



citizens' resilience  
in times of crisis

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The RESCuE project investigated everyday life and practices of vulnerable households in the context of the European financial and economic crisis, in order to investigate if and how they develop resilience.

Resilience is understood as getting by better, suffering less deeper or recovering more quickly than others under the same adverse circumstances. Resilience is less a matter of personal traits, but more of economic, social and cultural resources being made available, and mobilizing these resources, how tiny, obsolete or marginal they may seem. Resilience can be observed not only by the socioeconomic situation, but also by cultural

There is no vulnerable households' resilience without a welfare state, but resilient families and households use it differently.

Poverty or vulnerability is associated with a lack of wealth and sustainable employment – and is in principle a non-resilient situation. This explains the low incidence of resilience among households around the poverty line. Nevertheless, there are some, and social policy can learn from them.

The RESCuE project received funding from the European Commission under the 7th framework programme, from 2014 to 2017. 600 narrative interviews with 250 households and more than 70 experts were conducted, and the households took more than 10.000 pictures of their lives and situation.

A team of 30 scientists from Universities in Ireland, Portugal, Greece, Poland, United Kingdom, Turkey, Finland, Spain and Germany participated in the research.

## Vulnerable households, hardship, crisis and resilience

The pictures in this slideshow have been taken by the respondents of the RESCuE fieldwork 2014-2015, and they have explained their motivations and thoughts in an interview alongside their photographs: What gives them power, what are their abilities and resources of living, how they express their identities, how they experience and celebrate community, but also the adversities they are facing, and their experiences of hardship. The project team had provided the respondent photographers with a written inspirational guideline, associatively relating to the topics of the project and encouraging for different ways to express themselves.



### Collecting nature's goods:

„My husband knows a lot about mushrooms, he always knows where to find them, how they are called and if they're edible. I'm more the expert when it comes to herbs and wild garlic.”

*German Case, rural context, ~ 40, female, self-employed*

Macrolepiota procera, huge, edible and tasty. Two or three of them can make a family's Sunday dinner.



**„Curious figures“:**

"These are self-harvested carrots from the garden, I thought they were quite funny. In the last years I've realized, that if you put the seeds a bit closer together in the ground, well, a little closer, than you always get these curious figures (laughs). So for example this is where a big part of our food comes from, so we grow a lot of fruit and vegetables in the garden by ourselves "

German Case, rural context, ~ 40, male, artist



In the pictures, there is first a documentary level, second, a level of creative self-expression, third, a level of symbolic ,language' which connects the photographers' work to the symbolic forms of society and culture. These different levels reveal themselves in an iconographic language both relevant for many of the photographers but also the later analysis.



**„Liqueur made of happy fruits“, on display at a Christmas market**

*German Case, rural context, ~ 40, male, artist*



Many pictures are not simply documentaries, but demonstrate an aesthetics of practice. These aesthetics combine the depiction of everyday and family life, a creative self expression and relations to symbolic cultures and communities, and even to iconic symbols from history and collective visual memories.

Be it a catch of fish lined up in an order referring to christian depictions, a stack of firewood with an intentionally unusual order, or dew drops glittering on a spider's web.

Could it be an expression of resilience to understand life from a viewpoint of practical aesthetics instead of pure necessity?



A spiders net, woven into a thorny bush, covered all over by small drops of morning dew. A metaphor for relatedness? For using the stingy branches to get support? For a good catch of water? Are the thorns a threat, a protective fence, or both? For whom?

Photography taken by the mushroom seeker's wife



**Double use of nature:**

“[...] well this is a great place to catch trouts and that is nice. Well I’m almost always bringing home some fish. “

*German Case, rural context, ~ 40, male, artist*

Does this picture refer to the christian metaphor of fish as a symbol for plenty and the grace of higher powers?







### **Vegetable garden for self-production of food:**

“A lot of people keep gardens like these. [...] But the land belongs to the municipality, right? [...] [The production] is just for me. I can give away some cabbages. Or I can have some more potatoes.”

*Portuguese case, rural context, ~ 60, male*

Interviewee lives in a shack in a soon-to-be razed slum. A construction worker by trade, he was forced to retire by dwindling job opportunities in the construction sector during the crisis.





### **Boots for gardening:**

“I have a small backyard. Things just for the house. So that he [the husband] keeps himself occupied. [I grow] some cabbages, some lettuce. I have some orange trees [...] I take advantage of it. Otherwise, it would be even more difficult for us [...] We have the hennery over there. Those are laying hens. For putting eggs. When they get old, I kill them and I buy some new ones. They make for some great chicken soup [laughs].”

*Portuguese case, rural context, ~ 70, female*



### Picking grapes:

*During the crisis, Spanish smallholder families, having lost jobs, often have turned back to work their fields themselves instead of renting out to bigger farmers or hiring paid agricultural workers.*

*Spanish case, rural context*





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### **Reindeer roundup:**

"Yes, the dominant stags (reindeer) are separated from the rest at this point (in the larger fence), they are not to be left mixed with the other reindeer in the small fence, because that would cause harm, since it is small space full of reindeer and people, therefore they are taken away at this point"

*Finnish Case, ~ 30, female, housewife and reindeer herder.*

Maintaining and living from traditional livelihood and acquiring reindeer herding skills.



**“berries just don’t walk”:**

“I am in the forest with my children, it is a kind of meaningful exercise, and one gets berries for home use. For example we use a lot of lingonberry and lingon jam, really a lot. Children learn to take responsibilities – berries just don’t walk to the table by themselves.”

*Finish Case, rural context*

Vaccinium myrtillius, about 3 kg at least





### Number one fish:

"my boyfriend caught this fish, now he has a story to tell for the following next years. A large trout is the number one fish, the red flesh which we are catching with the gold lust in our eyes. [...] It was in a good flesh, and had a great taste"

*Finish Case, rural context, ~ 30, female, artisan and student in nursing*





### Nature on the porch:

„ There we were with grandma, again picking berries. Or actually we just went for a walk, but I suppose we ended up just eating berries [...] yes the lingonberries grow large (as cranberries) in that place.“

*Finish Case, urban context, Teenager, female, 16 (parent: ~ 50 male)*

Joy and nutrition from the surrounding nature.







### **A fair share:**

"These are class-1 mushrooms, [...] picked when they are still small, so they are in a good condition. Class 2 and 3 mushrooms go bad quite fast. I pick the mushrooms from the same area as the one's who sell them for the shops, but we have kind of a deal, that they pick only the mushrooms which are profitable for them, the class 2 and 3 which are sold in the markets, and we don't touch those, we only collect the class-1 mushrooms"

*Finish Case, urban context, ~ 30, female, project work and traditional subsistence economy*

A remarkable demarcation between commodified and non-commodified mushrooms.



„[...] Last year, I caught a big salmon trout, a really big one. And a friend from [a big city], a philosopher, stayed here over the weekend with his girlfriend. It was his birthday and we celebrated and we cooked the salmon trout and had a nice evening [...]“

*German Case, rural context, ~ 40, male, artist*

*Food sharing for keeping up relations is an important way to use self-produced goods*





**Olive trees:**

“We take advantage of this field of olives. This is what I do to enjoy myself.”

*Greek case, rural context, male*

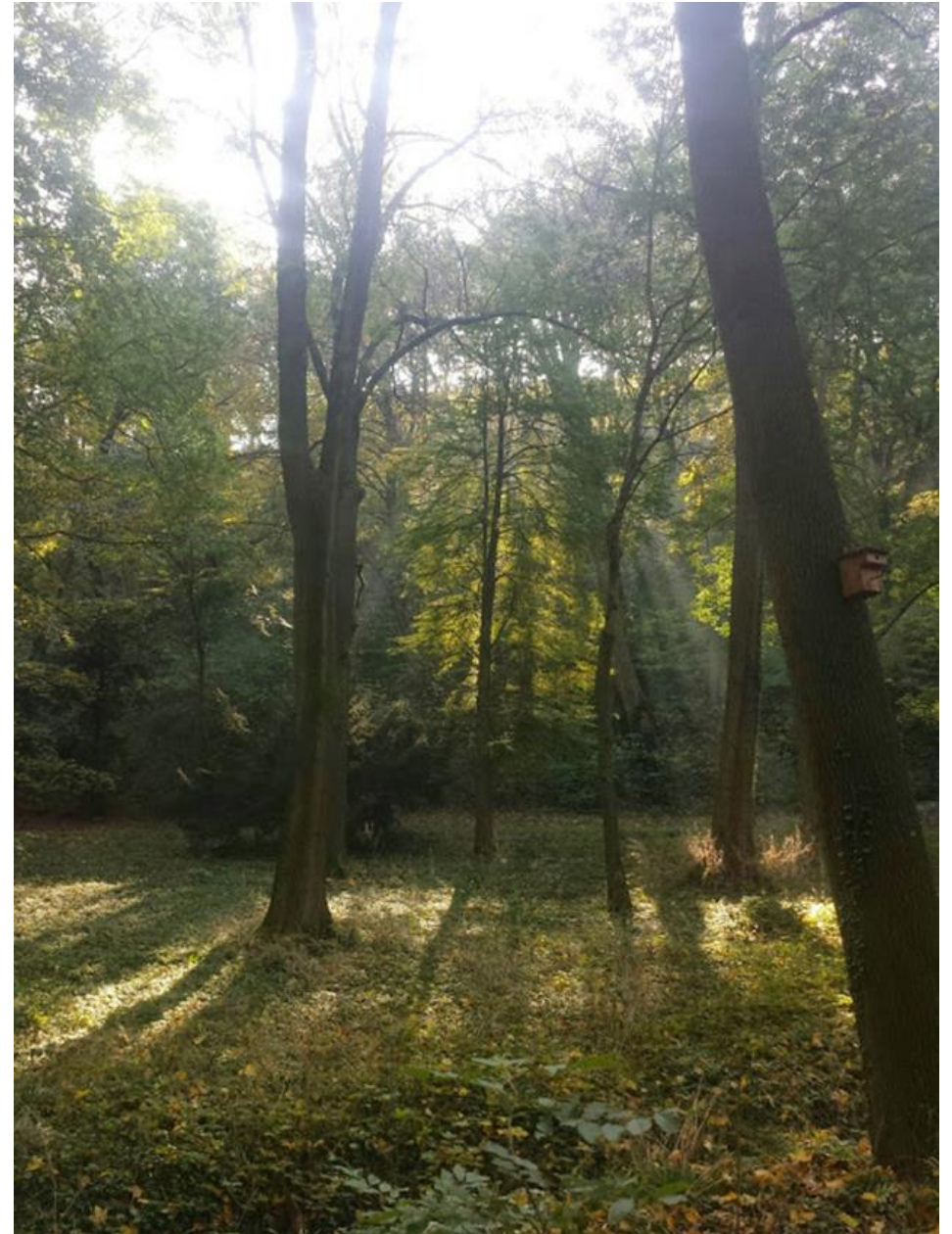




### **Recreation and Nature:**

“And for me it is simply beautiful [...], I always look for a few things where I can recreate myself, which is just beautiful. Then I look at it for a while or photograph it, so I can take it with me in the inside of myself. This makes me feel better and I get the strength to continue again. And so nature is very important for me.”

*German Case, rural context, ~ 40, women, self-employed*



### Wintershoes in making:

"[New] furshoes, mine and my daughters [...] they are filled with hay, so that they will dry and harden to that shape. [...] I use furshoes in a daily basis, when it is very cold. My eldest daughter don't use them so much anymore, probably due to her friends in school. But when we go to grandma's, she wears them, they are for dry frosty weather [...] I don't even have a decent regular winter shoes, and I rather use furshoes, since they feel more comfortable

*Finish Case, rural context, ~ 30, female, artisan and student in nursing.*

Traditional and indigenous skill of handicraft used for providing winterclothing for the family.





**Day off – rest:**

"If I have a day off, I like to read books here I just lit a candle."

*Polish case, urban context, widow, psychologist*



## Tea and Cigarettes:

“How often can you eat chicken or meat?”

“We thank God when that happens.”

*Turkish case, urban context, ~ 40,  
female, Syrian refugee*

Drinking tea and smoking cigarettes provide a rare relaxing moment to this refugee family who lives in a makeshift home with the support of neighbors.







### **The luxury of a good roast pork:**

“Roast pork. [...] My husband bought one, and he said: Here, I've got a surprise for you. We make roast pork. You wanted to know what we are eating. Here you are [chuckles]. This is luxury. That's expensive. I can't cook this every week.”

*German Case, rural context, ~ 40, female, self-employed*





### **The foodbank basket:**

“But then the moment came: ‘we have no choice; we need help!’ And, a while afterwards, we did get help. But to go and get the food [at the foodbank] - that is still tough.”

*Portuguese case, urban context, ~50 female and male, married, two children.*

The woman currently works in a nursing home, while her husband is still unemployed. Former small business owners, they were forced to close their business by the crisis.





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### **Where you live, and where you call home:**

“That's my dad's back garden where I'm...my home house...we do that a couple of times during the summer and it's lovely... Not to talk...we could sit there. She'd sit one side of the range, I'd sit on the other and drink a cup of tea. That's it, and just go home”

*Irish case, rural context, ~40, female, Self-employed, suffered collapse of business and limited welfare support.*





*Spanish case, urban context*



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**Furry joy:**

“My dog is what makes me feel well. He makes me laugh. He is the only thing that makes me laugh lately.”

*Greek case, rural context, female*



### Round table:

„[...] Well I'm always somehow in the centre. I have many friends around me who visit me in my studio. For many years I host the Thursday evenings in the studio. Backwards everyone who wanted could cook for everyone. Meanwhile me and [a friend], with whom I share the studio for over ten years, cook together every Thursday. We are preparing the food and somehow people come together. So friends or even business acquaintances can meet up to talk about projects. Well back then we decided this, 'cause everyone likes to eat, that way you can bring people together and talk and think in a cosy and relaxing atmosphere [...]"

*German Case, rural context, ~ 40, male, artist*



**Sharing food with friends in a backyard (“patio”):**

*Sharing food with friends and family is an important way of promoting cheap social activities, as well as providing material resources to people in times of economic scarcity*

*Spanish case, rural context*







**Old family pictures:**

“There is a first birthday of our Paulina, one year old Paulina in the church, just in St. Nicholas' Day! [...]”

*Polish case, urban context*

**Network participation:**

“We organized an African dance event. We asked African groups to participate and so many people came, it was so crowded, we didn’t expect that”

*Greek case, urban context, female*





**Visiting the Virgin in the brotherhood's chapel:**

*Religion is deeply interwoven with cultural activities in the rural context, so religious celebrations are the most important events of the village*

*Spanish case, rural context*

*Brotherhoods are men's religious associations for praying and organizing religious and community activities.*





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### Friends for fresh perspectives

“[meeting friends] will always give you a slightly different perspective than the one you're looking for and that's what you need [to solve your problem]”

*Irish case, urban context, ~ 50, male, employed through activation course*





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### DVD Night:

“We were sitting there and [my sister] was saying to me; 'will we have a DVD night?' [...]She made popcorn and then we went down to the shop and got sweets and stuff...so I was like; 'oh this is great'.”

*Irish case, rural context, female, ~25, student, part-time worker, and informal work in her home.*

Leisure is a night in watching a movie.



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### **Our everyday**

“So we live now. We spend most of our time in the hospital, because his aunt has health problems. [...] I would like to come back to have more time for myself.”.

*Polish case, urban context, family of three adults.*



**New parent:**

“That's the playpen that we are just after getting that day and I took a picture of all the set-up we did.”

*Irish case, urban  
context, ~ 25, male,  
student and new father*



**“Building a dollhouse for my daughters”:**

*Some sorts of do-it-yourself projects are important to avoid economic expenses in the formal economic market*

*Spanish case, rural context*





## Books beat makeup:

„[my daughter says] 'well, yes I know Daddy, reading is much more important than makeup'. [...] Indeed, books are very important to me.”

*German Case, rural context, ~ 40, male, artist*



### Sharing toys:

“My daughter has already prepared some toys she wants to pass on to someone else. [...] I'm glad of that, because she learns sharing with others, but also learns coping in life - to exchange, to collaborate, and so on”

*Polish case, rural context*

Through an internet search, the family received household appliances, furniture, toys and other free used goods.





**Theatre group in parents' association at school**

*Parents' association at school provide an important source of fun, support and friendship among households*

*Spanish case, urban context*



### **Village solidarity:**

“[...]the villages stick together like that. Especially in our region, which is quite poor. And that they are able to run a museum, an open air railway museum where they take no entrance fee. So that must mean a lot of love.”

German Case, rural context, ~ 40, woman, self-employed







**Group of friends “going out”:**

*Multicultural relationships favored mainly by the local church allow neighbours to strengthen their social ties*

*Spanish case, urban context*

## Carnival parade

*Carnival is celebrated by all, independently of their culture or religion. A shared celebration of multicultural character*

*Spanish case, urban context*





## Football lessons for children

*Playing football is an important cultural activity in the Spanish context, as well as an affordable activity in which children are involved*

*Spanish case, rural context*





### **It's pure joy:**

„Well, I moved to a village where I did not know anyone. And the carnival club, or rather, the dance group, where I go, helped me a lot, to feel not so alone anymore. [...] They simply asked me: ‘would you like to join? Good, come on.’ [...] And since then, the carnival club means a lot to me. It's pure joy.”

*German Case, rural context,  
~ 40, woman, self-employed*





**A group of friends gathering for a barbecue**

*Spanish case, urban context*



### The annual town fair:

“[Local culture] used to be stronger. I’m not that much into it, but it used to be stronger. When the [Name of town annual] fair starts, they make these parades and the like. Even that has changed, because they used to bring what they called cabrestos [castrated bulls]... And they would bring the wild bull in the middle of it all. They had to make the tour [of the town] and be in total control, so that the wild bull wouldn’t run away. Not anymore – now what they came up with is this poor excuse of a bull!”

*Portuguese case, urban context, ~ 40, female, single mother of one child*

The interviewee is a former optician, she left her home town after marrying and returned after divorcing at the height of the crisis. She now works as a taxi driver. She took this photo during the annual town fair.





### A place to hang out

“I’m always here but I don’t bet. People ask me ‘how come? You always hang out here’. But I don’t bet. I sometimes go to the coffeehouse and play cards, but not this. I sometimes buy lottery tickets, I don’t care if I don’t win.”

*Turkish case, urban context, male, ~ 30, painter*