

## Productive Margins: Regulating *for* Engagement

### Linked Studentship - Spaces of Dissent

This studentship is located in the Geography pathway of the South West Doctoral Training Centre, and will be co-supervised by Professor Wendy Lerner ([w.lerner@bris.ac.uk](mailto:w.lerner@bris.ac.uk)) and Dr Morag McDermont ([morag.mcdermont@bris.ac.uk](mailto:morag.mcdermont@bris.ac.uk)).

**Case Study:** Coexist is a registered Community Interest Company set up in August 2008 to manage spaces in which people can coexist (verb – to exist in harmony) with themselves, with each other and the environment. It occupies a former office building in Stokes Croft and is central to the regeneration of a formerly run down area in Bristol. Over the last two years Coexist has drawn together a diverse array of alternative energy companies, artists, crafts people, community groups, health practitioners and social enterprises in their effort to develop innovative and ethical futures. More recently Coexist has more actively engaged with established Bristol institutions and networks – including Bristol City Council, UWE, University of Bristol, and the Bristol Environmental and Technology Services project in an effort to formalize their activities and build relationships of mutual benefit. The expressed aim is to establish Coexist specifically, and the city of Bristol more generally, as a ‘beacon of good practice’ that will enable others to emulate this grass roots model of environmentally sensitive urban regeneration and social innovation.

**Context:** The proposed doctoral project begins from the assumption that Coexist exemplifies the new emphasis on ‘resilience’ as the way we should live. Resilience is a term that has an established meaning related to the strategies of endurance people adopt to facilitate their day-to-day living. More recently, however, resilience has become a new *lingua franca* for how we should live in this historical moment. Whereas sustainability was the dominant rubric for environmental policy in the 1990s, resilience has a broader remit that draws together environmental, economic, social and psychological processes. In social science literatures the term has begun to proliferate, appearing in diverse empirical fields including environmental geography, urban planning, retail geography and regional development. Perhaps even more importantly, however, resilience now features strongly in the ‘grey literature’ of think-tanks, environmental consultancies and social movements. It has become a ‘keyword’ and political goal in realms as diverse as climate change, urban infrastructure, community building and personal development, all of which come together in a bottom-up grassroots initiative like Coexist.

Although resilience thinking rejects market-led and individualised models of neoliberal economic and social development, it is not a return to the state-led formulations of Keynesian welfarism and developmentalism. As influential UK think-tank Demos (2009) underlines, ‘next generation resilience relies on citizens and communities, not the institutions of the state’. In this ‘after neoliberal’ political formation there is explicit recognition of the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, and psychic processes. The political imperatives of resilience thinking also privilege modes of experimental governance in which policy-makers, researchers, businesses and communities are collectively charged with finding new paths to sustainability. Correspondingly resilience thinking can be seen as part of the more general move towards individual and collective empowerment that has further displaced states, professionals and technocrats. In this context, we need to know much more about the organisational and technical arrangements being put in place to foster resilience. We also need to know much more about the effects of resilience. What new regulatory forms are invented when resilient subjects that are explicitly attentive to relationships of solidarity (human and non-human) are created?