Discourse Analysis in Risk and Crisis Research

From Theory to Method with Resilience as an Example

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Abstract. This paper provides a selective introduction to discourse analysis for research on risk, crisis and related fields. It reviews key theoretical and methodological foundations across social-constructionist and poststructuralist traditions, while placing particular emphasis on critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The discussion addresses how discourses can be defined and delimited, how meanings are constructed and contested, how discourse relates to power and social practice, and how intertextuality, interdiscursivity and genealogy can be used analytically. The concept of *resilience* serves as a recurring example through which these concepts are illustrated. The paper then translates the discussion into a practical research workflow, culminating in an illustrative CDA design concerning resilience in Norwegian total preparedness and total defence. The purpose is not to present discourse analysis as a single or privileged method, but as one possible approach to critically oriented qualitative research. Its value arises when language, meaning and their relationship to social practice are themselves central to the research problem.

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1. Audience, purpose, and scope

While discourse analysis is not entirely absent from interdisciplinary research on hazards, risks, and crises, it remains relatively uncommon and is often difficult to approach as a coherent research strategy. The difficulty lies partly in the diversity of the field itself. Discourse analysis encompasses several overlapping and sometimes competing theoretical and methodological traditions, with different ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological commitments. For researchers not yet positioned within this field, the challenge is therefore not simply to learn a set of analytical techniques, but to understand how theoretical assumptions, methodological approaches and analytical procedures fit together. This paper addresses that challenge through a conceptual, theoretical, and methodological discussion intended to support the construction of coherent discourse-analytical research.

The discussion is mainly intended for readers interested in applying discourse analysis empirically without assuming extensive prior familiarity with its different traditions. It proceeds from basic questions concerning what discourse analysis is and what counts as a discourse, through the construction and contestation of meaning, the social and political effects of discourse, relations among texts and discourses, and genealogy. Finally, the paper outlines the design and conduct of an illustrative empirical study.

The paper is situated within the broader field of social-constructionist discourse analysis and places critical discourse analysis (CDA), especially as presented by Norman Fairclough, in dialogue with more poststructuralist approaches. However, the paper does not attempt to combine these traditions into a single theoretical framework. Rather, they are used selectively where they provide useful conceptual or analytical resources, while CDA becomes the principal methodological framework when the discussion turns to empirical operationalisation. The central requirement throughout is coherence between the theoretical position adopted, the research problem, the material selected, the analytical procedures employed, and the conclusions drawn.

The concept of *resilience* provides the main substantive example in this paper. Its changing meanings, contested interpretations, political uses, and historical trajectories make it particularly suitable for demonstrating how discourse-analytical concepts can be applied. The illustrative case-study Section 8 ties the preceding discussion together by illustrating how Fairclough's three-dimensional model can be applied to a CDA research project on resilience. Specifically, it demonstrates how to study *resilience in Norwegian total preparedness and total defence*, tracing the project from the initial research questions through methodology, corpus construction, and data analysis to the final interpretation.

2. What is discourse analysis?

Discourse analysis investigates how language and other meaning-making practices participate in constituting social reality. Its object is not language in isolation, but the recurring patterns through which phenomena are named, classified, related and made actionable. In risk and crisis research, this may involve examining how hazards come to be recognised and prioritised as risks, how events are defined as crises, which actors are assigned responsibility, and how particular responses acquire legitimacy. Because different traditions explain these processes in different ways, discourse analysis is best understood as a theoretically informed approach, not as any one neutral technique, for analysing texts or other social phenomena.

Three questions are particularly important at the outset. First, what kind of theoretical and methodological approach is discourse analysis, given the diversity of traditions gathered under that label? Second, what counts as a discourse, and how can its boundaries be delimited for empirical research? Third, when does discourse analysis provide a useful approach to studying risk and crisis phenomena?

2.1 Theory, methodology, or method?

Discourse analysis can refer to a theory, a methodology, or a set of methods, depending on how the term is used. These levels are closely connected but should not be conflated. At the theoretical level, discourse-analytical approaches make assumptions about language, meaning, knowledge and social reality. At the methodological level, these assumptions guide the formulation of research questions, the selection of empirical material and the kinds of interpretations and conclusions that can reasonably be made. Methods are the more concrete analytical procedures through which texts, speech and other meaning-making practices are examined—for example, by studying recurring categories, representations, narratives, subject positions, exclusions or relations between language and power.

This distinction also explains why there is no single method called discourse analysis. As Van Dijk (2015, p. 466) emphasises, CDA in particular should not be understood as one specialised method. Researchers may draw on different methods from discourse studies and from the wider humanities and social sciences. Yet this does not mean that any technique can simply be labelled discourse analysis. The analytical procedures chosen should remain compatible with the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the approach being used.

Across many social-constructionist approaches to discourse analysis, some foundational assumptions overlap (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; cf. Cap, 2019; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). A central premise is that language does not transparently reflect a fully pre-given social reality. Meanings, categories, identities and social relationships are historically and culturally situated, and language participates in constructing them. Discursive patterns consequently enable and constrain what can meaningfully be said, known and done. Many approaches also examine relations of power: how particular representations become authoritative or taken for granted, privilege some actors or forms of knowledge, and marginalise alternatives.

Important differences nevertheless remain. These concern, among other things, two basic philosophical questions. Ontology concerns what kind of reality we assume exists—put simply, what there is to be studied. Epistemology concerns what can be known about that reality and how such knowledge is possible. These questions matter for discourse analysis because approaches differ both in how they understand the relationship between discourse and other dimensions of social reality and in the kinds of knowledge claims they consider justified.

An important ontological difference concerns the relation between discursive and non-discursive aspects of social life. Strongly poststructuralist approaches, such as that of Laclau and Mouffe (2001, p. 107), regard all social practices as discursive. This does not mean denying the material existence of objects, bodies or events. Instead, such phenomena acquire social meaning and become objects of knowledge and intervention only within discourse. CDA, understood as a broad movement rather than a unified school, generally takes a somewhat different position. Discourse is treated as one dimension of social practice that interacts with material, institutional, economic and political dimensions of social life. From this perspective, discourse helps constitute social reality but is itself also shaped by other social structures and practices (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Epistemologically, most discourse-analytical approaches reject the idea that language provides transparent access to reality, but they differ over what can nevertheless be known and on what basis claims can be criticised. Strongly poststructuralist approaches emphasise that truths, identities and objects of knowledge are historically constituted within discourse and that researchers cannot occupy a completely neutral position outside these processes. Critique therefore often focuses on contingency: how particular truths became possible, which alternatives were excluded, and what relations of power their establishment supports. Many forms of CDA likewise regard representations as socially constructed, but allow greater analytical separation between discourse and other social or material conditions. This makes it possible to

ask how particular representations interact with relatively enduring institutions and structures and whether they contribute to domination, inequality or social change.

Compared to Fairclough's earlier more linguistic approach (Fairclough, 1989), his later CDA develops this position through an engagement with critical realism, particularly the work of Roy Bhaskar. In simplified terms, critical realism assumes that reality exists independently of our particular descriptions of it, while our knowledge of that reality remains historically situated, theoretically mediated and fallible. In the social world, structures are real, but they are also reproduced or transformed through human activity. Fairclough uses this position to conceptualise discourse as one element of social practice rather than either a transparent reflection of reality or an autonomous linguistic realm. Language, or more broadly *semiosis*, stands in a dialectical relationship with material, institutional and other social elements (Fairclough et al., 2002; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; cf. Bhaskar, 1979, 1986). In this later framework, Fairclough distinguishes among *discourses* as ways of representing the world, *genres* as ways of acting and interacting, and *styles* as ways of being or identifying. These semiotic dimensions can become embedded in institutions, practices and identities and may therefore have effects beyond individual texts. The precise philosophical integration of critical realism and CDA remains debated (e.g., Flatschart, 2016), but for present purposes the important point is simpler: discourse and other dimensions of social reality are treated as distinct but mutually constitutive.

These differences may initially appear rather fine-grained, but they have practical consequences. An approach that treats discourse as one dimension of a wider social reality permits different kinds of claims and requires different kinds of evidence from an approach that treats social reality as constituted entirely through discourse. The task is therefore not simply to "use discourse analysis". It becomes important to select and justify an approach appropriate to the research problem and to maintain coherence between its theoretical assumptions, research questions, empirical material, analytical procedures and conclusions (Müller, 2011).

The present paper primarily adopts a CDA perspective within the broader field of social-constructionist discourse analysis. This makes it possible to examine language and meaning while also considering their relationships with institutional, political and material practices. Poststructuralist approaches remain important as a contrasting position and as a source of concepts for examining contingency, exclusion and struggles over meaning. The intention is not to merge these approaches into a single theory, but to use them selectively and consistently according to the analytical question at hand.

2.2 Defining and delimiting a discourse

Once a discourse-analytical orientation has been chosen, a more immediate empirical question arises: what exactly is the discourse to be analysed? The term *discourse* is used differently across theoretical traditions, and even a defensible general definition may remain too abstract to identify a concrete object of study. Discourses do not normally present themselves with ready-made boundaries. Researchers must therefore clarify both what they mean by discourse and how the particular discourse, or set of discourses, under investigation is to be delimited.

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 13) note that many contemporary approaches to discourse analysis draw on Michel Foucault's conception of discourses as relatively rule-bound sets of statements that delimit what can meaningfully be said and known. Foucault himself describes discourse in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as a group of statements belonging to the same system of formation (1972, p. 107), while also insisting that discourses are not merely collections of linguistic signs but practices that participate in forming the objects of which they speak (p. 49). Discursive practices therefore help establish what can appear as an object of knowledge, how it can be classified, which concepts may legitimately be used, who is authorised to speak about it and which statements count as relevant, normal or true. These historically

specific rules do not constitute a completely closed system; they delimit a field of possibilities within which different and sometimes contradictory statements may emerge. Foucauldian discourse analysis consequently concerns relations among discourse, knowledge, institutional practices, material conditions, power and history rather than language in isolation (Hook, 2001).

CDA can be broadly situated in the Foucaldian tradition (Chouliaraki, 2008), and also Fairclough largely retains this socially constitutive understanding of discourse. However, he gives the concept a more explicit analytical specification. In its general or abstract sense, *discourse* refers to language and other forms of semiosis as elements of social life. Used in the plural, *discourses* are particular "ways of representing aspects of the world" (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 214–215). A security problem, for example, may be represented through competing discourses that construct its causes, responsible actors and appropriate responses differently. Hajer and Versteeg (2005, p. 175) offer a related formulation, defining discourse as "an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices". Both formulations connect recurring representations with the practices through which they are produced and maintained.

These definitions still do not provide a mechanical rule for determining where one discourse ends and another begins. In empirical research, discourse boundaries therefore have to be established analytically. A discourse may become identifiable through recurring representations, categories, problem definitions, causal narratives, storylines, assumptions and subject positions. Its boundaries may also become visible through contrast: different discourses may organise the same domain differently, privilege different forms of knowledge, assign responsibility differently or make different actions appear appropriate. Such boundaries remain provisional because discourses overlap, borrow from one another, compete and change over time.

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, pp. 141–144) therefore treat delimitation as dependent on the research question. A broad category such as *medical discourse* may be useful when contrasted with alternative medicine, whereas another study may need to distinguish several competing discourses within medicine itself. A discourse is in this sense partly an analytical construction through which the researcher organises the empirical material. This does not make delimitation arbitrary. The proposed boundary must be theoretically meaningful, appropriate to the research question and supported by recurring empirical patterns.

Fairclough's concept of an *order of discourse* becomes useful when several discourses and other forms of meaning-making operate within the same social domain. An order of discourse is not simply one large discourse or a term with many possible meanings. It refers to the relatively stable configuration of discourses, genres and styles, as defined above, associated with a network of social practices. More generally, order of discourse is the way semiotic possibilities are organised within a particular social field (Fairclough, 2003, p. 220). The plural is *orders of discourse*, which refers to the idea that different institutional or social domains may have different such configurations.

The distinction between a discourse and an order of discourse is therefore partly a question of analytical scale. The concept of resilience, the main substantive example used in the present paper, may be illustrative. At a broad level, researchers might speak of a *resilience discourse* if they identify a sufficiently coherent way of representing adversity, adaptation and responsibility across their material. Closer analysis might instead reveal several competing resilience discourses. For example, representations that foreground robustness and recovery, or emphasise adaptation, transformation or particular distributions of responsibility. The wider field within which these representations coexist, compete and combine could then be approached as an order of discourse. Whether resilience is best analysed as one discourse, several

discourses, or as a domain containing an order of discourse cannot be decided by terminology alone. It depends on the research question and on what the empirical material shows.

Both discourses and orders of discourse should consequently be treated as theoretically informed but empirically revisable delimitations. Initial distinctions may be drawn from theory or previous research and then modified as the material is analysed. The practical point is that there is rarely one objectively correct boundary waiting to be discovered. The researcher constructs a defensible analytical boundary that must remain useful for answering the research question and open to revision when empirical patterns make another delimitation more appropriate.

2.3 Why use discourse analysis in risk and crisis research?

Many questions associated with discourse analysis are already familiar in mainstream risk and crisis research. Studies of framing, sensemaking, crisis communication and political contestation have long examined how situations are interpreted, how competing actors seek to define them and how these definitions influence decisions and responses. Risks and crises may have material causes and consequences, but their social meaning is rarely self-evident. A situation can be identified as a crisis, treated as routine, framed as a security problem or understood through competing interpretations. These are well-established concerns in crisis research (Pursiainen, 2018, pp. 97–100; Gigliotti, 2020). They do not require discourse analysis as such.

The justification for discourse analysis must therefore be more specific. Fairclough (2003, p. 2) describes a focus on language as "one productive way of doing social research". This is a useful starting point. Discourse analysis becomes particularly relevant when language and other forms of meaning-making are themselves central to the research problem. It provides concepts and procedures for investigating how particular representations are constructed, how they circulate between texts and institutional settings, how they change during that movement, and how they become connected with wider practices and relations of power. Especially in CDA, this requires movement between textual evidence and the institutional and social contexts in which texts are produced, circulated and used.

In risk and crisis research, this can become important when apparently familiar concepts themselves form part of the problem to be investigated. *Risk*, *crisis*, *security*, *preparedness*, *responsibility* or *resilience* may appear self-explanatory while carrying different meanings in different contexts. They may classify situations differently and position actors differently. They can also make some forms of action appear more reasonable than others. A discourse-analytical study can therefore ask how a particular understanding becomes established. It can also examine how such an understanding is reproduced or transformed as it moves between actors and institutions, what assumptions are built into its use and which alternatives become less visible.

The interest in discourse analysis goes however beyond simply identifying different frames or vocabularies. It lies in examining their textual and intertextual construction closely enough to show how particular representations acquire authority and become embedded in policy, institutions or social practices. This can involve asking who is represented as capable, vulnerable or responsible. It can inquire which voices and forms of knowledge are treated as authoritative. It may question what is presupposed rather than argued, and how apparently neutral concepts become connected to particular understandings of appropriate action.

Discourse analysis does not, however, automatically produce findings unavailable through policy analysis, organisational research, political and social history or other qualitative approaches. Nor is it necessarily the most appropriate approach when the primary purpose is immediate problem-solving—for example, determining which organisational arrangement works best or designing a more effective emergency procedure. Its usefulness depends on the research question. Where the relationship between language,

meaning and social practice is central, discourse analysis offers a systematic way of making that relationship itself an object of empirical inquiry.

It may therefore often be most productive in combination with institutional, historical, ethnographic or other forms of analysis. This is consistent with Phillips and Hardy's (2002, Ch. 1, p. 17) broader argument for methodological pluralism: different approaches make different aspects of social reality visible while inevitably leaving others less explored. Discourse analysis need not replace established approaches to risk and crisis research. It offers another way of looking at a problem and, where useful, of questioning categories that researchers and practitioners might otherwise take for granted.

Resilience provides the recurring example in the remainder of this paper. At this stage, however, it is deliberately left analytically open. It may be studied as a signifier whose meaning varies across contexts, as a relatively coherent resilience discourse. Or it can be approached as several competing resilience discourses, or as part of a wider order of discourse in which different representations coexist and struggle for authority. The fact that resilience is widely invoked while its meaning, boundaries and practical implications remain far from self-evident makes it particularly suitable for illustrating the discourse-analytical questions.

3. How is meaning constructed and contested?

Discourse analysis rejects the assumption that words simply carry fixed meanings from one context to another. Meanings are formed through relations among signs, through their use in particular social settings, and through attempts to stabilise or challenge particular interpretations. These processes can be approached through the concepts of sign, signifier, signified, and signification. This vocabulary derives primarily from structuralist and poststructuralist traditions and is not equally prominent in all forms of discourse analysis. Fairclough-oriented CDA more commonly approaches related questions through concepts such as representation, vocabulary, articulation, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity, discussed later in this paper.

The section nevertheless draws on this structuralist and poststructuralist vocabulary because it provides an accessible way of examining how a concept can acquire different contents and meanings. It first introduces the basic relation between signifier and signified and the poststructuralist emphasis on the instability and provisional fixation of meaning. Resilience is then used to illustrate three progressively more complex possibilities: a signifier connected to particular meanings, a floating signifier contested between alternative meanings, and an empty signifier whose relative openness allows it to represent wider and heterogeneous objectives.

3.1 Sign, signifier, signified, and the instability of meaning

The theory of the sign is typically associated with Ferdinand de Saussure's early twentieth-century structural linguistics and semiology (de Saussure, 1972). For Saussure, a sign consists of a *signifier*—the perceptible form of a word or other sign—and a *signified*—the concept associated with it. The relation between the two is conventional rather than natural, and meaning also depends on the relations and differences among signs within a linguistic system. *Signification* refers to the relation or process through which a signifier comes to evoke a signified.

Poststructuralist discourse theory reworked Saussure's framework by placing greater emphasis on the instability and contestability of meaning. In Laclau and Mouffe's (2001, pp. 112-113) account, discourses seek to organise meaning around privileged points, or *nodal points*, and thereby achieve a temporary fixation of meaning. Such closure can never be complete: signs remain open to rearticulation as they are connected to different concepts and political projects. This provides the conceptual background for

distinctions such as *floating* and *empty signifiers*, which describe different ways in which meanings may remain contested or acquire wider political functions.

A floating signifier is a term or symbol whose meaning is contested and therefore open to different, partly competing articulations. Different actors and discourses seek to connect the same signifier to different signifieds and thereby fix its meaning, at least temporarily. The term has roots in Claude Lévi-Strauss's discussion of the mismatch between the human capacity for signification and what has already been conceptually determined. It was subsequently developed in poststructuralist discourse theory to analyse struggles over the meanings of politically important signs (Laclau, 1996; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 29–30).

An empty signifier is related to, but distinct from, a floating signifier. It is sometimes described as a "signifier without a signified", but this should not be taken literally. In Laclau's theory, a signifier becomes relatively empty when its more particular content is loosened so that it can represent a broader collective objective. Terms such as freedom, justice, security or the people can perform this function: different groups may attach different expectations to them while still treating them as shared objectives. The relative emptiness of the signifier does not make it random or politically insignificant. On the contrary, its ability to represent a wider totality makes it a particularly important site of hegemonic struggle. Competing actors seek to fill it with their preferred content and to present their particular interpretation as a universal interest (Laclau, 1996; Brown, 2011; Friede, 2025).

The distinction between floating and empty signifiers is analytical rather than absolute. A floating signifier is pulled between competing attempts to define its meaning. An empty signifier unifies heterogeneous demands by partially relinquishing its particular meaning and representing a broader common objective. The same term may perform both functions: its meaning may be contested while its very openness allows different actors to organise themselves around it.

3.2 Illustration: Resilience as a signifier

Consider now the term *resilience*. One authoritative definition is provided by the International Organization for Standardization, according to which it means the "ability to absorb and adapt in a changing environment" (ISO, 2025). Following this minimalist definition, the sign *resilience* combines the word-form *resilience* with the concept of an ability to absorb and adapt to change. The *signifier* is the linguistic form through which the concept is expressed—for example, the word *resilience* in spoken or written language. The *signified* is the concept evoked by that signifier—in this case, an entity's ability to absorb disturbance and adapt in a changing environment. *Signification* is the social process through which a signifier is connected to a signified and thereby made meaningful. This occurs, for example, when a policy document describes a community as *resilient* and thus represents its ability to absorb and adapt to disruption as one of its defining characteristics.

The signified should not be confused with the *referent*: the entity, event, capacity, or practice in the world to which the sign is applied. In the expression *the resilience of a power grid*, the signifier is the written or spoken form *resilience*; the signified is the concept of an ability to absorb and adapt; and the referent is the particular power grid, including the technologies, organisations, capacities, and practices being described. Discourse analysis examines how these material arrangements are represented and made intelligible without necessarily denying their existence outside language.

For Saussure, the relationship between a signifier and a signified is arbitrary in the specific sense that it is neither natural nor intrinsically necessary. There is no necessary reason why the word resilience should signify precisely the ability to absorb and adapt rather than some other concept, nor why that concept should be expressed by this particular word. The connection is established and maintained through socially shared

linguistic conventions. Arbitrary does not mean, however, that an individual speaker can make a signifier mean anything at will. Its meaning is constrained by established conventions, its relations with other signs, and the social contexts in which it is used.

The above-mentioned ISO definition provisionally fixes the signifier *resilience* to a particular signified: the ability to absorb and adapt in a changing environment. From a discourse-analytical perspective, however, this connection cannot be treated as entirely neutral or definitive. Other definitions associate resilience with, for instance, resistance, robustness, persistence, resourcefulness, preparedness, recovery, self-reliance, adaptation, or transformation. The signifier *resilience* can therefore be connected to several partly competing signifieds. The methodological task is to examine how particular texts and actors establish these connections, which meanings become dominant or taken for granted, which alternatives are marginalised or excluded, and what social practices the different definitions make possible.

3.3 Illustration: Resilience as a floating signifier

Resilience has often been described as an all-encompassing concept that can be understood as a floating signifier (Coaffee & Chandler, 2016, p. 385). Its history illustrates why. Rather than carrying one stable meaning across different fields, the signifier *resilience* has historically been connected to a succession of partly different understandings.

Indirli's (2019) detailed historical review shows that the signifier *resilience* circulated across several fields long before its contemporary use in disaster risk reduction. Derived from the Latin *resilire*, meaning "to rebound" or "leap back", it was allegedly first used in English by philosopher Francis Bacon in his 1627 *Sylva Sylvarum*, discussing the nature of echo that, like a ball, bounces back from a wall. Later, the term became associated in nineteenth-century materials science and engineering with the ability of timber, metals, and structures to absorb energy, resist impact, and recover after deformation. In this articulation, the material object is expected to retain or regain its previous form, like the hull of a sailing ship that yields in a storm but recovers its shape, or a fabric that stretches without tearing. Most notably, resilience thus came to denote a property of matter in which the hardest or most rigid material is not necessarily the most durable.

Holling's (1973) ecological intervention, often understood as the beginning of the concept's modern popularity, connected the same signifier to a different signified. He showed that whereas what later became known as *engineering resilience* emphasises the speed and efficiency with which a system returns to equilibrium after disturbance—its capacity to "bounce back"—*ecological resilience* concerns the capacity to absorb disturbance and persist while retaining essential relationships or identity. A system may therefore be ecologically resilient even when it does not return rapidly, or necessarily at all, to its previous equilibrium. Resilience here shifts from recovery towards persistence and adaptation under changing conditions.

While traversing across a variety of disciplines and practical domains, later approaches have extended the signifier further towards transformation. This is sometimes expressed through maxims such as "building back better" (e.g., Mannakkara et al., 2018) and "bouncing forward" (e.g., Manyena et al., 2011). *Transformative resilience* goes beyond restoring previous conditions or incrementally adapting existing arrangements by allowing more fundamental changes in structures, functions, institutions, or development pathways. Asadzadeh et al. (2022) distinguish in this respect between conservative coping, reformative incremental adaptation, and fundamental transformative adaptation. The latter involves a deliberate capacity to reshape systems and move towards different, potentially more sustainable forms and functions.

These developments illustrate why the semantic breadth of resilience is more than a recent policy ambiguity. Through the term's circulation across materials science, engineering, ecology, psychology, the

social sciences and disaster governance, the same signifier has become associated with persistence, recovery, adaptation and transformation. From a discourse-analytical perspective, this should not be understood as an unbroken and largely logical conceptual lineage in which one idea has simply developed or expanded over time. It is instead a history of translation, appropriation, metaphorical extension and changing meaning. However, the differences are also consequential. A recovery-oriented understanding may prioritise restoration of previous functions. An adaptive understanding may accept considerable change while seeking to preserve a system's essential identity. A transformative understanding may question whether the pre-disturbance condition should be restored at all.

Against this historically plural background, standards and international organisations can be understood as attempting to stabilise the meaning of resilience for particular practical and institutional purposes. The above-used ISO (2025) definition of resilience as the "ability to absorb and adapt in a changing environment" articulates resilience primarily with an adaptive understanding. Its brevity nevertheless leaves open whether adaptation means maintaining existing functions, bouncing back to a previous condition, or enabling more fundamental change.

The broader authoritative definition used by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction describes resilience as the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to "resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover" from their effects while preserving and restoring essential structures and functions (UNDRR, 2017.). This can be read as an attempt to synthesise and institutionally stabilise several historically developed meanings within one definition. *Resist*, *recover* and *restore* retain elements of engineering-oriented resilience; *absorb*, *accommodate* and *adapt* correspond more closely to ecological and adaptive resilience; while *transform* introduces the possibility of more fundamental change. The definition thereby brings "bouncing back", adaptation and potentially "bouncing forward" under the same conceptual umbrella.

Such comprehensiveness does not, however, resolve all tensions between these meanings. Preserving and restoring "essential basic structures and functions" may sit uneasily with transformation if the latter substantially changes precisely those structures and functions. The definition does not determine how much change is compatible with the continued identity of a resilient system, or who has the authority to decide which features should be preserved and which transformed. In this sense, institutional definition produces a provisional closure rather than a final settlement of meaning.

The wider resilience literature reflects the same problem. The proliferation of interpretations, methods and applications has led resilience to be characterised as a "fuzzy" or "stretched" concept. One response is to accept this plurality and resist imposing a universal framework across fundamentally different disciplinary and practical contexts (Convertino & Valverde). Another seeks a more integrated position: epistemological pluralism may be retained while common elements are brought together within a more holistic understanding of resilience (Miller et al., 2008).

Neither response necessarily eliminates the floating character of the signifier. Resilience is therefore likely to continue acquiring somewhat different meanings as it travels between disciplines, institutions and social contexts. From a discourse-analytical perspective, the relevant question is not to find or propose one final definition that can settle what resilience *really* means. The key issue is how particular actors seek to stabilise its meaning, for what purposes, and with what consequences.

3.4 Illustration: Resilience as an empty signifier

Some accounts go further and understand resilience not merely as a floating signifier, whose meaning is contested, but as an empty signifier whose very openness can become potentially politically useful. Such emptiness is not inherently good or bad. It allows otherwise different actors and objectives to gather around

the shared aspiration of "resilience" without necessarily agreeing on what resilience requires. The emptying of a signifier need not be intentional. In Laclau's account (1996), it arises as a signifier sheds some of its particular content in order to represent an increasingly heterogeneous set of demands. Political actors may nevertheless seek to exploit, preserve, or extend this openness by presenting their own particular objectives as the content of the wider signifier.

Davoudi's (2012, 2013) discussion of resilience in spatial planning illustrates some of the conditions underlying an interpretation that resilience has acquired characteristics of an empty signifier. She observes that the rapid proliferation of resilience-building reports, strategies, and activities often obscures both the precise meaning of the term and the particular type of resilience being promoted. Its elasticity allows diverse actors to endorse the apparently universal objective of "building resilience" even when they disagree about the problems to be addressed, the structures to be preserved, and the changes that should follow.

This conceptual openness makes it necessary to ask more discriminating questions: resilience to what disturbance, of what system or group, and for what purpose? Who defines resilience, and whose knowledge is authoritative in doing so? Which existing structures and relationships are to be preserved, and which should be transformed? Who gains and who loses from a particular resilience strategy? Ultimately, whose resilience is being built, by whom, and under what social and political conditions? One answer, presented by Mingarini and Larsson (2026, p. 398), is that it is no one's. According to them, there is no clear political discourse concerning resilience or any associated hegemonic view. Resilience remains an empty signifier and a fashionable word that is filled with contradictory content and meaning. "The danger in the centrality of such a word in policy making is that it signals action but leads to inertia."

Friede (2025), by contrast, argues that resilience functions as an empty signifier in the discourses of the European Union and NATO, where its emptiness is desirable. In these contexts, resilience appears as a flexible and universally desirable objective whose precise content varies across policy fields. It can connect otherwise distinct demands concerning disinformation, critical infrastructure, supply chains, energy security, public health, cyber threats, and societal preparedness. The signifier thereby provides a common vocabulary through which heterogeneous vulnerabilities and interventions can be assembled into a broader policy agenda. The meaning of such resilience in EU and NATO discourse is that its relative indeterminacy enables it to perform an integrative and legitimising function. By representing multiple security concerns as dimensions of resilience, the organisations such as the EU or NATO can expand established agendas into new policy areas and make diverse interventions appear to serve the same overarching objective. Friede describes this as a discourse of "controlled loss of control": uncertainty and disruption are accepted as unavoidable, while resilience promises that their effects can nevertheless be anticipated, managed, and contained.

4. What do discourses do?

Discourse analysis is concerned not only with how meanings are constructed but also with what those constructions make possible in social life. Discourses can shape how problems are recognised, which actors and identities become intelligible, what forms of knowledge acquire authority, and which actions appear appropriate or legitimate. CDA places particular emphasis on these relations between representation, social practice, ideology, and power. From this perspective, discourse is constitutive of social reality while also being shaped by material, institutional, political, and other dimensions of social life.

This section examines these constitutive effects by placing Fairclough's CDA in dialogue with a more Foucauldian understanding of discourse and power. First it considers how CDA connects discourse with social practice, ideology, hegemony, and social change, and then turns to a Foucauldian account in which power circulates through discourse and becomes productive of objects, subjects, and practices. The approaches overlap in their concern with how discourse becomes socially consequential, while differing in

how they conceptualise the relationship between discourse, power, and other dimensions of social practice. The section then uses critical debates on resilience to illustrate how such effects may shape understandings of vulnerability, redistribute responsibility, produce subject positions, and legitimate particular forms of intervention.

4.1 The productive effects of discourse

In Fairclough's CDA, discourse is understood as a form of social practice that is dialectically related to other dimensions of social life. Language use is shaped by social structures and by institutionally established orders of discourse, but it also contributes to reproducing or transforming them. This relationship provides an important basis for understanding why the analysis of language can tell us something about social continuity and change (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 14–90). Power enters this relationship through struggles over which representations and discursive practices become established within an order of discourse. Particular ways of representing social reality may become naturalised and acquire the status of common sense, while alternatives become marginalised or less readily available. For Fairclough, ideology is important precisely because representations can contribute to sustaining relations of power while appearing normal or self-evident. Hegemony refers to the more contingent securing of consent around such arrangements and therefore also leaves room for contestation and change (Fairclough, 2001, 2010).

A Foucauldian approach places the productive character of power even more directly at the centre of analysis. It is worth noting that in discourse analysis and CDA, the common word “productive" does not (necessarily) imply a positive outcome, but rather power’s capacity to actively generate knowledge, subjects, and social realities. Hardy and Thomas (2014), studying strategy discourse in an organisation, conceptualise power as circulating through discourse rather than as a resource simply possessed and exercised by particular actors. Discourses produce objects, subjects and possibilities for action, but their effects are neither automatic nor deterministic. In their case, the power effects of one strategy discourse intensified through interconnected discursive and material practices, producing both a recognisable strategy object and the subject position of the “cost-conscious employee”. Another discourse failed to acquire comparable effects. Power was therefore productive, but also dependent on practices through which discourse became normalised, diffused and resisted.

This Foucauldian account places stronger emphasis on power circulating through discourse and material practice than on the detailed linguistic analysis characteristic of CDA. The distinction is nevertheless one of emphasis and theoretical position rather than entirely separate research concerns. Vaara (2015), discussing the same field of organisational strategy research but from a CDA perspective, explicitly acknowledges both the epistemological differences and the connections between these traditions. For CDA, discourse is likewise socially constitutive but remains one dimension of social practice whose effects should be examined through the relationship between textual features, discursive practices and wider institutional and material contexts. Vaara therefore places particular emphasis on close textual analysis as the empirical basis for claims concerning subjectivity, legitimation, ideology and power.

The critical orientation of CDA becomes especially visible when these ideas are operationalised empirically. The immediate material may be small—a leaflet, a speech, a policy document or a set of news articles—but the analytical interest often concerns wider social processes and relations of power. CDA may examine how competing discourses represent events, actors and policy programmes; how some representations gain prominence or become marginalised within an order of discourse; and how particular discourses become operationalised in strategies, identities, institutional practices or material arrangements. The task is not to infer large-scale social effects from individual textual features, but to investigate how textual and discursive patterns participate in broader processes of social reproduction and change (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 11–21).

As one of the main developers of CDA, Van Dijk (2015) tasks the approach with bridging the micro- and macro-levels of the social order, occasionally via a mediating meso-level. For him, the micro-level encompasses agency and interactional relations, while the macro-level comprises the structural, institutional, and organisational elements of society. Bridging these levels requires studying dynamics such as member–group relations, action–process interactions, situational contexts versus social structures, and personal versus social cognition. In essence, this framework aligns with the broader social constructivist tradition and its classic structure–agency debate in sociology. Within CDA, the concept of power serves as the central nexus that renders the analysis "critical". Consequently, the approach reveals how powerful groups control both the text and context of public discourse. It investigates how such dominant discourse shapes the minds and actions of less powerful groups, as well as the resulting social consequences, such as inequality. Finally, it examines the specific properties of the discourse produced by powerful institutions and how these properties constitute forms of power abuse.

4.2 Illustration: How resilience redistributes responsibility and power

The concept of resilience provides a useful illustration of these productive effects. Several overlapping resilience discourses may coexist and compete within a broader order of discourse, each constructing, in somewhat different ways, the problems to which resilience responds and the appropriate distribution of responsibility. In this sense, resilience discourse can be productive of a particular kind of world: one characterised by complexity, permanent uncertainty, and crises that cannot be fully predicted or prevented and with which societies must therefore learn to live.

A significant strand of critical scholarship has examined these implications, sometimes developing what might be called an "against resilience" position. Walker and Cooper (2011) trace the movement of resilience from systems ecology into fields such as finance, development, urban planning, and homeland security. They argue that its contemporary prominence reflects an elective affinity with Hayekian and neoliberal ideas about the limits of central knowledge, prediction, and control. Brassett, Croft, and Vaughan-Williams (2013) similarly draw attention to how resilience discourse encourages businesses, communities, and individuals to calculate and manage their own risks, often without corresponding guarantees of protection from the state. In this discourse, government does not necessarily disappear, but its role is reconfigured: from preventing insecurity and guaranteeing collective protection towards enabling adaptation, coordinating networks, and cultivating self-reliant subjects. Vulnerability may then be represented primarily as a deficit of local adaptive capacity rather than being an outcome of such politically contestable issues as unequal resources, weakened welfare provision, or political and economic decisions.

Resilience discourse thus produces recognisable subject positions, such as the adaptable citizen, the responsible community, the innovative business, and the vulnerable or insufficiently resilient population. It can also make public–private partnerships and technocratic interventions appear appropriate while potentially obscuring structural causes of risk and alternatives based on public provision, redistribution, or collective political claims. Where such an articulation becomes naturalised, resilience may thus operate as a common-sense governing rationale through which particular distributions of responsibility appear reasonable while alternatives become less visible.

Tierney's (2015) analysis of post-Katrina New Orleans, following the 2005 catastrophic storm, provides a more empirical illustration. Specifically, it shows how such representations can connect to institutional arrangements and recovery practices when resilience is articulated through neoliberal forms of governance. Tierney does not reject resilience as such, but she examines critically the political projects and institutional arrangements with which it may become associated. In post-Katrina New Orleans, recovery was organised extensively through private contractors, public–private partnerships, charities, and market mechanisms. Survivors were treated less as citizens entitled to protection and assistance than as clients or entrepreneurial consumers required to document their eligibility, navigate complex programmes, assume debt, and

demonstrate their capacity to adapt. At the same time, technocratic and infrastructure-centred approaches acquired greater authority than questions concerning housing rights, compensation, employment, community continuity, and unequal vulnerability. In this case, resilience discourse helped legitimise both the state's retreat from direct provision and profitable forms of private intervention, while those unable to recover risked being constructed as insufficiently adaptable.

These interpretations are themselves articulations within a broader academic and political struggle over resilience. Other accounts construct resilience's origins, meanings, and political effects differently. The question therefore becomes how competing interpretations draw on, challenge, and transform one another. This leads to the concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity.

5. How are texts and discourses connected?

Discourses are produced and transformed through relations among texts and between different ways of representing the world. Individual texts rarely stand alone: they quote, paraphrase, presuppose, contest, or otherwise draw on earlier texts, while also combining elements from different discourses. CDA provides particularly developed concepts for examining these relations through *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity*. These concepts direct attention not only to what a text says, but also to the textual and discursive resources through which particular meanings are reproduced, modified, or challenged.

This section introduces first intertextuality and interdiscursivity primarily through Fairclough's CDA and then applies them to scientific discourse itself. The second subsection examines a debate within critical and poststructuralist resilience scholarship in which authors explicitly engage with, reinterpret, and contest earlier accounts of resilience. These studies are therefore used in two ways: as texts that demonstrate intertextual and interdiscursive relations, and as substantive contributions to the continuing debate over what resilience means and how it should be understood politically.

5.1 Intertextuality and interdiscursivity

Intertextuality refers to the presence of other texts within a text (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 40-61). Some of these relations are explicit, as in an academic citation or a direct quotation from a policy document. Others are implicit: a text may reproduce a familiar formulation or assumption without identifying its source. Texts can therefore be understood as points within intertextual chains through which statements and representations move from one text and social context to another. For example, an academic concept may be incorporated into an international policy report, translated into national guidance, repeated in professional training, and subsequently reproduced in organisational routines. At each stage, its meaning may be retained, selectively appropriated, or transformed. In this sense, intertextuality brings other texts or voices into dialogue with the text, rather than silencing them or reducing difference by assuming common ground.

Intertextuality can also be used to frame the other voice. Intertextuality is inevitably selective with respect to what is included and what is excluded. Here the concept of framing is used in text analysis, spoken or written. Framing is a well-known phenomenon in mainstream crisis research (e.g., Boin et al., 2009); a crisis can be framed differently intentionally or unintentionally, or a crisis can be framed into a non-crisis, or a non-crisis can be framed into a crisis for political purposes, for instance. Discourse analysis as a theory and method may then engage in closer intertextuality research by looking at how an alternative voice is framed, or recontextualised, for the purpose, for instance, to change the original meaning of an alternative voice and enhance the hegemony of one representation of social reality.

Interdiscursivity, in turn, concerns how different discourses, or different genres and styles, are articulated together within a text or communicative event (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 65-86, 218). A resilience strategy

might, for example, combine the discourse of national security with discourses of community participation, market efficiency, psychological well-being, environmental sustainability, and individual responsibility. Such combinations can reproduce an established order of discourse, but they may also destabilise existing boundaries and contribute to discursive change. Interdiscursivity is therefore particularly important for investigating how concepts move between fields and acquire new meanings. *Recontextualisation* occurs through mediation, or the movement and transformation of meaning, and may also be ideological insofar as it redefines meaning in a new context (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 28, 79).

The concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity are closely related but should not be treated as synonymous. Intertextual analysis asks how a text draws on identifiable earlier texts and utterances. Interdiscursive analysis asks how it combines broader discourses, genres, and styles. Interdiscursivity has been called constitutive intertextuality, because texts draw not only on particular prior texts but also on socially available conventions for representing, acting, and identifying. Together, intertextuality and interdiscursivity help researchers examine whether discursive practices reproduce relatively stable arrangements or contribute to social and discursive change (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 73–74, 139–140).

5.2 Illustration: Resilience as an intertextual and interdiscursive debate

The academic resilience debate provides a relatively accessible illustration of intertextuality. Academic texts explicitly cite, reinterpret, criticise, and build upon one another, making many intertextual relationships comparatively easy to identify. Referring to the interpretation of resilience as a part of the neoliberal ideology, discussed in Section 4.2 above, Chandler (2014), for example, intervenes in the very same critical debate on resilience, but he modifies its explanatory framework. Chandler argues that resilience should not be understood only in terms of neoliberal responsibilisation. At a deeper level, resilience thinking transforms how governance itself is imagined. If social life is represented as an emergent complex system whose causal relations cannot be fully known in advance, government is no longer imagined as an external actor capable of identifying causes comprehensively and deliberately producing predictable solutions. Governance instead becomes iterative, adaptive, and self-reflexive: it responds to disturbances and policy failures as they emerge and works through capacities already present in society.

In Chandler's account, resilience discourse therefore does more than transfer duties from the state to citizens. It rearticulates the meaning and possibilities of governance under conditions of complexity. This may recast politically produced insecurity as an unavoidable consequence of complex social life, shifting attention away from questions about who should prevent harm and provide resources, and towards how individuals and societies can adapt continuously to disruption. Chandler does not deny the possible neoliberal effects identified by other critical scholars, but he argues that neoliberal responsibilisation is an insufficient explanation of resilience thinking. Instead, he situates it within a broader transformation in how knowledge, causality, and governability are understood.

Bourbeau (2018) makes a different intervention in the same debate by directly challenging the genealogy offered by Walker and Cooper (2011). He argues that their account constructs an overly linear and deterministic narrative in which resilience originates in 1970s systems ecology, enters world politics, and culminates almost inevitably in neoliberal governance. His alternative genealogy represents resilience not as a concept with a single origin and fixed political logic but as a historically dispersed and contested field of meanings shaped through several disciplinary pathways, including engineering, psychology, social work, criminology, and ecology. These traditions articulate resilience variously as material robustness, individual recovery, institutional persistence, social adaptation, collective resistance, and transformative renewal.

From a discourse-analytical perspective, Bourbeau (2018) therefore questions the construction of the ecology-to-neoliberalism narrative itself. By treating one prominent articulation of resilience as the

meaning of the concept, critical scholarship, such as Walker and Cooper (2011), risks reproducing the apparent coherence and inevitability poststructuralist discourse analysis seeks to expose. According to Bourbeau, resilience may indeed be articulated with neoliberal discourse in ways that responsibilise individuals and communities, but this is a contingent political articulation rather than its necessary meaning or outcome. In other contexts, resilience may be articulated relationally and collectively—as access to social resources, resistance to domination, the preservation of welfare institutions, or the transformation of existing arrangements. Bourbeau thus shifts the analytical question from what resilience inherently is or does towards how particular actors define, appropriate, and institutionalise it in specific contexts, which subject positions and practices these articulations enable, and whether they reproduce, modify, or transform prevailing relations of power.

Read together, these contributions illustrate both intertextuality and interdiscursivity. They are intertextual because Chandler and Bourbeau explicitly engage with, reinterpret, and challenge earlier texts in the resilience debate. They are interdiscursive because they articulate resilience with different bodies of knowledge and political vocabularies: neoliberal governmentality, complexity theory, systems ecology, psychology, social work, collective resistance, and institutional transformation. The question for discourse analysis is therefore not merely which definition is correct. The issue is also how these competing articulations circulate, which acquire authority in particular arenas, and what forms of knowledge, subjectivity, and action they make possible.

6. How can genealogy historicise the present?

The concept of genealogy was introduced above but its meaning in discourse analysis was not yet clarified. The previous section examined how texts and discourses are connected through intertextuality and interdiscursivity, which is mainly CDA's approach to look at transformations in discourses. This section deepens that analysis historically by introducing the more poststructuralist concept of *genealogy* as a way of tracing how meanings, practices, and relations of power are formed and transformed over time. Associated primarily with Foucault and other poststructuralist approaches, genealogy does not seek a single origin or linear development. Instead, it examines discontinuities, competing lineages, exclusions, and the contingent processes through which present understandings come to appear coherent or self-evident.

The section first presents genealogy as a historically oriented mode of discourse inquiry and then considers how it can be brought into dialogue with CDA to support more explicit empirical research. It subsequently returns to the resilience debate, comparing competing genealogical accounts of the concept and asking what they reveal about its multiple origins, changing meanings, and political implications.

6.1 Genealogy as a history of the present

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972, pp. 21–30) seeks to move away from traditional historical analysis and its "theme of continuity". This theme relies on notions such as tradition, development, evolution, and spirit as connections between times and people. The result of traditional history writing is, according to Foucault, mostly ready-made syntheses, groupings, and teleologies whose validity is recognised from the outset. Instead, he introduces the concepts of discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, series, and transformation, which are to be studied through discourses. Discursive history should be analysed as a genealogy.

For Foucault (1977), who developed this approach through a critical engagement with Nietzsche, genealogy does not seek to discover the single, authentic origin of an idea, practice, or institution. On the contrary, it questions the assumption that present arrangements have a pure origin, a continuous linear history, or a necessary endpoint. It resists histories organised as a smooth progression from origin to present and focuses instead on how meanings and practices have been assembled, disrupted, redirected, and transformed. It

reconstructs the heterogeneous conditions, events, struggles, appropriations, and accidents—the “long baking process of history”—through which particular objects of knowledge and forms of practice became possible. Genealogy can therefore be understood as a “history of the present”: it begins with something that now appears normal, natural, necessary, or self-evident, and investigates how it came to be understood and governed in this particular way.

Such an inquiry may show that present institutions and practices did not emerge through a smooth process of rational improvement. They may instead have developed through contingent decisions, competing forms of knowledge, institutional struggles, unsuccessful experiments, and the exclusion of alternative possibilities. It has been argued that genealogy provides “a functional microanalysis of power relations, operating on the smallest and most insignificant details” not easily captured by the historian's eye (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 205). Genealogy does not, however, demonstrate that everything is accidental or that rational argument plays no role in historical change. It challenges retrospective accounts that present current arrangements as the natural or inevitable outcome of history.

Hook (2001, 2005) presents Foucauldian genealogy primarily as a mode or ethos of critique rather than as a strictly codified research method. Its purpose is to make familiar arrangements appear historically contingent and therefore open to questioning. Genealogical research is comparable to historical detective work only in a limited sense: the researcher examines documentary traces and reconstructs connections that are no longer immediately visible. Unlike a conventional detective or historian, however, the genealogist does not seek one hidden truth, original cause, or responsible author. The task is instead to examine the multiple conditions and relations of power through which a present object, practice, or regime of truth was formed. This investigation requires meticulous attention to heterogeneous historical materials, including details that conventional histories may treat as mundane or insignificant. These details are not collected randomly. They are examined because they may reveal discontinuities, struggles, practical techniques, and excluded possibilities obscured by more coherent accounts of historical development.

Two important concepts in this approach are *descent* and *emergence* (Hook, 2001, 2005; see also Tamboukou, 1999, pp. 208–210). Descent traces the heterogeneous lineages through which an apparently unified object has been assembled. It asks how different concepts, practices, institutions, classifications, and material arrangements have intersected to produce something that now appears coherent. It does not aim at confirming the identity of the object across time. Instead, descent may show that what is called by the same name has performed different functions and carried different meanings in different historical contexts.

Emergence, in turn, concerns the particular field of forces and struggles within which an object, practice, or subject position becomes possible and acquires authority. It directs attention to contests over classification, knowledge, institutional competence, and acceptable conduct. These contests need not be understood as a consciously designed struggle between two clearly identifiable groups. They are rather the entry of forces, an accidental moment, an episode, and not the ultimate point of a historical evolution. Genealogy examines how strategies, institutional practices, and relations of power interact—often without any single actor directing the overall process—to establish particular ways of speaking, knowing, and acting.

Genealogy can also reactivate perspectives and forms of knowledge that dominant historical accounts have marginalised, disqualified, or forgotten. This does not mean treating excluded voices as expressions of an unmediated or more authentic truth. These accounts may be used critically to disrupt the apparent unity of dominant narratives and to show that alternative interpretations and practices have existed. Genealogy thus exposes the contingency and fragility of what currently counts as normal, reasonable, or true without claiming to replace it with a final and universally valid account.

Hook (2001, 2005) further argues that genealogy can address several limitations of discourse analysis, particularly approaches that concentrate closely on texts. He notes that these textual approaches often pay insufficient attention to history, materiality, institutional practice, and the conditions under which particular statements become accepted as knowledge. Genealogy broadens the analysis from what texts mean. Its point is to show the historical conditions that allow certain statements to be made, circulated, institutionalised, and acted upon. It also investigates the relationship between discursive and non-discursive practices: for example, how classifications expressed in documents become connected to administrative procedures, organisational structures, professional authority, technologies, spatial arrangements, and interventions into people's conduct.

6.2 From critical orientation to methodological practice

On one influential reading, Foucauldian genealogy does not constitute a clearly codified method governed by fixed procedural principles. Instead, it develops what Tamboukou (1999, p. 215) calls a "methodological rhythm of [its] own", structured around several guiding questions: What is happening now? What characterises our present? How have we become what we are? What possibilities are there for becoming otherwise? These questions orient genealogical inquiry towards the historical contingencies through which the present and its subjects have been constituted, while opening previously unexplored, or even unthought, fields of investigation. Genealogy therefore offers neither methodological guarantees nor a readily reproducible procedure but rather resists reduction to a stable methodological formula.

This understanding places genealogy closer to a poststructuralist ethos of inquiry than to a standardised research method. Yet the absence of a fixed procedure raises practical questions about how genealogical research is to be designed and conducted, particularly when it centres on historical documents. Anaïs (2013) addresses this problem by bringing genealogy into conversation with CDA. She defines genealogy as: "a methodological process concerned with telling the story of how a set of discursive and non-discursive practices come into being and interact to form a set of political, economic, moral, cultural, and social institutions which define the limits of acceptable speaking, knowing, and acting" (p. 125).

Genealogy therefore examines more than historical changes in language. Anaïs's proposal occupies a middle ground between genealogy's poststructuralist orientation and CDA's more explicit analytical procedures. Genealogy provides historical depth and foregrounds the reciprocal constitution of discursive and non-discursive practices, while CDA offers practical tools for collecting, organising, and analysing textual material. These tools must, however, remain consistent with genealogy's concern with contingency, discontinuity, and power–knowledge. Their purpose is not to uncover a text's final or 'true' meaning, but to examine how meanings, categories, and truths are produced and authorised.

Anaïs does not translate this orientation into a rigid sequence of steps but identifies three practical conventions for genealogically informed textual research (2013, pp. 129–133). First, the researcher assembles a 'living archive': an open and revisable body of heterogeneous material organised around a historical problem or moment of transformation. It may include legislation, institutional records, scientific publications, media coverage, correspondence, testimony, and images. Although neither complete nor fixed, its boundaries and selection criteria must be transparent and defensible. Second, texts are treated as material and institutional artefacts rather than simply as containers of language. Attention is therefore paid to their genre, format, authorship, circulation, and role in enabling institutional decisions and practices. Third, researchers read both along and against the text. Reading along reconstructs its explicit argument, categories, distinctions, and rhetorical organisation; reading against it identifies silences, exclusions, presuppositions, and alternatives rendered marginal or unintelligible. Reading against the text does not claim to recover the authentic voices or experiences of excluded actors. It reveals the historical rules and power relations through which some accounts become authoritative while others are silenced or

disqualified. Together, these conventions support an analysis of how objects of knowledge emerge through discontinuities, struggles, and interactions between discourse and institutional practice.

Anaïs's model should therefore not be understood as a fixed genealogical method. Instead, it uses CDA to give genealogical inquiry greater procedural transparency, while genealogy prevents CDA from reducing discourse to linguistic form or treating history as mere background. The result is a more methodologically explicit form of historically oriented, Foucauldian discourse analysis that uses history to unsettle the apparent naturalness and necessity of the present.

6.3 Illustration: Competing genealogies of resilience

Applied to resilience, genealogy would not be constrained to ask when and where the term appeared, but how different meanings of resilience were assembled across fields such as engineering, psychology, ecology, sociology, security, and public administration. How did some of these meanings acquire greater authority than others? Through which texts, institutions and practices did they enter governance? And what forms of responsibility, expertise and intervention did they subsequently make possible?

Returning to the frameworks established by Walker and Cooper (2011) and Bourbeau (2018), discussed in Sections 4.2 and 5.2 above, both authors explicitly characterise their respective studies as genealogies, but neither follows in every respect such extensive social-practice-oriented methodologies as outlined, for instance, by Hook (2005) or Anaïs (2013). They are more accurately described as genealogically informed conceptual histories. Both historicise a concept that has become prominent in contemporary governance, select texts and episodes that challenge its apparent self-evidence, and examine the political implications of how it is understood. Neither, however, constructs a systematically delimited archive through which the production, circulation, institutionalisation, and practical effects of resilience discourse are traced in detail.

Walker and Cooper's 2011 study is, however, closer to the critical purpose of Foucauldian genealogy. It makes the contemporary demand for resilience appear historically contingent and connects resilience thinking to changing forms of knowledge and governance. Drawing on work in systems ecology, neoliberal political thought, finance, development, and homeland security, the authors argue that concepts such as complexity, uncertainty, adaptation, and limited predictability have become linked to a governmental rationality. This understanding treats crises as inevitable and emphasises adaptation rather than prevention. Their discussion includes policy documents and institutional examples, so it is not detached entirely from social practice. Nevertheless, these materials mainly illustrate a conceptual argument. The article does not explain systematically how its sources were selected, undertake detailed textual analysis, or trace the implementation and reception of resilience policies through administrative practices and affected populations.

The argument of Walker and Cooper (2011) also conflicts in some respects with genealogy's suspicion of singular origins and linear development. Despite referring to "genealogies" in the title, Walker and Cooper present Holling's systems ecology as the principal origin of contemporary resilience and construct a relatively direct trajectory towards neoliberal crisis governance. The connection they draw between Holling and Hayek, the latter as a visible representative of neoliberal thinking in political economics, is based primarily on conceptual affinity rather than documented influence. Holling did not cite Hayek, and he probably did not consider Hayek in this context at all. The authors, however, argue that such systems-ecological projects later coalesced around similar assumptions concerning complexity, prediction, and adaptation. The article is therefore most convincing when read as a genealogy of one influential complexity-based articulation of resilience, not as the genealogy of resilience as such.

Bourbeau's counter-genealogy is more consistent with genealogy's emphasis on plural origins, discontinuity, and contested meanings. He demonstrates that resilience had significant histories in

engineering, psychology, social work, criminology, and other fields before and alongside its development in systems ecology. His bibliographic evidence directly challenges the claim that resilience was invented by theoretical ecologists in the 1970s. He also reactivates meanings marginalised by the dominant critical narrative, including resilience as collective capacity, resistance, institutional persistence, and transformative renewal. In doing so, he shows how Walker and Cooper's (2011) critical research can itself construct a selective history by foregrounding evidence that supports the neoliberalism thesis and excluding evidence that does not.

Bourbeau's study, however, is also more a multidisciplinary history of concepts than a fully developed Foucauldian genealogy of practices. It identifies several disciplinary branches but does not always demonstrate how concepts traversed between them or became embedded in specific institutions, technologies, and routines. Nor does it analyse an explicitly delimited corpus through the close textual procedures associated with CDA. Bourbeau opens resilience to contextual empirical analysis, but he does not himself provide a comprehensive social-practice analysis of each expression he identifies.

These limitations do not make either study invalid. Genealogy is an orientation towards historical critique rather than a standardised method with obligatory procedural steps. The articles demonstrate that meaningful genealogical arguments can be developed through theoretically informed selection and comparison of texts and historical episodes. They also show, however, that the strength and scope of the conclusions must remain proportional to the evidence. A limited conceptual genealogy can credibly identify a possible trajectory, challenge a dominant origin story, or formulate questions for further research. It cannot by itself establish how a discourse operates across all institutions and contexts or what material effects it invariably produces.

For a bounded research project, this is both reassuring and cautionary. A genealogically informed discourse analysis need not reconstruct the complete history of a concept. It may instead focus on a particular institution, period, policy process, or moment of change. Such a study still requires a transparent selection of material, an explicit analytical procedure, and evidence connecting discursive change to social practice where such a connection is claimed. The aim is not comprehensiveness but a coherent relationship among the research question, archive, analytical concepts, evidence, and conclusions.

7. How to design and conduct a discourse-analytical study?

The preceding sections have introduced theoretical and analytical resources for understanding discourse, contested meaning, discursive effects, relations among texts, and historical change. This section makes a more explicit methodological choice by turning primarily to Fairclough's CDA and his three-dimensional model as a practical framework for connecting text, discursive practice, and wider social practice. The model provides a way of operationalising discourse analysis without reducing it to textual analysis alone: textual features are related to how texts are produced, circulated and interpreted, and these processes in turn to the institutional, historical and political settings in which they occur.

However, the purpose of this section extends beyond presenting the three-dimensional model as a sequence of analytical steps; it also demonstrates how these dimensions translate into a research workflow. This discussion links directly to Section 8, which illustrates how the Faircloughian three-dimensional CDA model can be operationalised for a case study on resilience in Norwegian total preparedness and total defence.

7.1 Three-dimensional model

Fairclough's three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 1989) treats discourse as social practice rather than as text alone. A discourse event can be approached through three interconnected dimensions: text, discursive

practice, and social practice. These correspond broadly to three analytical movements: description, interpretation, and explanation. Although often presented sequentially, the dimensions are nested and dialectically related: social structures shape discourse, while discourse may reproduce or transform those structures. Figure 1 presents an adapted version of the model used in the present discussion (Fairclough, 1989, 2003).

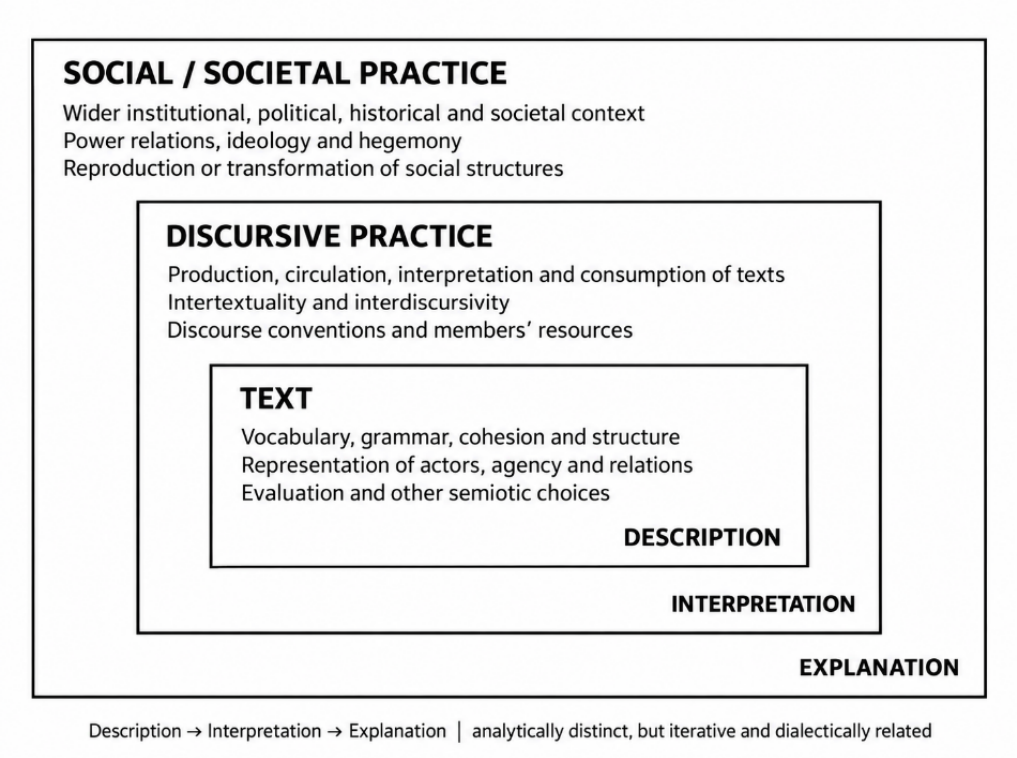


Figure 1 Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis

Description of text concerns the linguistic and organisational features of spoken, written, or multimodal material. Fairclough directs attention to vocabulary, grammar and textual structure, including classification, word choice, metaphor, agency, nominalisation, modality, active and passive constructions, pronouns, evaluation and cohesion. Such features help show how the world is represented, how relationships and identities are constructed, and how speakers or writers position themselves in relation to what they say. Description identifies potentially significant textual choices, but their wider social meaning cannot be established from linguistic form alone.

Interpretation of discursive practice examines the processes through which texts are produced, circulated and understood. Participants interpret textual cues through socially acquired knowledge, assumptions and discourse conventions, which Fairclough calls members' resources. Interpretation therefore concerns both the immediate communicative situation and the text's relationships with other texts and discourses. Concepts such as presupposition, framing and intertextuality become relevant here. Different participants may draw on different resources and may consequently interpret the same text differently; relations of power may also affect which interpretations become authoritative.

Explanation of social practice connects these textual and interpretative processes to broader institutional, historical and societal conditions. The question is how relations of power, ideology and established social practices shape discourse, and how discourse may in turn reproduce or transform them. Fairclough distinguishes between the immediate situational context, the institutional context and wider societal

structures. Claims at this level therefore require more than linguistic evidence alone: they must be supported by appropriate historical, institutional or other contextual material.

Taken together, the three dimensions prevent discourse analysis from being reduced either to linguistic description or to abstract social interpretation. Textual analysis provides evidence of how meanings are realised. Moving beyond the text, analysis of discursive practice examines how those meanings are produced, circulated, and interpreted. Finally, analysis of social practice relates these individual processes to wider structures and relations of power. Although analytically distinguishable, the three dimensions are usually interconnected and approached iteratively in empirical research rather than as a strictly sequential procedure.

7.2 Operationalising the model into a workflow

Later applications of Fairclough's three-dimensional model have made its interconnected character more explicit. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, pp. 61–95), for example, translate Fairclough's broad methodological framework into a more practical research workflow. They connect a socially significant problem and theoretically informed research questions with purposive material selection and analysis, while emphasising movement between the three dimensions rather than a mechanical sequence. Particularly important is the relationship between a communicative event and its order of discourse: which existing texts, genres and discourses are drawn upon, how they are combined, and whether these combinations reproduce or change established discursive arrangements. Claims concerning social practice require appropriate historical, institutional or other contextual evidence rather than being inferred from textual features alone.

Janks (1997) provides an even more practical set of working heuristics. She likewise treats the dimensions as nested and simultaneous, allowing the analyst to enter through any one of them and move repeatedly between them. Her distinction between reading with a text (reconstructing its preferred reading) and reading against it (questioning its assumptions, positioning and exclusions) is similar to that of Anaïs (2013) already introduced in Section 6.2. Analysis may begin with a single text, examine its verbal and visual organisation, identify possible discursive patterns, and then pursue these through related texts and contextual material. Linguistic features such as lexicalisation, agency, active and passive voice, nominalisation, modality, thematic structure and cohesion provide analytical cues rather than a mechanical checklist.

Two broad entry points to such a study are therefore possible. A problem-led study begins from a socially significant issue that guides the research questions and the selection of material. A text-led study may begin from an initially relevant or puzzling text whose close analysis helps generate or refine the research problem. The latter is not purely inductive, since the selection of a text already reflects prior interests and assumptions. Both approaches can therefore be understood as iterative and partly abductive, moving between textual patterns, related texts, theoretical concepts and their production, reception and sociohistorical contexts.

The scale of such a study can vary considerably. It may concentrate on one speech or document, compare several texts, or trace a discourse across institutions and over time. Within Fairclough's framework, however, the analysis ultimately needs to reconnect text, discursive practice and social practice. The central caution is not to treat the three dimensions merely as headings for linguistic description, paraphrase and general background commentary. Claims about textual positioning can be supported by close analysis, but claims about intentions, audience effects, institutional pressures or wider social consequences require additional evidence. Section 8 illustrates how these principles are integrated into a concrete research design.

8. Illustrative case: Resilience in Norwegian total defence

Resilience, the recurring example throughout this paper, serves as the focus of the following practical illustration. Specifically, this case examines the meaning and role of resilience within contemporary Norwegian total preparedness and total defence policy. Applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model and the methodological principles from Section 7, the study demonstrates how these elements are brought together within a coherent research design. To achieve this, the section mirrors the conventional structure of an empirical report: proceeding from the initial research problem and questions, through the theoretical and methodological frameworks, to the execution of the empirical analysis and its subsequent discussion.

8.1 Introduction

In CDA, the research problem normally connects language and other meaning-making practices to a socially significant problem. The researcher does not start from *tabula rasa*, but with some preliminary knowledge of the field and material. In the present case, an initial examination of Norwegian total preparedness and total defence shows that resilience is generally presented as a desirable capacity. At the same time, its increasing prominence may influence how security, preparedness and responsibility are understood. It may, for example, place greater emphasis on adaptation, continuity and self-preparedness, or construct particular roles for the Armed Forces, civil authorities, municipalities, businesses, communities and individual citizens.

The critical question concerns the political and social character of resilience itself: whether, and under what conditions, it operates as a desirable, problematic or politically ambivalent governing idea. The literature discussed in Sections 3–6 outlines competing expectations associated with resilience. This is especially relevant in the context of total defence, which connects military security with a wide range of civilian institutions, organisations and societal functions. How resilience is articulated may therefore relate to broader questions about civil–military relations, state–society relations, and the distribution of duties, capacities and resources.

Against this background, the overarching research problem can be formulated as follows:

> **RP.** *How is resilience constructed, recontextualised and negotiated within contemporary Norwegian total preparedness and total defence, and what relations of responsibility and power does this discourse support?*

Such a research problem remains rather broad and can therefore be divided into more operational research questions. In practice, this operationalisation would normally follow some preliminary reading of the field and potential empirical material. The research questions could then be formulated as follows:

> **RQ1.** *How do NATO and Norwegian total-defence texts represent resilience, threats, preparedness and the actors responsible for security?* (Close analysis of texts)

> **RQ2.** *How is resilience discourse recontextualised and transformed as it moves from NATO-level frameworks and guidance through national policy processes to regional and municipal guidance?* (Intertextuality and interdiscursivity)

> **RQ3.** *What social order of security and preparedness is constructed through official Norwegian resilience discourse? How does resilience discourse allocate responsibilities and construct roles for the state, municipalities, Armed Forces, businesses, civil society and citizens, and what implications may these constructions have for Norwegian civil–military and state–society relations?* (Relationship between discourse and social practice)

The three research questions are organised here broadly across Fairclough's three dimensions. This provides a clear structure for the illustrative analysis, although other ways of organising the questions would also be possible.

8.2 Theoretical framework

Much of the theoretical groundwork for the illustrative study has already been developed in the preceding sections. For present purposes, the theoretical framework needs only to indicate which concepts are carried into the empirical analysis and how they relate to the research questions.

First, Fairclough's understanding of discourse as both constitutive of and constituted by social practice provides the broader theoretical logic of the study. The analysis can examine how resilience is represented in particular texts, how these representations construct actors, responsibilities and legitimate forms of action, and how they relate to wider institutional and political practices.

Second, intertextuality, interdiscursivity and recontextualisation provide concepts for tracing how representations of resilience move between institutional arenas. This allows the analysis to examine how NATO formulations have been cited, translated or selectively incorporated into Norwegian government policy and subsequently transformed into guidance for municipalities, organisations or citizens. The analytical interest therefore concerns how meanings may change as resilience moves between these settings and becomes connected to other discourses.

Third, concepts such as order of discourse, hegemony and subject positions support analysis of whether resilience is becoming an established way of understanding preparedness and total defence, which alternative representations remain visible, and how different actors are positioned within this discourse. Order of discourse is relevant here to express how resilience connects and organises different official discourses of national security, civil preparedness, administrative coordination and societal responsibility. In the present case, this is particularly relevant to the distribution of responsibility among the state, the Armed Forces, municipalities, businesses, civil society and individual citizens.

The critical resilience literature discussed earlier can provide sensitising expectations rather than predetermined conclusions. Walker and Cooper (2011), Chandler (2014) and Bourbeau (2018), for example, offer different interpretations of the political implications of resilience. The analysis can therefore examine whether the Norwegian material supports, qualifies or challenges such interpretations. Together, these concepts provide the theoretical basis for the three research questions formulated in Section 8.1.

8.3 Methodology

Methodology explains how the research problem and research questions are investigated in practice by connecting the research design, methodological approach, analytical methods, empirical material, and considerations of research quality and ethics. In the present illustration, Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA provides the overarching framework. The methodological task is therefore to show how text, discursive practice and social practice can be examined and connected empirically.

8.3.1 Research design

Research design refers to the overall architecture of the study. It shows how the research problem and research questions are connected to the theoretical framework, methodological approach, empirical

material, analytical procedures, and the kinds of conclusions the study can support. In the present illustrative case, the design is summarised in Figure 2.

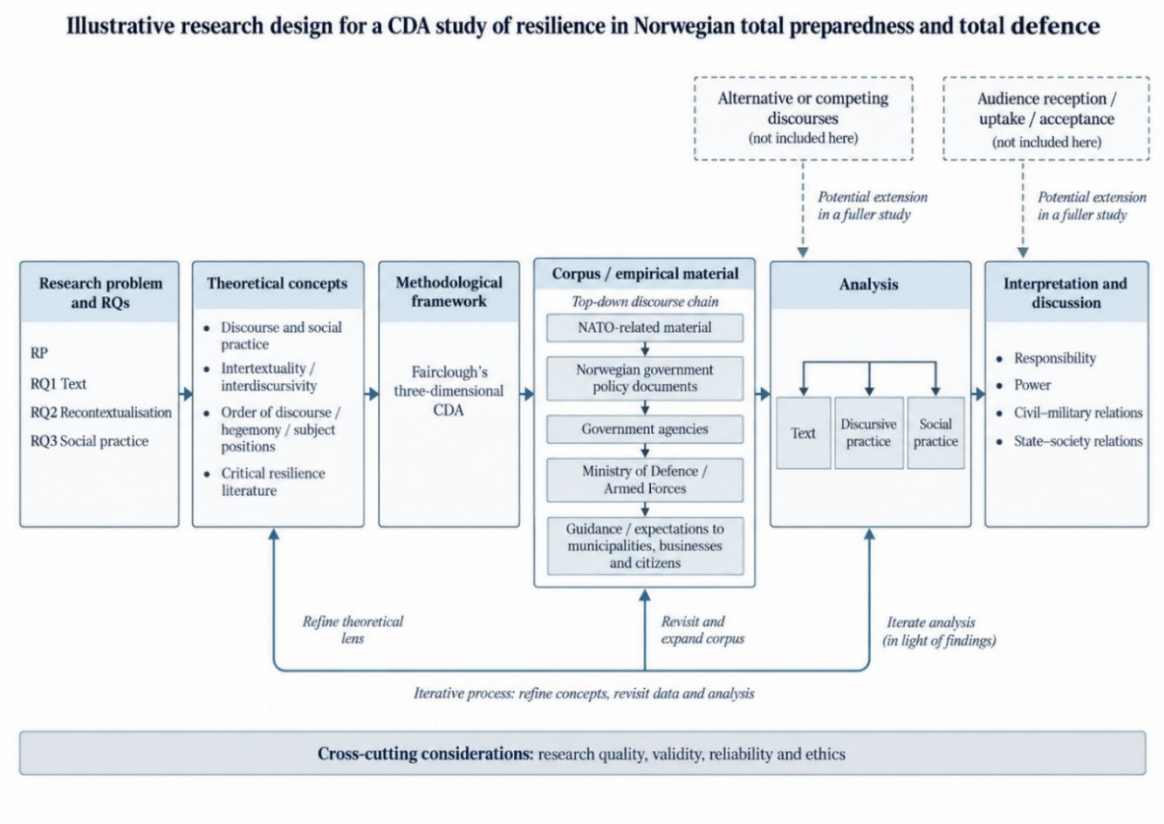


Figure 2 Illustrative research design

The design starts from the research problem and the three research questions. These are connected to the selected theoretical concepts concerning discourse, resilience, intertextuality and interdiscursivity, hegemony, subject positions, and the relationship between discourse and social practice. Fairclough's three-dimensional model provides the overarching methodological structure, while the empirical component specifies the corpus, the analytical procedures, and the forms of contextual evidence required to interpret the findings. The design is iterative rather than strictly linear. Observations from textual analysis may lead to new theoretical reflections, to the inclusion of additional texts, or to a reconsideration of what contextual evidence is needed.

The research design displayed in Figure 2 is broader in scope than the practical illustration provided in this section. The current study is delimited primarily to a top-down policy and guidance chain, moving from NATO-related material through Norwegian government and agency documents to the expectations directed at municipalities, businesses, and citizens. While this focus is ideal for analysing the official recontextualisation of resilience discourse, it intentionally excludes certain dimensions mapped in the visual framework. Specifically, the analysis does not explore the counter-discourses or the audience reception represented by the separate boxes in the upper right-hand corner of Figure 2. In a full-fledged research project, these dimensions would be fully integrated as additional empirical components.

8.3.2 Methodological approach

Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA described in Sections 7.1–7.2 and illustrated in Figure 1 approaches a communicative event simultaneously as text, discursive practice and social practice, corresponding broadly to description, interpretation and explanation. In the illustrative study, *textual analysis* examines how resilience, threats, preparedness and responsible actors are represented. *Analysis of discursive practice* traces how these representations circulate and change across NATO and Norwegian policy and guidance. *Analysis of social practice* relates these patterns to their wider institutional, political and historical context. Table 1 summarises how these dimensions are operationalised in relation to the three research questions.

Table 1 Fairclough's three-dimensional model for the illustrative study

Dimension	Analytical movement	Methodological focus in the illustrative study	Primary RQ connection
Text	**Description**	How are resilience, preparedness, threats, relevant actors and responsibilities represented in the selected texts? Attention is directed to the linguistic and, where relevant, visual choices through which these representations are realised.	Primarily RQ1; also provides evidence relevant to RQ3
Discursive practice	**Interpretation**	How are representations of resilience produced, circulated and recontextualised across institutional settings? How do texts draw on earlier texts and other discourses, and what happens to meanings as they move between NATO, national policy and regional or local guidance?	Primarily RQ2; also relevant to RQ3
Social practice	**Explanation**	How do the identified representations and discursive processes relate to the wider historical, institutional and political context, and how does this context in turn shape the discourse? What do they indicate about the position of resilience within preparedness discourse and about changing constructions of authority, responsibility and actor roles?	Primarily RQ3

Although Fairclough's three dimensions are analytically distinguishable, they are nested and the analysis may move repeatedly between them. The present study takes a problem-led route. Prior knowledge of resilience as a contested concept, the critical debate concerning its political implications, the Norwegian total-preparedness context and NATO's role in this field has informed the research problem, theoretical framework, research questions and initial corpus. Close textual analysis is therefore theory-informed rather than theory-free.

This does not mean that the empirical material is used simply to confirm theoretical expectations. The concepts and literature related to resilience discussed above in Sections 3-6 provide sensitising ideas and possible interpretations rather than predetermined findings. Textual and contextual evidence may support, qualify or challenge these expectations, or reveal different articulations altogether. The analysis is therefore iterative and abductive, moving between textual observations, intertextual relations, theoretical interpretations and broader contextual evidence. The main requirement is that the conclusions remain grounded in what the material can actually demonstrate.

8.3.3 Methods and analytical tools

Methods concern what is actually done with the empirical material. Whereas the methodological framework establishes why text, discursive practice and social practice need to be connected, methods specify the procedures through which this is investigated. The analytical route from empirical material to interpretation should be sufficiently transparent for the reader to understand how the conclusions were reached.

Three analytical steps

Practical guides to CDA vary in how far they formalise this process. Some emphasise repeated close reading, annotation and analytical notes (Dahlborg et al., 2024), while others propose more explicit coding frameworks and systematic documentation of analytical decisions (Morchid, 2025). The appropriate degree of formalisation depends on the research question, corpus and purpose of the study. In the present illustration, the analysis can be organised around three related *analytical tasks* corresponding broadly to Fairclough's three dimensions.

First, *textual analysis examines* how resilience, preparedness, threats, actors and responsibilities are represented in the selected texts. Repeated close reading identifies relevant passages and recurring patterns, while particular linguistic features are examined where they help answer the research questions.

Second, *analysis of discursive practice traces* how texts draw on, reproduce and transform other texts and discourses. In the present case, this includes following resilience formulations and related requirements from NATO-level material into Norwegian national policy and further guidance, asking what is retained, omitted, added or rearticulated as they move between institutional settings.

Third, *analysis of social practice relates* these textual and intertextual patterns to the wider institutional and political context. Contextual evidence can be used to examine whether identified representations reproduce, modify or challenge established understandings of preparedness, responsibility and actor roles. Claims concerning institutional practices, reception or wider effects require corresponding evidence beyond the texts themselves.

Table 2 below presents a selection of such analytical concepts; they provide a repertoire rather than a compulsory checklist.

Empirical material and corpus selection

The empirical material defines the texts and other communicative sources on which the analysis is based. As discussed earlier, discourse-analytical studies may range from close analysis of one or a few texts to broader tracing of discourse across institutions and time. The present illustration adopts a middle ground between these possibilities.

Corpus construction is not merely a technical matter of collecting documents. Selection follows from the research problem, theoretical framework and research questions: the material must make it possible to examine the relevant representations, intertextual relations, discursive processes and connections to social practice. The corpus should therefore be theoretically justified as valid rather than simply comprehensive.

Corpus construction is also iterative. Preliminary reading may reveal important documents, institutional relationships or intertextual chains that were not apparent at the outset. The corpus can therefore be refined or expanded as the study proceeds, provided that the reasons for doing so remain transparent and consistent with the research design.

One possible entry point for the present illustration is the Norwegian government White Paper *Prepared for crises and war: Total preparedness* (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2025). The document immediately presents several intertextual elements. For instance, the document explicitly refers to NATO's seven baseline requirements for national resilience:

> *"NATO Member States have adopted seven baseline requirements for national resilience in critical societal functions: assured continuity of government and critical government services; resilient energy supplies; ability to deal effectively with the uncontrolled movement of people; resilient food and water resources; ability to deal with mass casualties and disruptive health crises; resilient civil communications systems; and resilient transport systems."*

The reference provides a reason to include relevant NATO material in the corpus and raises an intertextual question central to RQ2: how is NATO's resilience vocabulary incorporated into Norwegian total-preparedness discourse, and what happens to its meaning as it moves between institutional settings? A similar relationship appears further down the policy chain. DSB's guidance to municipalities and county authorities (DSB, 2026a), for example, repeatedly articulates resilience in practical and prescriptive terms and also refers to NATO's seven baseline requirements. This suggests a potential intertextual chain from NATO through national policy to regional and municipal guidance.

The initial corpus can therefore be constructed to capture different institutional levels and types of texts through which resilience discourse is produced, circulated and recontextualised. The aim is not to include every document mentioning resilience, but to select material that enables the research questions to be addressed and relationships among NATO-level formulations, national policy, government agencies and guidance directed towards municipalities, organisations and citizens to be traced.

Where material exists in both Norwegian and English, the original-language version should also be consulted when key concepts are analysed. Translation cannot necessarily be treated as semantically neutral, and differences between terms may themselves become relevant to the analysis of recontextualisation.

It is also useful to distinguish the core analytical corpus, whose texts are subjected to systematic textual and discursive-practice analysis, from contextual material used to reconstruct institutional developments and wider social practice. The present illustrative corpus remains primarily documentary and top-down. A fuller study could extend it with interviews, alternative or competing discourses, and material concerning audience reception and rearticulation, but these elements are not pursued systematically here.

The illustrative period begins with the 2023 report of the Total Preparedness Commission, which provided an important expert basis for the subsequent 2025 government White Paper, and extends through Total Defence Year 2026 and its related communication material. Table 3 below outlines a potential core corpus within this period; only selected material is analysed below.

Practical analytical tools

The practical tools used for this work can remain relatively simple. For a corpus of the size presented here, highlighting, analytical notes and a structured coding matrix or spreadsheet may be sufficient. Rows can represent documents or relevant passages, while columns record representations of resilience, actors and agency, responsibility, linguistic features, intertextual references, related discourses and contextual observations. Coding can assist retrieval and comparison, but it remains provisional and interpretive: the frequency of a code does not in itself establish its analytical importance, and coded extracts still need to be read in their textual and institutional contexts.

Table 2 From analytical questions to textual and contextual evidence

Dimension / focus	Analytical concept	Plain-language meaning	Simple illustration
Text: naming and classification	Vocabulary and classification	What words and categories are used to name people, events and problems? Different labels may organise the same phenomenon differently.	Calling a group *protesters*, *activists* or *rioters* already classifies it differently.
Text: emphasis	Foregrounding, backgrounding and omission	What is made prominent, what receives little attention, and what is absent?	A report may emphasise individual preparedness while giving little attention to public infrastructure.
Text: agency and action	Agency and transitivity; active and passive voice	Who is represented as acting, who is affected, and whether the actor is made explicit. *Transitivity* is the linguistic analysis of how actions, events and participants are represented.	*The police closed the road* identifies an actor; *the road was closed* does not.
Text: agency and abstraction	Nominalisation	Turning an action or process into a noun. This can make an event appear more abstract and sometimes remove the actor.	*The municipality relocated residents* becomes *the relocation of residents*.
Text: commitment and obligation	Modality	How strongly a statement expresses certainty, possibility, permission or obligation.	*Must*, *should*, *may*, *probably*, *certainly*.
Text: positioning	Pronouns and forms of address	How language constructs relationships and collective identities.	*We must protect our communities* raises questions about who is included in 'we' and 'our'.
Text: value	Evaluation	How people, actions or situations are explicitly or implicitly judged.	*Responsible citizens*, *an unacceptable delay*, *effective measures*.
Text: taken-for-granted meaning	Presupposition	Something presented as already known or accepted rather than argued for.	*The government will continue improving preparedness* presupposes that such improvement is already taking place.
Text: figurative framing	Metaphor	Understanding one domain through another, which can structure how a problem is imagined.	*Front-line workers* or *the fight against inflation*.
Discursive practice	Intertextuality	How a text quotes, echoes, summarises or otherwise draws on other texts and voices.	A policy document incorporates wording from an earlier international agreement.
Discursive practice	Interdiscursivity and recontextualisation	How different discourses are combined and how meaning may change when formulations move between settings.	A concept developed in military doctrine is adopted in civilian administrative guidance.
Social practice	Contextual and institutional analysis	Relating textual patterns to independently evidenced institutions, practices, historical developments and relations of power.	A change in official terminology is examined together with legislation, organisational reforms or documented shifts in responsibility.

Table 3 Illustrative corpus

Source	Level and type of text	Rationale for inclusion in the corpus	Main RQ(s)
NATO Comprehensive Defence Handbook I & II (NATO, 2020a, 2020b) **NATO Resilience Curriculum (NATO, 2025)**	NATO level; comprehensive-defence guidance and resilience reference curriculum	Provides the supranational resilience vocabulary and the seven baseline requirements against which Norwegian formulations can be compared. Serves as an important reference point. Serves as an important reference point for tracing how resilience is recontextualised in Norwegian policy.	RQ1, RQ2
Totalberedskapskommisjonen (2023)	National level; government-appointed commission report (NOU)	Important agenda-setting text preceding the current total-preparedness policy. Allows examination of how resilience, societal security, preparedness and total defence are problematised and linked before subsequent government policy formulation.	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security (2025)	National level; government White Paper to Parliament	Central authoritative policy text defining contemporary Norwegian total preparedness. Particularly suitable for analysing representations of resilience, threats, preparedness and responsible actors, as well as explicit intertextual links to NATO.	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
Norwegian Ministry of Defence (2024)	The Norwegian long-term defence plan 2025–2036	Allows to consider the Armed Forces' positioning to resilience and total defence.	RQ3
DSB (2026a)	National–local level; guidance for municipalities and county authorities	Especially useful for tracing the movement of resilience discourse from NATO and national policy into prescriptions for regional and municipal practice. Explicitly constructs roles, responsibilities and expected capacities at local level.	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
DSB (2026b)	Organisational level; practical guidance on continuity planning and organisational self-preparedness	Extends resilience and preparedness discourse from public authorities to organisations and businesses. Allows analysis of how responsibility is operationalised through expectations concerning continuity, self-preparedness and organisational capacity.	RQ2, RQ3
DSB (n.d.-a)	Household and individual level advisory brochure for self-preparedness	Extends resilience and preparedness discourse to household and individual level. Allows to see how citizens are connected to total defence efforts.	Q3
DSB (n.d.-b)	Societal/citizen-facing level; *Totalforsvarsåret 2026* website and communication material	Provides a broader public arena in which total defence and preparedness are communicated and promoted. Useful for examining how resilience becomes normalised as "common sense" and how responsibilities are extended to organisations, communities and citizens.	RQ3

Software such as NVivo, ATLAS.ti or MAXQDA can support the organisation of documents, coding, retrieval and comparison across texts. Text searches, frequency queries and visualisations such as word trees or word maps may also provide exploratory orientation and help identify recurring formulations or passages for closer analysis. Their outputs do not in themselves establish meaningful discursive relationships, which still require contextual reading and interpretation. Generative AI may likewise have supporting uses, although its application requires particular attention to transparency, verification and the preservation of contextual meaning.

8.3.4 Validity, reliability, ethics

In an interpretive approach such as discourse analysis, research quality depends less on reproducing identical interpretations than on making the analytical process transparent and the resulting claims well grounded. Validity is particularly important: interpretations should be supported by identifiable textual evidence, considered in relation to relevant institutional and historical contexts, and tested against alternative or contradictory readings. This is especially necessary when moving from observations about wording to broader claims about responsibility, power, hegemony or social practice, which require evidence beyond individual textual features. Reliability therefore concerns the consistency and transparency of corpus selection and analysis, while reflexivity requires acknowledging how theoretical assumptions and analytical choices shape interpretation. Ethical considerations remain relevant even when the material is publicly available: texts and actors should be represented fairly, quotations should not be decontextualised, and the distinction between what the material demonstrates and what constitutes the researcher's interpretation should remain clear.

8.4 Empirical analysis and findings

The illustrative empirical analysis below provides a selective demonstration of how the research questions and methodological framework can be translated into empirical findings. It is organised around the three research questions, which broadly correspond to Fairclough's dimensions of text, discursive practice and social practice. Selected material from the corpus is used to illustrate how the analytical concepts and procedures developed above can be applied in practice; the purpose is therefore illustrative rather than exhaustive.

8.4.1 Research Question 1

RQ1 was formulated as follows: *"How do NATO and Norwegian total-defence texts represent resilience, threats, preparedness and the actors responsible for security?"*

RQ1 provides the main entry point for close *textual analysis*. Preliminary reading showed that the Norwegian government White Paper draws explicitly on NATO's resilience requirements, which provided a reason to include NATO-level material in the analysis. The discussion therefore begins with NATO formulations of resilience before turning to the Norwegian material.

Language also requires some attention because the analysis moves between English-language NATO material and Norwegian policy and guidance. A one-to-one correspondence cannot be assumed between *resilience* and Norwegian terms such as *motstandskraft* and *motstandsdyktighet*. Where this distinction becomes analytically important, the original Norwegian terminology should therefore be considered alongside the official English-language material.

Resilience in NATO comprehensive defence

In the NATO-linked material, resilience is central to comprehensive defence, a framework closely related to the Norwegian total defence concept. The analysis here draws on the *Comprehensive Defence Handbook*, Volumes I and II (NATO, 2020a, 2020b), and the *NATO Resilience Curriculum* (NATO, 2025). The handbooks explicitly describe their recommendations as informative rather than authoritative and are therefore treated here as NATO-linked guidance, not formal NATO doctrine. Volume I constructs resilience as the foundation of comprehensive defence (p. 17):

> *"Resilience is the foundation atop the whole-of-society bedrock. It is defined as 'the will and ability to withstand external pressures and influences and/or recover from the effects of those pressures or influences' in an individual and collective manner. Resilience is built through civil preparedness and is achieved by continually preparing for, mitigating and adapting to potential risks well before a crisis."*

For Faircloughian *description of text*, one possible reading centres on the metaphors of "foundation" and "bedrock", which construct societal resilience as the basis on which comprehensive defence rests. Resilience combines "will" and "ability", linking psychological commitment with practical capacity, while the activities of "preparing", "mitigating" and "adapting" represent it as a continuous process rather than a capacity activated only after disruption. Although the passive formulation "resilience is built" leaves the responsible actor unspecified, the surrounding whole-of-society framework distributes this responsibility across society. Elsewhere, resilience is described as the "first line of defence" and as something that can never be "resilient enough" (pp. 18–19, 34), reinforcing an open-ended expectation of continual preparedness. Civil preparedness is thereby articulated directly with defence and deterrence.

Volume II of the *Handbook* makes the allocation of comprehensive-defence responsibility especially explicit (p. 11):

> *"Figuratively speaking, the responsibility to prevent or respond to threatening events falls to only 2% of society. This means that the majority of the population is contained in the two non-governmental categories, the private and civic sectors, sometimes referred to as 'the 98%.' A key Comprehensive Defence objective is to harness the untapped capacity of 'the 98%' by developing the will of the people to directly contribute to their own safety and security, and their natural right to self-determination."*

One possible textual reading focuses on the numerical opposition between "the 2%" and "the 98%", which simplifies a complex society into governmental and non-governmental security blocs. Although introduced as "figuratively speaking", the percentages give the distinction a quantitative and apparently objective form. The metaphor "harness the untapped capacity" constructs businesses, civic organisations and citizens as a reserve resource to be mobilised, while the emphasis on developing "the will of the people" extends preparedness from practical capacity to attitudes and motivation. References to "their own safety and security" and a "natural right to self-determination" frame this mobilisation as empowerment and self-protection. At the same time, responsibility is redistributed: government retains an enabling and coordinating role, while the "98%" are positioned as active contributors to national security. Whole-of-society resilience can thus be read here as combining empowerment with responsibilisation.

The Resilience Reference Curriculum (NATO, 2025) explains the institutional role of the seven baseline requirements (see Section 8.3.3 under 'Empirical material and corpus selection') as follows (p. 45):

> *"NATO has identified three core functions of civil preparedness: 1) Continuity of government, 2) Continuity of essential services to the population, and 3) Civil support to the military. These critical specifications have been translated into seven baseline requirements for national resilience against which Allies can measure their levels of preparedness. For NATO, resilience is a national responsibility and a collective commitment and a critical enabler for the Alliance's collective deterrence and defence."*

One possible textual reading points to a movement from conceptual plurality to institutional operationalisation. Elsewhere, the curriculum acknowledges that resilience has different meanings and lacks a universally accepted definition. Here, however, the three functions of civil preparedness are "translated" into seven baseline "requirements" against which Allies can "measure" national resilience. These formulations present resilience as something that can be specified, assessed and compared, while "requirements" and "collective commitment" give the framework an obligatory character. The description of resilience as a "critical enabler" further connects civilian preparedness directly to NATO's deterrence and defence. The seven baseline requirements can therefore be read as an institutionally privileged operationalisation of resilience: broader meanings remain possible, but this particular formulation is made especially suitable for national planning, assessment and guidance.

Read together, the NATO texts move from resilience as a broad societal foundation, through the mobilisation of civilian capacity, to a set of operational requirements against which national preparedness can be assessed. Although resilience remains conceptually plural, the framework privileges government continuity, essential services and civil support to military operations. This institutional prioritisation provides the point of departure for examining how NATO resilience discourse is subsequently recontextualised in Norwegian total-preparedness policy and guidance.

Resilience as a national total-defence project

The 2025 government White Paper *Prepared for crises and war: Total preparedness* (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2025) provides the main national-level text for examining how resilience is articulated within contemporary Norwegian total defence. A simple frequency search of the key terms included in RQ1 provides an initial orientation to the document's vocabulary. As Table 4 shows, (total) preparedness, security, (total) defence, total defence and total preparedness are recurrent terms, while responsibility, resilience, and threat(s) also appear prominently. Such frequencies do not in themselves establish how these concepts are understood or related, but they help identify themes for closer textual analysis.

Table 4 Selected baseline concept frequencies in the 2025 government White Paper

Search term or phrase	Frequency
Preparedness	824
inc. total preparedness	180
Security	762
Defence	332
inc. total defence	117
responsib*	207
resilien*	155
threat*	176
(inc. hybrid threat*)	(41)

Document length: 148 pages
Source: Author's frequency search of Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security (2025).

The following extracts illustrate how resilience is connected textually with preparedness, threats and responsibility.

Resilience as a national project built on trust

At the very beginning of the document (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2025, p. 11) one can find two telling quotations:

> "*This community of trust and good, safe and vibrant local communities throughout the country are the most important building blocks of Norwegian civil preparedness.*"
>
> "*The Government is setting out a completely new direction […] to strengthen the resilience of the entire population.*"

One possible textual reading centres on the construction metaphor "building blocks", which presents trust and local communities as the foundations of civil preparedness. The superlative "the most important" gives this relationship an authoritative character. Agency is also asymmetrical: "the Government" actively "sets out" a new direction and seeks to "strengthen" the resilience of "the entire population", which is positioned as the object of that intervention. The formulation collectivises citizens and civil society into a single national security subject and represents resilience as a capacity to be cultivated across society. At the same time, the passage presupposes that trust and strong local communities already characterise Norway, even as they are presented as requiring further strengthening.

Threats and shared responsibility for resilience

The following passages (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2025, p. 12) connect the changing threat environment with expectations of collective preparedness:

> *"These developments and the complexity of the threat landscape require a more vigilant and resilient civil society."*
>
> *"The general public, voluntary organisations, the private sector and local, regional and national authorities must increasingly recognise that security and preparedness are a joint responsibility to which we must all contribute."*

One possible textual reading centres on how the "threat landscape" constructs threats as a surrounding and continuing environment rather than as isolated events. The abstract "developments" and "complexity" are nevertheless given agency: they "require" a more "vigilant and resilient civil society". In the second passage, the high-obligation modality of "must" makes participation necessary rather than optional, while the enumeration of the general public, voluntary organisations, the private sector and authorities distributes responsibility across society. The inclusive "we" and "all" reinforce a sense of common purpose while simultaneously extending security obligations to all these actors. Resilience is thus articulated with shared responsibility: a changing threat environment requires preparedness, and preparedness requires contribution across society.

Resilience as deterrence and defence capability

A third passage (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2025, p. 97) connects societal resilience directly to deterrence and defence capability:

> *"Strengthening society's resilience in peacetime acts as a deterrent and helps to increase preparedness during crisis and armed conflict."*
>
> *"A resilient population provides a better foundation for national security and defence capabilities."*

One possible textual reading focuses on how "strengthening society's resilience" presents resilience-building as an established activity without specifying who strengthens it or by what means. Resilience itself is given an active strategic effect: it "acts as a deterrent", while a "resilient population" becomes the "foundation" for national security and defence capabilities. The sequence "peacetime", "crisis" and "armed conflict" further places resilience across a continuum of security conditions. Declarative formulations such as "acts", "helps" and "provides" present these relationships as established rather than contested. Resilience is thereby constructed not only as the capacity to withstand disruption, but also as a societal resource contributing directly to deterrence and defence.

Taken together, these passages represent resilience as a Norwegian social capacity grounded in trust, a capacity to be strengthened by government, a responsibility distributed across society, and a strategic resource for deterrence and total defence.

The same type of analysis could be extended across the full corpus, comparing recurring patterns as well as differences and contradictions among texts rather than forcing them into a single uniform interpretation.

8.4.2 Research Question 2

RQ2 was formulated as follows: *"How is resilience discourse recontextualised and transformed as it moves from NATO-level frameworks and guidance through national policy processes to regional and municipal guidance?"*

RQ2 focuses primarily on *discursive practice,* particularly how formulations are reproduced, modified or combined as they move between institutional settings. This can be illustrated through the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection's guidance *Roles and Responsibilities of Municipalities and County Councils in Security Policy Crises and War* (DSB, 2026a), which translates national and NATO-related preparedness expectations into guidance directed at regional and municipal authorities.

From NATO-level framework to municipal guidance

The White Paper presents NATO as an important reference point for Norwegian resilience policy, linking national self-help, civil preparedness and collective defence to Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty and NATO's seven baseline requirements. In the DSB guidance (DSB, 2026a, pp. 50–51, translated), this strategic framework is translated further into municipal categories, reporting practices and expectations.

> *"NATO has defined seven baseline functions as fundamental requirements for civil preparedness and societal resilience. These are defined under Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty."*
>
> *"The Armed Forces have developed a reporting template using NATO's seven baseline expectations for civil resilience. This template is recommended for use by preparedness councils."*

For Faircloughian *interpretation of discursive practice*, the passages provide a clear example of manifest intertextuality: NATO and Article 3 are explicitly invoked as the authoritative basis of the framework. Strictly speaking, the intertextual reference simplifies the picture as the seven baseline requirements were much later developed through NATO's resilience work under Article 3 rather than being specified in the

1949 treaty itself. In the DSB guidance, however, they are recontextualised as an administrative framework for municipal preparedness and reporting. Resilience thereby becomes something that can be classified, documented and communicated across administrative levels. NATO strategic discourse is combined with municipal administration, risk management and the technical practices of reporting.

Localised national security

The guidance (DSB, 2026a, pp. 8, 11, 12, translated) also translates national security into municipal responsibilities and vertical coordination:

> *"The state has the primary responsibility for protecting Norway. […] At the same time, the whole of society must contribute when serious crises or threats to the country arise."*
>
> *"The municipality's local leadership and coordination responsibility for preparedness is a local extension of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security's leadership and coordination responsibility for civil preparedness."*
>
> *"Central government guidelines and possible orders may restrict local room for manoeuvre."*

The phrase "a local extension" is particularly revealing. Municipal authority is represented simultaneously as local self-government and as part of a national preparedness system coordinated from the centre. Although the guidance states that it introduces no new duties, it brings existing legislation, policy and preparedness expectations together within a directive framework. Differences between legal obligations, recommendations and expectations remain, but together they shape municipal planning, coordination, continuity management and reporting. The possibility that national orders may restrict local room for manoeuvre also makes visible a tension between municipal autonomy and national security priorities.

Military expectations

Military requirements add another layer to municipal resilience, as expressed in the DSB guidelines (DSB, 2026a, pp. 50, 53, translated):

> *"Civil preparedness and the maintenance of critical societal functions during crisis and armed conflict are essential to the defence of Norway."*
>
> *"It is important that the Armed Forces have insight into and understand the civilian situation so that it can be taken into account in operations and in the planning of new operations."*
>
> *"The counties and municipalities concerned, together with the associated ports and infrastructure, have been informed of the plans for reception in their area and are tasked with supporting this operation."*

Here civil-administrative and military-operational discourses become intertwined. Municipal services, infrastructure and preparedness arrangements are represented not only as means of protecting the population and maintaining essential functions, but also as support for national and allied military operations. Resilience consequently acquires a dual purpose: civilian continuity and military effectiveness. Municipalities remain local democratic and welfare authorities, but they are simultaneously positioned as logistical, informational and infrastructural components of total defence.

Ukraine as a practical model

The DSB guidance also draws lessons from Ukrainian wartime experience (DSB, 2026a, pp. 61–63, translated):

> *"Another key measure has been the establishment of physical meeting places for the population, often referred to as 'resilience points'. These function as local hubs for electricity, heating, water, information and social support, and contribute both to practical survival and the maintenance of social stability."*
>
> *"Effective crisis management at the local level presupposes the ability to maintain critical services, flexible organisation, clear communication, and close cooperation with the surrounding community."*

Ukraine introduces a different form of recontextualisation. Wartime experience is translated into Norwegian municipal preparedness through practices such as physical meeting places, continuity of essential services, communication and community support. The idea of "resilience points" gives the otherwise abstract concept a concrete spatial form: resilience becomes a place where electricity, heating, water, information and social support are maintained. At the same time, the guidance recognises differences between Ukrainian and Norwegian conditions, making this a selective rather than direct transfer. This broadens resilience beyond NATO's functional requirements towards situated local civilian practices involving flexibility, redundancy, communication and community mobilisation.

Taken together, the DSB guidance does more than transmit NATO and national policy downward. It recontextualises resilience by combining NATO authority, national policy, municipal administration, military planning and lessons from Ukraine. In this process, resilience becomes progressively more concrete and operational: an international strategic concept is translated into local responsibilities, reporting practices, continuity arrangements, military-support functions and community-level preparedness.

8.4.3 Research Question 3

RQ3 was formulated as follows: *"What social order of security and preparedness is constructed through official Norwegian resilience discourse? How does resilience discourse allocate responsibilities and construct roles for the state, municipalities, Armed Forces, businesses, civil society and citizens, and what implications may these constructions have for Norwegian civil–military and state–society relations?"*

RQ3 shifts the analysis towards *social practice* and the relationships among the actors positioned within resilience discourse. In addition to the NATO-related material, the government White Paper and the DSB municipal guidance examined above, the illustration draws on DSB guidance for businesses (DSB, 2026b), the long-term defence plan (Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2024), and material from Total Defence Year 2026 (DSB, n.d.-b). Together, these sources allow several relational themes concerning responsibility, authority and civil–military relations to be explored.

Implications for state–local relations

The White Paper presents preparedness responsibility in two complementary ways (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2025, pp. 12, 55):

> *"The Government has the ultimate responsibility for emergency preparedness in Norway."*
>
> *"The general public, voluntary organisations, the private sector and local, regional and national authorities must increasingly recognise that security and preparedness are a joint responsibility to which we must all contribute."*

The DSB municipal guidance reproduces the same distinction (DSB, 2026a, p. 8):

> *"It is the state that has the main responsibility for protecting Norway."*
>
> *"At the same time, the whole of society must contribute when serious crises or threats to the country arise."*

One possible *social-practice explanation* is that responsibility for maintaining resilience is widely distributed, while strategic authority remains more concentrated. Municipalities, businesses, voluntary organisations and citizens are positioned as contributors to a shared national project, but the state retains responsibility for coordination, priority-setting and, under serious security conditions, the authority to constrain local discretion. This can be understood as responsibilisation under central coordination: practical obligations are dispersed without an equivalent redistribution of authority.

Such a construction expands the range of actors treated as security actors and brings preparedness further into ordinary municipal, commercial and civic activity. At the same time, it may create tensions between local autonomy and national security priorities, particularly where centrally defined preparedness requirements shape local choices and resource allocation.

Implications for the Armed Forces

The long-term defence plan *The Norwegian Defence Pledge: Long-term Defence Plan 2025–2036* (Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2024) is noteworthy in that both "resilience" and "total defence" appear only once. The relevant passage states (p. 6):

> *"A whole-of-government approach is required to improve society's resilience against military and non-military threats. International cooperation and collaboration between governmental agencies, businesses and the population, within the framework of the Norwegian total defence concept is a priority."*

The low frequency of resilience is itself analytically interesting. While the defence plan largely concentrates on military capacity, readiness, deterrence, personnel, infrastructure and allied reception, the White Paper and DSB guidance develop in much greater detail what civilian society is expected to contribute to total defence. This suggests a possible division of discursive and institutional labour: the defence plan primarily describes what the Armed Forces should be capable of doing, while civilian policy and guidance elaborate the resilience capacities expected from municipalities, businesses and the population.

From a social-practice perspective, this may indicate an asymmetry in civil–military relations. Civilian resilience is articulated extensively as a condition supporting defence objectives, whereas reciprocal military responsibilities towards civilian resilience are less visible in the defence-plan discourse examined here. The significance of this asymmetry would require broader evidence, but it provides a relevant question for further analysis of how roles and responsibilities are distributed within total defence.

Implications for civil–military relations

The material constructs the civilian sector simultaneously as something to be protected and as a resource for defence. The defence plan states that *"civil-military cooperation is an integral part of the Norwegian defence effort"* (Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2024, p. 6), while the White Paper notes that *"Civil support for military efforts at the high end of the crisis spectrum […] has gradually been given greater focus in recent years"* (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2025, p. 30).

The DSB municipal guidance makes this relationship more concrete (DSB, 2026a, pp. 34, 50, translated):

> *"The road transport system is part of the total defence and must be capable of supporting both civilian needs and military mobility in war."*
>
> *"Civil preparedness and the maintenance of critical societal functions in crisis and armed conflict are essential to the defence of Norway."*

One possible social-practice explanation is that civilian institutions occupy a dual position. Their populations, services and infrastructure are objects of protection, but the same resources are also expected to support national and allied defence. Municipalities are consequently positioned not only as providers of civilian services but also as logistical nodes, infrastructure managers and sources of situational information relevant to military operations. Resilience discourse thereby connects the maintenance of civilian society more closely with the operational requirements of total defence.

Implications for businesses and organisations

In the DSB guidance (DSB, 2026b), businesses and other organisations are positioned as more than economic actors. Their personnel, supply chains, data, equipment and production capacities become part of the wider preparedness system. This brings commercial continuity planning into closer connection with national security and total defence. This does not imply that businesses become military organisations. Rather, the material suggests a growing expectation that defence and security requirements should be considered in their risk analysis, supply arrangements, information security and continuity planning.

Business resilience is further translated into managerial self-governance. The DSB continuity guidance states (DSB, 2026b, translated):

> *"It is important that all organisations have a continuity plan, since any interruption may have consequences for other actors and for society as a whole."*
>
> *"A continuity plan can strengthen the ability to maintain production and service delivery if these are affected by disruptions. In this way, the organisation's robustness can be strengthened."*

The guidance asks organisations to identify critical activities and dependencies, assess acceptable downtime, establish alternative suppliers and redundancy, allocate responsibilities, and test recovery arrangements. Resilience is thus translated into familiar techniques of business continuity management. The reference to ISO 22301 and ISO 22313 further connects national preparedness with international management standards.

One possible social-practice conclusion is that collective security objectives are partly translated into organisational self-management. This may strengthen operational preparedness, but it also places responsibility on individual organisations to invest in resilience because their disruption may affect "society as a whole". The Norwegian term *virksomheter* is significant here because it extends beyond private businesses and may also include public agencies and other organisations.

Implications for citizens

Across the documents, citizens are positioned in several overlapping roles: as people entitled to protection, self-prepared households, employees, volunteers and contributors to societal resilience. A particularly revealing formulation appears in the municipal guidance (DSB, 2026a, p. 12, translated), enforced in the official self-preparedness advise distributed to all households in several language versions (DSB, n.d.-a):

> *"Employees who have prepared their own household and family for prolonged crises will, to a greater extent, be able to report for work and withstand the strain over time."*
>
> *"If more of us can look after ourselves and our immediate families, Norway's overall defences will be strengthened, i.e. the sum of public resources for preventing and managing crises and war."*

One possible social-practice analysis would highlight that household preparedness is represented not only as protection of the individual, but also as a contribution to organisational and societal continuity as well as national defence. The underlying chain can be expressed as follows: prepared household → available employee → functioning organisation → functioning municipality → resilient society. Citizens are thereby constructed simultaneously as rights-bearing civilians, self-preparing subjects and contributors to wider preparedness.

This construction also raises a distributional question. Citizens differ in their capacity to maintain supplies, secure alternative heating, continue working during disruption or care for dependants. Universal formulations such as "we must all contribute" may therefore conceal unequal capacities to meet the expectations attached to resilience.

Exercises as enactment of resilience

During Total Defence Year 2026, DSB organised scenario-based discussion exercises using regionally adapted threat scenarios and supporting guidance (DSB, n.d.-b). Such exercises do more than describe possible threats. They place participants in predefined crisis roles, require them to consider priorities and responses, and provide a setting in which institutional expectations and preparedness practices can be rehearsed. In this sense, abstract resilience principles are translated into organisational conduct.

From a social-practice perspective, the exercises can therefore be understood as sites where resilience discourse is enacted and potentially institutionalised: policy is translated into scenarios, scenarios into rehearsal, and rehearsal may contribute to organisational routines and shared understandings. The available exercise material does not, however, show how participants actually interpreted or accepted these expectations. Examining reception would require additional evidence such as after-action reports, local documents or interviews.

8.5 Discussion and conclusions

The illustrative analysis points towards a pattern that both resonates with and qualifies critical interpretations of resilience. Elements of responsibilisation identified by Walker and Cooper (2011), Brassett et al. (2013) and others are visible: municipalities, businesses, organisations and citizens are expected to develop capacities, prepare themselves and contribute actively to collective security. Yet the Norwegian material does not suggest a straightforward withdrawal of the state. Instead, responsibility is dispersed within a framework in which the state retains a strong role in defining priorities, coordinating preparedness and translating national and NATO-related expectations into guidance for other actors. In this respect, the findings are closer to Chandler's (2014) argument that resilience cannot be reduced to neoliberal responsibilisation alone, and to Bourbeau's (2018) emphasis on the contingent political articulation of resilience.

A distinctive feature of the material is therefore the combination of broad societal participation with central coordination. Taken together, these recurring articulations suggest an emerging official order of discourse in which resilience connects civil preparedness, societal participation and national defence. Its consistency across the White Paper and subsequent guidance may indicate a hegemonic tendency within the official

policy discourse, in the sense that this particular understanding of resilience becomes increasingly normalised and institutionally privileged. The "whole-of-society" approach constructs differentiated subject positions for municipalities, businesses, civil organisations and citizens as contributors to resilience, but not on equal terms or with equal authority. Civilian capacities are also increasingly securitised and articulated in relation to deterrence and defence: infrastructure, services, organisational continuity and household preparedness become relevant to national and allied military capability. In the material examined here, the Armed Forces appear more clearly as beneficiaries of civilian resilience than as providers of it. This suggests a particular configuration of total defence in which resilience extends security responsibilities across society while strategic direction remains comparatively concentrated.

These conclusions, including the apparent hegemonic position of this resilience discourse, remain tentative. Because the illustrative corpus is primarily official and top-down, it reveals how resilience is constructed, recontextualised, and operationalised within policy, rather than how these expectations are received, negotiated, or contested by local actors and citizens. Nor does it establish their practical effects. A fuller study would therefore require evidence of alternative discourses, local interpretations, and implementation before stronger conclusions could be drawn about how resilience reshapes Norwegian state–society and civil–military relations. By broadening the research task in this way, future studies would not only capture audience reception but also reveal the alternative resilience discourses currently marginalised or excluded from official policy.

9. Conclusions

This paper has provided a selective introduction to the theoretical and methodological foundations of discourse analysis and an illustration of how these foundations can be translated into empirical research. The field is considerably broader and more internally diverse than could be represented here. Poststructuralist approaches, CDA and other traditions differ in their theoretical assumptions, analytical interests and methods, and none provides a single standard procedure for "doing discourse analysis". What matters is coherence between the theoretical position adopted, the research problem, the material selected, the analytical procedures used and the conclusions that can reasonably be drawn from them.

Discourse analysis should also be understood as only one possible approach to critically oriented qualitative social research, not as a privileged route to understanding social reality in the field of societal security. Many of its concerns—framing, interpretation, contested meanings, sensemaking and political struggle—are already familiar in risk and crisis research and can be studied through policy analysis, organisational research, history and other qualitative approaches. Discourse analysis can be a valuable tool for uncovering latent tensions, revealing undemocratic power dynamics, and exposing uneven distributions of responsibility or unintended consequences. However, it is arguably less suited to prescribing definitive answers or contributing directly to immediate, practical problem-solving within societal security contexts.

Its particular value emerges when language and other forms of meaning-making are themselves central to the research problem. Discourse analysis can then make explicit how phenomena are named and represented, how particular interpretations circulate between settings, how familiar categories position actors and distribute responsibilities, and how some understandings acquire authority while alternatives become less visible. Especially in CDA, this involves moving between textual evidence and the institutional and social practices in which texts are produced and used. Used in this way, and where appropriate together with historical, institutional, ethnographic or other approaches, discourse analysis offers one systematic way of examining the relationship between language, meaning and social practice without claiming to exhaust it.

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