



*Synthesis*

## **Focusing the Meaning(s) of Resilience: Resilience as a Descriptive Concept and a Boundary Object**

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**ABSTRACT.** This article reviews the variety of definitions proposed for “resilience” within sustainability science and suggests a typology according to the specific degree of normativity. There is a tension between the original descriptive concept of resilience first defined in ecological science and a more recent, vague, and malleable notion of resilience used as an approach or boundary object by different scientific disciplines. Even though increased conceptual vagueness can be valuable to foster communication across disciplines and between science and practice, both conceptual clarity and practical relevance of the concept of resilience are critically in danger. The fundamental question is what conceptual structure we want resilience to have. This article argues that a clearly specified, descriptive concept of resilience is critical in providing a counterbalance to the use of resilience as a vague boundary object. A clear descriptive concept provides the basis for operationalization and application of resilience within ecological science.

**Key Words:** *boundary object; definition; descriptive concept; ecological resilience; resilience; sustainability; typology.*