers the conceptual resources to do this in ways already recognised in the field of IR (Bauer and Brighi, 2009; Pratt, 2016) and increasingly in European Studies (Juncos, 2017; Wood, 2011). A pragmatist view of resilience implies a pragmatist view of normative power, and both are, we argue, best understood in evolutionary terms.

Pragmatism and a pragmatist view of resilience

Three principles define pragmatism in our reading of Dewey and his interlocutors in sociology and political science. First, pragmatism is a theory of action. Dewey's (1987) maxim 'mind is primarily a verb' (p. 268) is revealing here. It means that ideas are an intervention into the world, and thinking is doing. Minds (and ideas), for pragmatists, are not only conscious or representational. Habituated routines are central to the cognitive formation of actors, and 'thinking' is an active and distributed process of interaction most of the time, with reflective, deliberative or conscious mental representation and cognition only occurring when habits are interrupted or inhibited, forcing organisms to reassess and revise them. Consequently, pragmatists also emphasise the role of creativity (Avant, 2021; Pratt, 2016).

While we can talk about ideas and concepts as things, this is a reification of convenience, and not a commitment to any kind of material-ideal binary, or to the view that mental constructions can be separated from the intimate and ongoing operations that generate them. Moreover, for pragmatists, ends and means are reciprocal: actors do not enter into action with well-defined ends, but instead continually adjust their goals and purposes as new possibilities for intervening in the world open up and existing possibilities close down. This is part of what distinguishes action, as a process, from actors, as only one component thereof:

> [Goals] become clearer once the actor has a better understanding of the possible means to achieve the ends; even new goals will arise on the basis of newly available means . . . [This] anchors the notion of goals firmly in the action process itself and argues against the external setting of goals as advocated in teleological theories of action. (Joas and Beckert, 2001: 273)

Rather than define action as something that begins *with* the actor, initiated as a discrete intervention by a wilful agent, this view instead defines action as an ongoing generative process in which actors are implicated but which is not fully circumscribed by their deliberations. Moreover, values or norms are never distinct from instrumental or strategic action, as the pursuit of ends is entangled with their formation (Joas, 2000).

Norms and institutions, often called 'ideational' social structures, are therefore also arrangements of ongoing action. Pragmatist social ontology is anti-essentialist, with the edges or boundaries of social arrangements constantly shifting and never absolute; binaries such as internal/external and ideal/material, along with fact/value or moral/strategic, are products of discourse and theory rather than metaphysics. Pragmatism is a theory of practice, holding that 'such phenomena as knowledge, meaning, human activity, science, power, language, social institutions, and historical transformation occur within and are aspects or components of . . . embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding' (Schatzki, 2001: 10–11). For this reason, pragmatists avoid Cartesian divides that identify some forces as material and others as, in some sense, non-material, and focus on situated, embodied activity as the site of agency and world-making.

The second principle is the primacy of relations over substances or fixed entities. Action is *transactional*, proceeding through relationships of mutual or collective constitution (Dewey and Bentley, 1949) in a flat field of unfolding processes. A transactional view of the world examines arrangements of actions rather than any specific action in isolation and conceives of human beings as existing in constellations rather than individuals. This implies a relational conception of the social world as a 'fluctuating, tensile equilibrium' (Elias, 1978: 131), made up of asymmetrical relations of power and position-takings (Bourdieu, 1984), and produced by continual interpersonal performances, collaborations, exchanges and competitions (Goffman, 1969). It cautions us to avoid reifying these relations into structures; pragmatists may be willing to talk about some social arrangements as if they were independent things, but only for contingent analytical reasons.

The third principle is that the world is always unfolding in process and motion. Novelty and growth are central to Dewey's accounts of action, enquiry and knowledge, and thus pragmatism is a theory of evolution, even when read as social theory (Hildebrand, 2008). Agency is always exercised, and never just potential. This implies a fractal of social transformation, or of laborious arrestation (Jackson and Nexon, 1999). Change is not always inevitable, but when existing arrangements or situations persist, it is because processes of reproduction are constantly working to maintain them. And while not inevitable, change is nevertheless very probable, as any equilibrium is fragile – 'a balance of power moving to and fro, inclining first to one side and then to the other' (Elias, 1978: 131). Pragmatist social science focuses on what is moving, and on theorising motile arrangements undergoing (re)formation, making no assumptions of temporal or spatial universality in the associations and tendencies it uncovers.

While principles do not yield any specific practical guide to being a pragmatist, they do allow us to propose and develop a view of resilience rooted in three premises: focus analysis on the evolution of practice rather than the persistence of structures, explain identities and norms in terms of relationality rather than essence, and look for problem-solving or adaptative mechanisms as drivers of transformation. For this reason, we believe resilience should be understood as a form of overcoming, rather than surviving, various challenges; the referent of resilience should not be a reified entity, whether an institution or a 'self', but a practice or unfolding social arrangement, which can continue or cease depending on how creatively its participants find ways to navigate and resolve disruptions. As we have already noted, resilience, understood in this way, involves situational responses (rather than general ones) that manage social relations in open-ended ways.

Much of this turns on an understanding of power that goes beyond coercion or persuasion, as per the traditional notion of NPE, and is more fully understood as *the capacity for creation that lies in every transaction between an actor and its environment*. This is a pragmatist view of power, and in the foregoing discussion of pragmatist social theory, we have tried to show how it intersects with NPE while also offering ways of thinking about normativity and action that NPE closes off. Often power is devoted to maintaining existing institutional or discursive configurations, and as we will discuss, 'resilience through maintenance' is a common strategy for EU actors. This is a familiar notion and can be seen in studies of fields of capital (Bourdieu, 1984) or more anthropological views of strategic interaction (Goffman, 1969; see also Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014; Klose, 2020), while also covering the hegemonic 'hidden face' of institutions and discourses to coopt those within them and restrict alternative possibilities (Lukes, 1974). But power can also be exercised during a period of rapid or radical social transition, even when actors are largely unable to resist forces of change. By seeking 'resilience through evolution', actors are able to adapt alongside those forces in satisfying ways, to find a new equilibrium across practices and social arrangements, from the level of situated cognition through to the level of whole regimes (Adler, 2019; Katzenstein and Seybert, 2018). Pragmatism allows for both these forms of resilience to be identified and analysed together as different expressions of power, and in our application of it here, extends and revises the insights of NPE to better appreciate how resilience can be cultivated, how it is already cultivated and how it might prepare us to confront major crises.

A pragmatist approach to EU resilience-building

When 'building resilience' is the goal of EU foreign policy strategy, actors may end up fixating on maintenance rather than evolution, to use the two pathways to resilience discussed in the preceding section. Put differently, fixating on the general imperative 'we must survive' makes it harder to reimagine who 'we' are, and whether 'we' might be something else just as good in the future. In this section, we look empirically at how EU resilience discourses tend to reify particular institutional arrangements, effectively constraining policy imagination in the process. We then locate overlooked opportunities for a more flexible, evolutionary form of resilience to emerge. To do this, we introduce a second distinction in addition to 'maintenance versus evolution':

the difference between being *pragmatic* and being *pragmatist.* Currently, the EU's understanding and practice of resilience is more pragmatic than pragmatist – in that it is focused on short-term solutions over long-term reflections on value, judgement and practice. This is because it still reifies norms and interests in the pursuit of foreign policy; it neglects relationality and how power is constituted in relations with others; and it retains a binary conception of internal/external resilience, which privileges current arrangements at the expense of future possibilities. A pragmatist view of resilience (through evolution) can instead open up possibilities for more creative responses to crises – as we will illustrate with the example of the Ukraine–Russia war, and as we will subsequently discuss with reference to the even bigger planetary organic crisis that originally provoked this discussion.

The planetary organic crisis and the promise of the EU's resilience turn

In devising a new paradigm for its external action − building resilience in its neighbourhood – the EU sought to respond more effectively to the challenges posed by the ongoing planetary organic crisis. The resilience turn acknowledges deep uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity as contemporary conditions (Juncos, 2018). As we live in a 'more connected, contested and complex world' (EEAS, 2015) which makes it impossible to predict threats and crises, an effective foreign policy demands a focus on preparedness, coping and adaptation. Existing threats linked to the planetary organic crisis such as inequality, demographic injustice, climate unsustainability, proxy insecurity and ethnonationalist politics (see Manners, in press) require solutions focused on building state and societal resilience. According to the EU, current crises are complex in nature:

> Pressures, marked by the unprecedented pace of globalisation, range from demographic, climate change, environmental or migratory challenges beyond the power of individual states to confront, to economic shocks, the erosion of societal cohesion due to weak institutions and poor governance, conflict, violent extremism, and acts of external powers to destabilise perceived adversaries (Commission and HR, 2017: 3)

As the EU seeks to confront multiple 'existential crises' (High Representative (HR/VP), 2016: 7), the EU's Joint Communication on Resilience advocates for 'the need to move away from crisis containment to a more structural, long-term, non-linear approach to vulnerabilities, with an emphasis on anticipation, prevention and preparedness' (European Commission and High Representative (Commission and HR), 2017: 2). Resilience-building reflects a broadening of security discourses from those narrowly centred on state security to more holistic and bottom-up approaches to security (Chandler, 2015). Resilience thinking thus appears to be an apposite way to address the contemporary challenges faced by the EU in the context of planetary politics.

What's more, resilience adumbrates a turn in the way the EU understands the exercise of power at the international level, one that is more in tune with a pragmatist perspective. As a process, resilience-building concentrates on action and becoming (Bourbeau and Ryan, 2018). Such an understanding also hints at the possibility of change and transformation, and with that, creativity. The EU's discourse has tended to

emphasise not just the bouncing back (recovering from crises), but the transformative nature of resilience as adaptation. In defining resilience as 'the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises' (High Representative (HR/VP), 2016: 23), the EU Global Strategy emphasises this element of transformation (see also Commission and HR, 2017). By emphasising transformation over stasis, the EU has also sought to respond to critics that have accused it of using the vocabulary of resilience as a way to privilege stability, sustaining autocracies in the East and the South. Like pragmatism, resilience thus emphasises contingency and the unstable nature of existence, a world of 'predictable unpredictability' (HR/VP, 2016: 46).

Reflexivity is also central to the way the EU understands resilience in that the adoption of this strategy already reflects a process of learning by doing and learning from failure. With its focus on learning and critical self-reflection, resilience provides an opportunity for actors to reflect on previous practice and to learn from crises and shocks (Schmidt, 2015). It has been argued that the emergence of resilience as an international policy paradigm builds on and acknowledges the failures and limitations of past international interventions (Joseph, 2016). As a case in point, the first iteration of the EU's resilience approach from 2012 was the outcome of a learning exercise on the European Commission's (2012) past response to food security crises. In adapting to a more complex and uncertain global context, the EU has also demonstrated reflexivity (Korosteleva and Petrova, 2021). For instance, the implementation of resilience has led to many changes that required learning new ways of doing things both at the Brussels level and on the ground. Some of those changes had to do with learning to work with others to do joint programming and implementation as required by the EU's integrated approach (Commission and HR, 2017). Thus, the EU's approach to resilience requires more 'flexible' ways of doing things, thinking creatively to get best results. The resulting lessons have led the EU (and other international actors) to move away from the top-down approaches associated with the liberal peace and state-building programmes towards more bottom-up and pragmatic approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Chandler, 2015). Overall, the new focus of these approaches has been on facilitating rather than replacing local capacities in keeping with the principle of local ownership (Juncos, 2017). Based on the lessons learned from previous interventions and crises, new resilience thinking implies a humbler view about the ability of the EU to shape the world. As stated in EU documents, 'the role of the EU and other external actors is to support this process and to foster societies better empowered to identify and solve their own problems' (Commission and HR, 2017: 23). Capacity-building programmes have thus become a staple of the EU's involvement in the neighbourhood as illustrated by current Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.

Yet, resilience-building initiatives are still underpinned by EU assumptions of what constitutes a 'capable subject' and about the lack of agency, in terms of power, knowledge and institutions, at the local level (Edmunds and Juncos, 2020). Thus, the EU continues to adopt a position of hierarchical superiority, being responsible for the diffusion of norms in the neighbourhood, and at the same time trying to depoliticise such interventions by shifting responsibility for any failures to 'the other' (see Evans and Reid, 2014).

EU resilience: a pragmatic rather than a pragmatist turn

As noted above, while some of the features of the EU's resilience approach are self-consciously pragmatist, when it engages with the reflective nature of EU foreign policy and the way it responds to the consequences of (past) actions, other features rest on problematic premises. One is a vision of normative power that reifies interests and norms. Another is an inadequate account for how relations constitute the EU and its power *in action*, as an ongoing project. And, linked to this, it is still based on a binary conception of internal/external resilience – something pragmatism shows is another reification. In our view, a more complete and self-aware engagement with pragmatist social theory provides a better picture of what resilience is, how it can be cultivated or attained, and what it means to maintain it.

First, while trying to do away with the tensions between interests and values, the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) still reifies the two. A lot of ink has been spilled in the past on how whether the EU pursues values or interests (see Diez, 2005). The EUGS tries to go beyond this binary by arguing that interests and values 'go hand in hand'; the Union has 'an interest in promoting our values in the world. At the same time, our fundamental values are embedded in our interests' (HR/VP, 2016: 8). As a way to resolve the interest-value conundrum, the EUGS puts forward the notion of 'principled pragmatism', which stems 'as much from a realistic assessment of the current strategic environment as from an idealistic aspiration to advance a better world' (HR/VP, 2016: 8). However, in its attempt to bring them together, the EUGS reifies values and interests, setting it apart from a pragmatist perspective.

What is more, the EU's understanding of resilience-building has not done away with liberal values; instead, they remain at the heart of the EU's approach to resilience. In this regard, the EUGS and the documents that followed present a view of the EU consistent with NPE. This conceptualisation of resilience means that resilience becomes a means to an end – the promotion of EU liberal values – rather than an end in itself. It is a means to achieve a greater goal, that of 'building upon underlying institutional and societal strengths in partner countries' (Commission and HR, 2017: 23). Predictably, when it comes to describing what these 'institutional and societal strengths' might resemble to, liberal values are presented as the solution. According to the EUGS, '[a] resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state' (HR/VP, 2016: 24; also Commission and HR, 2017: 4). This understanding preserves a modernist vision of the world imbued with a belief in progress. Yet, EU documents are less deterministic than previous official iterations in that they recognise that other non-liberal 'paths' might be possible (HR/VP, 2016: 25–26). As such, the worldview of what constitutes the 'good life' is a less dogmatic one, although the EU's way is still the preferred way.

Evidence from current policy initiatives also suggests that EU models and templates continue to be the ones to be advocated and exported in the neighbourhood despite the EU's rhetoric of resilience-building and local ownership and despite the challenges posed by the ongoing planetary crisis. While the EU's narrative appears to be in line with an evolutionary understanding of resilience, the EU's practice has failed to deliver on its promise. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, despite an apparent shift in strategy

'from democratization to resilience', the EU's peacebuilding approach has failed to foster more local ownership, while the lack of progress towards accession has led to a growing frustration among the local population (Bargués and Morillas, 2021; Joseph and Juncos, 2020). Policies towards its Eastern neighbours have not fared better. Just like in the Western Balkans, EU programmes show more continuity with the 'old ways' than innovation, with path dependency and reliance of past policy frameworks resulting in a gap between the rhetoric of resilience and its implementation (Petrova and Delcour, 2020).

This takes us to the second point about resilience and relationality. The EU has neglected the value of interactions to focus on the promotion of its own values. The way the EU sees resilience-building as a foreign policy strategy resembles other EU policies (enlargement or the European Neighbourhood Policy) in that the process of engaging with others is not considered to be intrinsically important, and these interactions are only seen as an instrument or tool to change the behaviour of others through the use of conditionality and in line with EU norms and values (Kavalski, 2017). Supposedly, the notion of resilience espoused by the EUGS presupposes a relational approach in that it is 'underpinned by a coherent mobilisation of political dialogue, the diplomatic resources of the Union and its Member States, EU assistance and sectoral policy dialogue and bilateral initiatives' (Commission and HR, 2017: 2). Yet, despite the EU's turn towards a more 'deliberative governance', through increased interactions and meetings with partners of third countries, problems regarding the EU's approach remain (see Korosteleva and Petrova, 2021). As a result, the EU's resilience-building agenda, and its foreign policy more broadly, has struggled to recognise how interactions are important in themselves and how this determines the kind of relational power it can draw upon (see Kavalski, 2017). Moreover, the EU still approaches these interactions by distinguishing like-minded from not like-minded countries (see the EU's Strategic Compass for an illustration (Council of the European Union, 2022)). By not engaging with the latter group of countries or only engaging with them from a position of moral superiority, this limits the ability of the EU to be recognised as a power by others (Kavalski, 2013).

The EU's failure to embrace relationality also has practical consequences regarding the EU's identity as an international actor. When it fails to produce such results in a particular context, the EU is accused of being an ineffective power or even power*less* despite evidence that those relations are constitutive (in themselves) of power. This applies both in terms of how others see the EU, but also how EU policymakers and practitioners perceive the EU's power. Failure to achieve changes consistent with the EU's values and norms in the neighbourhood has led to frustration among EU practitioners. On the ground, EU practitioners have struggled with the open-ended and relational nature of resilience-building (Bargués, 2020).

Finally, EU resilience accounts are still bound by external/internal binaries. Current official accounts of resilience portray it either as something that the EU produces in others or as an internal strength of the EU in the face of threats. The EUGS focuses mostly on the external dimension of resilience by identifying building 'state and societal resilience to our East and South' as a key priority of its external action (HR/VP, 2016). Yet, the same document also refers to the internal dimension of resilience, for example, when it comes to fostering the resilience of European democracies or the resilience of 'critical

infrastructure, networks and services, and reducing cybercrime' (HR/VP, 2016: 15, 22). The Joint Communication also distinguishes between 'strengthening resilience of partner countries and their citizens' and 'resilience within the Union' (Commission and HR, 2017: 4). While it sees them as interrelated, they are portrayed as ontologically two different realities. Although most of the work that followed the implementation of the EUGS went on supporting the 'external' dimension of resilience, this was understood as mainly contributing to the EU's own resilience in a context of increasing global competition and uncertainty (Commission and HR, 2017: 15).

Over time, with the deterioration of the external context, the external dimension of resilience has become less pronounced giving way to a more security-driven and inward-looking narrative. The 'geopolitical' Commission that was inaugurated in 2019 has placed more emphasis on the pursuit of strategic autonomy/sovereignty, shifting attention away from the EU's commitment to building resilience in the neighbourhood (Von der Leyen, 2019). If anything, the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine have diverted more political energy and resources away from the goal of 'building resilience to the East and the South' to building the EU's own resilience. The Strategic Compass has completed this shift from the external to the internal (Council of the European Union, 2022; also Bargués et al., 2023).

The binary distinction between the internal and external dimensions of resilience sits at odds with a pragmatist approach. It assumes that it is possible to distinguish between processes of resilience directed to the 'self' and to 'others'. But for pragmatists, resilience is a *relational outcome* and can only be constituted and sustained in transactions with others. Recognition of this reveals the most significant flaws in the EU's understanding of resilience: it not only presupposes a division between the EU and other external entities but also between human and nature. It presupposes a modernist understanding of the world where human nature is not (already) intricated in the evolution of nature. On the basis of this understanding, those threats that we need to cope with and adapt to are viewed as 'external' and pre-given or otherwise determined. However, the advent of the Anthropocene defies such views. As put by Chandler (2020), '[t]he Anthropocene challenges the aspiration of international actors such as the European Union in their desire to place societal resilience at the center of broader security strategies because complex relations of interaction destabilize the idea of a separate "inside"' (p. 198). A better understanding of it must be found – one that locates resilience in evolving processes of situational management and adaptation that do not require the reification of actors and their boundaries. By doing away with the separation between external and internal and between human and nature, a pragmatist approach lends itself better to the exploration of what the ongoing planetary organic crisis means for European foreign policy and EU power.

Resilience-through-evolution and the EU's response to the war in Ukraine

The previous section has shown that the EU's understanding of resilience has been 'more pragmatic than pragmatist'. Instead, here we propose that resilience be understood in pragmatist terms, as an evolving relationship between an actor and its environment as the former navigates the challenges of the latter. The EU's response to Russia's invasion of

Ukraine in 2022 exemplifies how thinking about resilience (and power) in evolutionary terms provides us with a fuller understanding of the EU's foreign policy. Russia's military action was perceived by policymakers as a major crisis. The 'return of war to Europe' challenged the EU's key values and identity; a 'watershed moment' according to President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen (Politico, 2022). However, rather than just merely shielding itself from threats or returning to the status quo ex ante, the crisis has had generative effects. It has led to an evolution in the way the EU does things but also its own identity as a security actor. In responding to the crisis, the EU has demonstrated its capacity to overcome significant disruptions through a transformation of the self.

A case in point is the delivery of lethal weapons to Ukraine through the European Peace Facility (EPF). It constituted a break in the way the EU has engaged with conflicts in its neighbourhood, with the financing of an unprecedented volume of defence equipment in the context of an inter-state war. While the adoption of the EPF preceded the start of the war, the scale of the invasion resulted in a radical reorientation of this instrument. What was initially conceived as a way to deal with complex security challenges such as civil wars, capacity building, security sector reform, counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism in Africa – mainly the Sahel region – has been reoriented to the East and been used to face a more traditional security threat: inter-state conflict. For High Representative Josep Borrell, the decision to deliver weapons to Ukraine constituted a creative moment for the EU: 'Another taboo has fallen. The taboo that the European Union was not providing arms in a war' (Politico, 2022).

For its part, the deployment of the EU Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine (EUMAM) also challenges the way the Union has deployed its military operations in the past by allowing it to operate within the territories of EU member states, in this case Poland and Germany. The Mission also transforms the EU's security identity into a more risk-taking and geopolitical actor. As put by Novakly (2022), '[t]hrough EUMAM, the EU will provide military training to a country fighting an active war against a great power aggressor. This is something that the EU as an organisation has never done or experienced before'.

Both examples show that in cultivating resilience the EU has followed the pathway of evolution rather than maintenance. Resilience in this case has meant not stasis, but continuous revisions in form and action to accomplish something in a world that resists intervention. Understood in this way, the EU's resilience (to face the shock of the war) has involved its transformation through action: from its traditional role as a 'peace actor' to one that has become (indirectly) involved in an inter-war conflict. In the words of Borrell, 'we claim that the EU is a peace force and cannot provide arms to anyone else [but] Yes, we can. Yes, we have done' (Euractiv, 2022).

Resilience (re)defined and found in the challenges of planetary politics

In this article, we sought to reconceptualise normative power from a pragmatist perspective, rethinking resilience and our response to the planetary organic crisis. We define resilience as the continuity of life within a given form, but which allows for given forms to change over time without ceasing to be recognisable as such. Resilience, then, is the

outcome of adequate power to overcome environmental challenges, whether in the form of unusual crises or regular frictions and forces of entropy that inhibit the continuation of a given social arrangement. Resilience, on this view, is not a quality or outcome but a way to expand the discussion: to talk not just about how the EU can change its environment or its partners, but also talking about how it can change itself within processes of policymaking and deliberation, to transform as an entity alongside a transforming set of planetary needs, demands and goals, including during times of unprecedented crisis. As the EU confronts the planetary organic crisis, an evolutionary form of resilience should occupy greater attention and interests.

If the expression of evolutionary resilience can open the future to more radical possibilities, then pragmatism also offers a way for scholars to open discussions to them. Resilience, as a concept, depends on normative commitments and ends, but we cannot determine them in an absolute or universalist way. In this sense, 'normative power' is not the power to create norms, but the positioning of all discourses and productions of power within relations of valuation. This understanding also takes the ethics of normative power seriously (Parker and Rosamond, 2013). Specifically, we share Cochran's (1999) vision for international ethics as pragmatic critique: an antifoundational, fallible and *experimental* form of cultural criticism, aimed at producing and sustaining international publics through growth and renewal (see also Abraham and Abramson, 2017). We also take our example from the grassroots and practical focus of pragmatist thinking on political action and activism (Cochran, 2017). As we conclude this article, we offer some proposed steps for building resilience that draw on these sources of ethical reflection on and through successful, self-conscious communal growth.

We propose three priorities as normative focal points for future discussions on EU policymaking in planetary context, both for ways of conceptualising resilience and in setting the agenda for building it. First, we propose that EU policymakers reflect on what it means to be pragmatic versus pragmatist. The ordinary language definition of pragmatism conceives of actions on a spectrum from pragmatic to dogmatic, and this raises the possibility of a 'middle-ground' fallacy, whereby being *too* pragmatic means being unprincipled. But the lesson of pragmatism is that all action is pragmatic, regardless of how consciously it proceeds from principles. Rather than ask 'what compromises can we make?', EU policymakers should ask 'what ways to go on are available to us?' The focus of such a question is always on movement, situational engagement, and a dialectic between ends and means. In this sense, to be pragmatic is simply not to stop.

Second, we propose that EU policymakers approach stakeholders not as clients but as fellow practitioners within a broader, if heterogeneous, field of action. The EU as an entity, and EU policymaking as a community of practice therein, is the outcome of plastic and evolving boundaries and arrangements. Strict differentiation between experts and constituents, politicians and civil servants, or even objects and subjects of normative power reifies distinctions in ways that elide the generative, *transactional* processes that produce these categories together. Not only would a new approach to stakeholders and partners recognise their active contributions to policymaking outcomes – beyond assigning ends – it would also serve the normative goal of averting elitism and technocracy among bureaucrats.

Third, we propose that EU policymakers should seek internal instruments of mutability – of protean power, as per Katzenstein and Seybert (2018) – as much as they seek external instruments of normative power. The crucial evolutionary lesson of pragmatism is that problem-solving is a search for a new equilibrium of an organism, environment, and habit or action. The challenges of planetary crises impose considerable pressures and constraints on institutions and practices; to manage them, policymakers must actively reconsider what institutions and practices are *for* – their ends, edges and engagements.

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1. Manners (2006) himself recognises the significance of practices as objects of analysis, but the question of where practices sit within the *ontology* of normative power is not clear in his account.

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