

Rebuilding Community at the Epicenter: Learning from participatory governance in post-earthquake Haiti

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Abstract

In the county of Léogâne, at the epicenter of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, over 20,000 people perished and about 80 percent of buildings and infrastructure collapsed. Of the tens of thousands who were left homeless, many fled to open, flat, government-owned land in the Santo sector where a large tent camp quickly materialized. In spite of the massive devastation to this part of Haiti, reconstruction efforts have been slow and limited primarily to individual transitional shelter homes rather than large-scale housing developments. Most people have had little access to basic services. In this difficult context, the organization Habitat for Humanity has managed to construct the largest post-earthquake permanent housing settlement, Habitat Santo Village, on this site. In this paper we investigate processes and early outcomes of the Santo Village project, with a focus on three wider debates around governance and capacity. First, we use collaborative rationality theory to analyze the community governance project introduced in Léogâne, drawing on qualitative data gathered from interviews, observations, and documentation of the process. Assessment is based both on how participants see the community governance system in terms of legitimacy, functionality, democracy and local ownership and also on its expected evolution and contributions to the community over time. Second, we use our analysis to explore existing debates over how government capacity should be built in Haiti; the Santo Village project suggests that government capacity can be built through a community-oriented approach to strengthening governance. Finally, we reflect on how one studies processes of local learning and adaptive governance in a fragile context, with a review of the usefulness of the different narratives, visual and documentary evidence collected for our analysis. Through the three aspects of this paper, we aim to contribute to better understanding of collaborative approaches to post-disaster reconstruction, community governance, and research. Specifically, the paper presents an example of participatory and adaptive governance that builds on social resilience in Haiti and institutionalizes engagement of local government with community groups and NGOs.

Keywords: collaborative rationality, participatory governance, social resilience, Haiti, earthquake, narratives

Note: An earlier version of this paper has been accepted for publication in the conference proceedings for i-Rec 2013, and will be available at this site: i-recconference2013.ch.

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Introduction

On January 12, 2010 in Léogâne, Haiti, Marie Veronila Antoine was at home with her three children. At 4:53pm a 7.0 earthquake violently shook the house, and as it collapsed, she and her children managed to escape. Her husband perished when a nearby building collapsed. Marie had no time to grieve; she faced struggles of daily survival. She lost her income from teaching at a school that was now gone. She improvised a tent “home” for her family on land in nearby Santo. Marie could no longer afford to send her children to school, and the youngest was sick from conditions of life in the tent. Most of the family’s material possessions were stolen. It would not be until two years after the earthquake that Marie would finally have a house in Habitat Santo Village.¹

In Haiti’s 2010 earthquake, more than 200,000 people lost their lives and an estimated 1.5 million people lost their homes. A devastated landscape, widespread poverty, and a fragile State are but some of the problems that complicate recovery. Three years later, most substantial reconstruction efforts have stalled prior to implementation. Equally troubling, of the post-disaster housing projects that have been implemented, few address governance in a comprehensive or mid- to long-term manner. A notable exception is Habitat Santo Village, a reconstruction project that exceeds the scale – and, seemingly, the success – of most efforts.

In this paper, we investigate Habitat Santo Village in light of the relationships between efforts to build the settlement and mechanisms for community governance. Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and local project documentation support our analysis. Three aspects of our research and analysis are advanced in this paper. First, the data on governance is analysed in light of Innes and Booher’s (2010) collaborative rationality theory; key elements for analysis – as described below – are: diversity and interdependence of actors, authentic dialogue and collective learning, and system adaptations associated with shared identities, meanings, and heuristics. Second, we explore how projects that focus on local governance contribute, or not, to wider efforts to build State capacity, an essential need in Haiti, where the State is often viewed as lacking legitimacy and effectiveness. We closely document the iterative processes of creating a governance system in the near-absence of a State. Our research provides support to assertions in the literature that specific governance elements can contribute to enhanced adaptive capacity and social resilience in the context of Haiti, where community-level governance contributes substantially to reconstruction efforts and to wider governance processes. Third, we reflect on methods appropriate to the topics under study, arguing that the narratives of participants in the governance project provide invaluable insights into its functioning, associated learning and the gradual enhancement of governance capacity.

¹ Interview with Marie Veronila Antoine, Habitat Santo Village resident, July, 2012.

Analytical Framework

Collaborative rationality for participatory, adaptive governance

Post-disaster Haiti faces a set of complex and “wicked” problems including: dysfunctional State institutions that do not serve people’s needs nor fit the situation; high levels of social, political, and environmental fragility; and lack of consensus on goals, priorities and how to address problems. However, given the recognized and proven strengths of Haitian society, might it be possible to develop new forms of collaborative working where the resilient societal institutions can be harnessed and catalyzed to contribute to change? Dubois (2012) contends that collaboration amongst complex societal institutions is needed for Haitian rebuilding to succeed.² In line with that observation, we sought an analytical framework for assessing the processes and mechanisms for collaboration between community groups, local governments, and international organizations.

Moreover, Santo can be characterized as a “community of desperation”. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, people at Santo were “thrown together, finding themselves in geographical proximity and economic interdependence, which means that the activities and pursuits of some affect the ability of others to conduct their activities” (Young 1995: 141-142). For such a “polity” to operate as a functional democracy with good communication, Young argues that a “minimal unity” of three conditions is needed: “significant interdependence, formally equal respect, and agreement on procedures” (1995: 142). We also drew on Healey’s call for attention to “the potential, in the evolution of new collaborative forms, to widen the range of voices and values which get to shape governance agendas” (2006: 323). Consistent with Healey’s claim that “there are no standard answers to the specification of the systemic institutional design of governance systems for inclusionary participatory democratic practice” (2006: 294), we sought a framework that, rather than comparing the design of the governance system against a prescribed model, allowed assessment of how effectively the governance approach facilitated context-specific collaboration.

These aims led to adoption of collaborative rationality (Innes and Booher 2010: 1) approaches, ones that call for “thinking differently for an age of complexity” in order to address wicked problems. The theory of *collaborative rationality* is emerging as an alternative to *instrumental rationality* that has dominated planning thought and practice.³ Innes and Booher (2010) build an

² Dubois (2012: 12) argues that successful reconstruction depends on collaboration with social institutions.

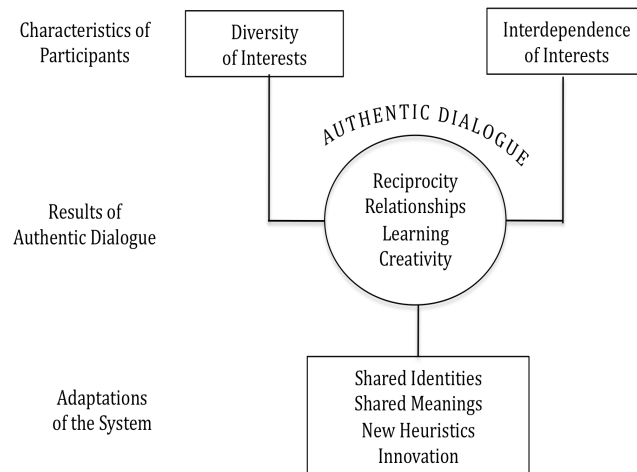
The social cohesion that has resulted from [Haiti’s] long historical process was made dramatically visible by the 2010 earthquake.... Despite its massive poverty and its almost total lack of a functioning government, [Haiti] is not a place of chaos. Life in Haiti is not organized by the state... But it does draw on a set of complex and resilient social institutions that have emerged from a historic commitment to self-sufficiency and self-reliance. And it is only through collaboration with those institutions that reconstruction can truly succeed.

³ *Collaborative rationality* is grounded in the work of Jürgen Habermas (1981) and *communicative rationality*, and in lessons from practitioners involved in multiple stakeholder and cross-sectoral collaborative governance processes.

argument about the value of collaborative decision making processes based on collaborative dialogues. There are three elements to the logic of their argument: 1) a process may be collaborative without being collaboratively rational; 2) collaboratively rational processes provide individual and collective learning opportunities that can strengthen a community’s adaptive capacity and resilience; and 3) such processes can lead to systemic changes that render institutions more adaptive and effective.

Three characteristics distinguish a collaboratively rational process from one that is merely collaborative (see Figure 1), namely a *diversity of interests*, an *interdependence of interests*, and *authentic dialogue* among them. Moreover, Innes and Booher contend that four results usually emerge from collaboratively rational processes: participants discover the reciprocal nature of their interests; they develop new relationships, often where trust is engendered; single and double loop learning occur; and, as a result of this individual and collective learning, “second and third order effects” or “adaptations” occur. Adaptations often take the form of developing shared identities, shared meanings, new heuristics, and innovative practices and mechanisms for governance.

Figure 1. DIAD theory network dynamics (Diversity, Interdependence, Authentic Dialogue)



Source: Innes & Booher (2010: 35)

The governance processes under study are those that are likely to lead to transformation of existing patterns of societal interaction at the local scale, and thereby contribute to the functioning of political processes of territorial, social and economic management in a re-built Haiti. As defined in the literature, this type of governance is termed *community governance*, referring to political governance of a territory (usually fairly small) that allows for a high degree of democratization by giving citizens participation rights, decision making power, and often direct control through institutions such as community councils (Somerville 2005). Other terms used in the wider literature include *participatory governance* and *collaborative governance*, used interchangeably with community governance in this paper, which emphasize the roles of NGOs, community organisations and government in governance, drawing on theories of social

mobilization (Friedmann 1987, 1992), inclusive, participatory governance (Healey 2006) and collaborative governance (Innes and Booher 2010). Community governance also includes elements of what Fung and Wright (2003: 5) refer to as “empowered participatory governance,” meaning that governance relies on “the commitment and capacities of ordinary people to make sensible decisions through reasoned deliberation and... attempts to tie action to discussion”. *Adaptive governance* is a distinct process, one in which formal and informal institutions evolve to better use and manage shared resources in collaborative, flexible, learning-based ways (Ostrom 2005, Innes and Booher 2010).

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was adopted because of its potential to enable understanding of complexities and richness of human experience, and of meanings and processes that provide structure to socio-spatial life (Herbert, 2010). Our methods of data collection during fieldwork in July 2012 can be broadly categorized as interviews, observation, and document study. Because the governance plan was completed and first elections held subsequently, we continued data collection remotely through document gathering and follow-up interviews by telephone and email. The following paragraphs set out how and with whom each method was employed, followed by our approach to data analysis.

Three different sets of interviews were conducted in Haiti: with NGOs, with residents, and with local government.⁴ During fieldwork, four NGO interviews were conducted with staff of Habitat for Humanity (“HfH”)⁵ and Haiti Partners (“HP”)⁶. Two interviews were conducted with female residents of Santo, and a discussion was held with the Mayor of Léogâne. The interviews could be characterized as “semi-structured” with Habitat for Humanity and Haiti Partners representatives; as “open-ended” with Santo residents; and “unstandardized” with the local mayor.⁷ Informal discussions were carried out with additional Santo residents and NGO staff during neighborhood walks. Observation data consist of field notes, photographs, and video.

We collected document materials from three NGOs involved with the project: Habitat for Humanity, Haiti Partners, and Architecture for Humanity (“AfH”). AfH played a key role in planning and design of Santo from early stages of the project in 2010 and prepared a master

⁴ All interviews were conducted by Jayne Engle-Warnick, with assistance from Alex Myril. NGO and local government interviews were conducted in French or English, and resident interviews were conducted in Haitian Creole. Field interviews were audio-recorded and the resident interviews were video recorded.

⁵ Habitat for Humanity Haiti is the lead organization of constructing Habitat Santo Village. Interviews were conducted with the HfH country director and community engagement staff who work on site. Informal discussions provided supplemental information.

⁶ Haiti Partners, a smaller NGO, was contracted by HfH in 2012 to carry out dialogue training and participatory processes with Santo residents, and to prepare a community governance plan.

⁷ See Berg (1998) for interview definitions.

plan.⁸ On-site staff shared project documents, including a household survey and beneficiary selection criteria. Haiti Partners provided access to all documentation of the Good Neighbor community governance project, including pedagogical material for trainings, notes from participatory and dialogue sessions, monthly project reports, and the Habitat Santo Village Governance Plan, consisting of founding by-laws of the governing body, SIDDEVAS (“Dedicated citizens for the Development of Habitat Santo Village”) and the Good Neighbor Code of Conduct.

Our analytic strategy relies on theoretical propositions along with learning from narratives (Yin, 2009: 130). A first proposition is that, in spite of good intentions and major efforts on the part of many organizations and aid bodies, it has been difficult to carry out substantial reconstruction projects in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake, in part due to challenges of governance (Bornstein, Lizarralde, Gould, and Davidson 2013). Second, our analytic strategy emphasizes learning from community narratives, as revealed in interviews, observations, and documents. We have heard from residents through interviews and discussions, and particularly through their involvement in the Good Neighbor governance project. The theoretical proposition behind this focus on narratives is that stories have the power to “reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experiences” (Patton, 2002: 116) and to “not only give meaningful form to experiences already lived, but also provide a forward glance, helping us anticipate situations before we encounter them, allowing us to envision alternative futures (Flyvbjerg 2001: 137). According to Young (1995) the use of story is particularly appropriate in cross-cultural settings where the researcher is trying to gain understanding of participants’ ways of seeing and situated knowledges.

We analyzed the data using a two-tiered approach to coding the following sets of data: 1) field note summaries; 2) Haiti Partners’ draft narrative report and the Santo Governance Plan; 3) notes from three Open Space sessions; 4) by-laws for the newly-established Santo governing body, SIDDEVAS; 5) notes from the first meeting of the Santo Village Council; 6) the Good Neighbor Code of Conduct; and 7) and 8) interview transcripts.

Our data analysis combined thematic coding with narrative interpretive inquiry. We used thematic coding as an organization and rigor device to analyze data according to the collaborative rationality theoretical framework, and also as a backup method for drawing out descriptive parts of the data. The first step was an “initial coding” involving reading all eight data sets, and making notes of initial impressions, emerging patterns, and identifying “patches”, or quotations that capture important meanings. In the second stage of coding we re-read all data and identified where the following themes were present: general descriptive data; theme 1: diversity of actors and independence of actors; theme 2: authentic dialogue and collective learning; and theme 3: system adaptations and systemic changes through shared identities, meanings and heuristics. The thematic analysis provides a systematic basis for looking across the data to interpretively analyze the narratives that emerge. Findings of this interpretive analysis are discussed in the next section.

⁸ The Santo Village master plan may be accessed at: openarchitecturenetwork.org.

Community Governance in Habitat Santo Village

Marie Veronila Antoine was among the first families to move in at Santo; she describes receiving the house key as one of the happiest moments of her life. Marie participated in the Good Neighbor Governance Project. On September 13, 2012, she presented herself as a candidate of the new Habitat Santo Village Council, and she was elected democratically as its first treasurer.

This section sets out the broader context for Marie’s evolving story: the beginnings of Habitat Santo Village, and the structure and process of the Good Neighbor Governance Project.

Within the Léogâne commune (county) of the Ouest department (region) of Haiti, 30 kilometers west of the capital, Port-au-Prince, lies the district of Santo (Figure 2). Santo is located near the epicenter of the 2010 earthquake. Visibility, proximity, topography, and security led to a large parcel of its land quickly becoming a tent camp following the earthquake. In October 2010, Habitat for Humanity (HfH) received a \$3 million grant from the Inter-American Development Bank’s Multilateral Investment Funds (IDB-MIF) to assist earthquake-affected families with income-generating training and construction of their own homes. HfH decided to focus efforts in Léogâne because it was seen as the most affected area⁹. In February 2011, HfH established the Habitat Resource Center and community engagement team on a plot of land ceded by the government for the project.

HfH worked with Architecture for Humanity to carry out a participatory process and develop a master plan for what was to become known as Habitat Santo Village. The plan, developed in 2011, was to build 500 homes for about 2,500 residents, schools, a community marketplace, and recreational facilities including a sports center, playgrounds, and public spaces, while designating areas for agricultural plots and ecological corridors. In August 2011, the first beneficiary families were trained in financial literacy, disaster risk reduction and basic construction skills. Some 570 contractors and workers from the area were given training in improved construction techniques.¹⁰ In February 2012 the first 155 families moved in and began to decorate, furnish and landscape their homes. As of March 2013, 300 homes had been constructed at Santo, but there are no imminent intentions or secured funds to construct additional homes or any of the planned community facilities.

Habitat Santo Village is the largest permanent housing settlement constructed in Léogâne since the earthquake.¹¹ Given the scale and intensity of the problem of thousands of people living in tents or T-shelters¹², including on sites immediately adjacent to the Village, along with conflicts arising among Village residents, Habitat for Humanity recognized the need to develop a community governance process and structure. Similar to other tent camps and post-disaster settlements which do not organically evolve, Santo was a “community of desperation” where

⁹ Interview with Claude Jeudy, Haiti country director for Habitat for Humanity, July, 2012.

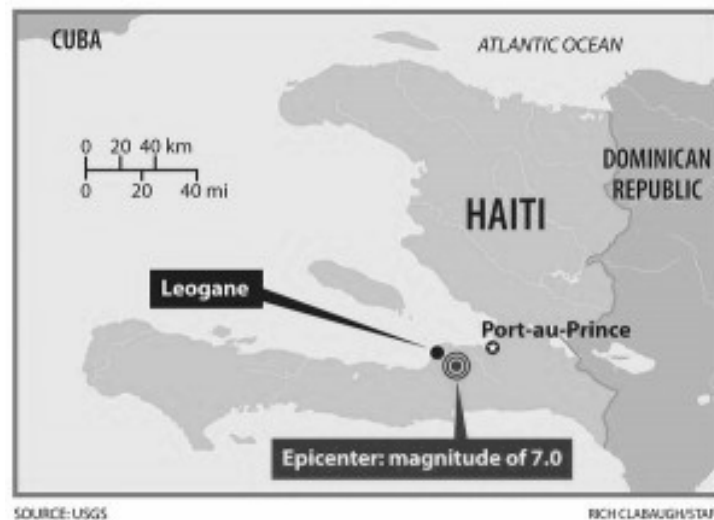
¹⁰ Interview with Mimz Diño, community engagement officer, Habitat for Humanity, July, 2012.

¹¹ Interview with Claude Jeudy, July, 2012.

¹² “T-shelters” refers to Transitional Shelters, Temporary Shelters, transitional houses, consisting primarily of tent-like materials. Many have not withstood post-earthquake hurricanes.

people came together to survive. In April 2012, two months after the first residents moved in, HfH contracted Haiti Partners to carry out a community governance program, which became known as “Bon Vwazen” in Haitian Creole (“Good Neighbor” in English). Haiti Partners is a hybrid NGO-CSO (nongovernmental organization-civil society organization) which comprises sister organizations in Haiti and in the US.

Figure 2. Map: Habitat Santo Village lies above the earthquake epicenter near Léogâne



Haiti Partners agreed to take on the community governance project, subject to an increase in scope (and budget) that permitted use of two dialogical and participatory methods – Circles of Change and Open Space¹³ – that underpin much of Haiti Partners’ work. Paulo Freire, and his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2011, original 1970) has inspired these approaches and the development of specific techniques. The underlying principles of the Good Neighbor project were as follows: village residents would train together to develop collaboration and dialogue skills; training content would initially comprise conceptual and value-based material; and it would evolve during the six-month project to the specifics of designing procedures and mechanisms for governing the village. In this way, residents themselves discussed and designed the principles and practices for a governance system, with staff from Haiti Partners facilitating the process.¹⁴

Objectives and milestones for the Good Neighbor project are set out in Tables 1 and 2. The main output of the project is the Governance Plan, primarily consisting of the founding by-laws of the governing body “SIDDEVAS” (Dedicated Citizens for the Development of Habitat Santo Village) and a Code of Conduct: rules and regulations that participants developed collaboratively. Figure 3 depicts the community governance bodies and structure.

¹³ The Circles of Change method is based on Reflection Circles practices of Touchstones (touchstones.org). Open Space, known officially as Open Space Technology, refers to a group facilitation method (openspaceworld.com).

¹⁴ Interview with Abelard Xavier, lead facilitator of the Good Neighbor project, Haiti Partners, July, 2012.

Table 1. Good Neighbor Project Objectives

Nurture a community culture of respect, inclusion, transparency, and authentic dialogue.	Develop a leadership structure/decision making body in Santo.
Carry out action planning.	Establish community governance policies (rules and regulations).
Mobilize a group of leaders who can monitor Santo.	Carry out community education.

Table 2. Good Neighbor project key milestones

Date	Milestone Event
May 7, 2012	Good Neighbor trainings on communication and dialogue begin
June 25-29, 2012	Open Space sessions on theme: “What’s the long-term dream for Santo Village and what are the immediate challenges that need to be addressed in the short-term?”
September 13, 2012	Official establishment by more than 100 residents of the governing body: “Dedicated Citizens for the Development of Habitat Santo Village” (SIDDEVAS) and its sub-committees
	First elections of the Village Council
	Adoption of Code of Conduct (rules and regulations) developed by participants
October 15, 2012	Graduation ceremony for Good Neighbor training participants
October 18, 2012	First meeting of Village Council to set priorities and action plan for first two-year term

The Good Neighbor project through a collaborative rationality lens

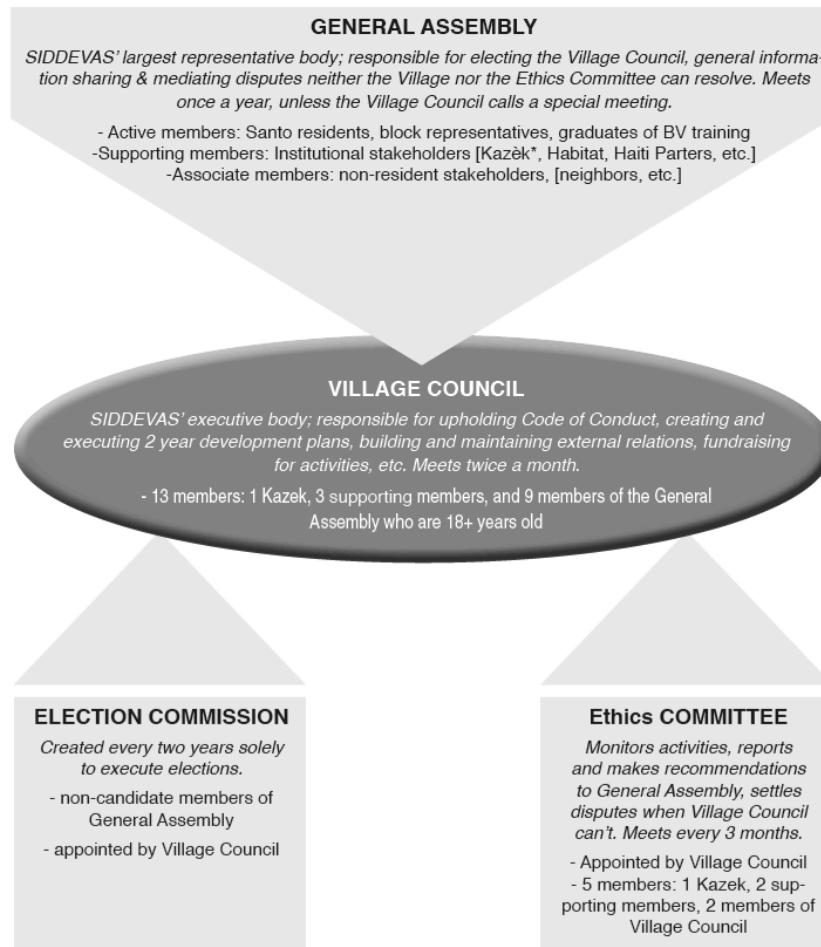
To assess the dynamics and potential longer-term impacts of the project, Innes and Booher’s (2010) collaborative rationality DIAD theory was employed. The Good Neighbor project is analysed in light of the three elements of effective community governance: diversity, interdependence, and authentic dialogue.

Diversity and Interdependence

Diversity of interests, values, perspectives, skills, and types and sources of knowledge among actors in a process allows “for robust ideas to develop and for the system to build a capacity to adapt over time” (Innes and Booher 2010: 36). Interdependence means that actors depend on each other in a reciprocal way.

The Good Neighbor project invited members of all 155 households to take part in 22 weekly training sessions. Participants represented about 50 percent of households and ranged in age from 16 to 60 plus. About 60 percent were women. Participants were not paid for their involvement.

Figure 3. Community governance structure established through Good Neighbor project



Source: Haiti Partners

*local authority

Participants were grouped for training sessions according to their geographic location within Santo, which meant that they had interdependencies of sharing water sources and common space in the land behind their homes. Project meeting notes and interviews show that participants are aware that collaborative efforts and coalitions are necessary to tackle their problems. The recognition of interdependence required for collective change is formalized in official project documents as well. The stated purpose of SIDDEVAS is “collective action for the benefit of all” and the Code of Conduct specifies that security is dependent on residents looking out for each other. Membership in SIDDEVAS is varied in age and gender, and is open to residents of neighboring communities, and seats on the Village Council are reserved for representatives of local government, HfH, and an “other local organization”.¹⁵ Village Council members showed a nuanced understanding of interdependencies in their first meeting’s

¹⁵ Haiti Partners was invited by the new governing body, SIDDEVAS, to occupy the seat of “other local organization” for the first governance term.

discussion of how to handle a resident breaking rules through unauthorized construction of new toilets, and concerns about precedent-setting. Negotiating roles and relationships of power, authority, and enforcement is clearly present in everyday life at Santo.

HfH's director pointed out that a culture of interdependency between residents and government in democracy building takes time to develop. While HfH and Haiti Partners representatives took full part in the Good Neighbor project, local government did not participate in the training. Good Neighbor staff members periodically met with local government officials during the project to provide updates and discuss village issues and relationships, and local government has signed on as a full partner of the Habitat Santo Village Council with seats on both the Village Council and Ethics Committee.

Authentic Dialogue and Collective Learning

According to Innes and Booher, authentic dialogue is at the core of collaborative rationality and has the power to create new ideas, change participants, and transform world views (2010: 97). By cultivating new ways to think and talk in face-to-face interactions, new institutions, both formal and informal, are created. Effective dialogue rises from participants learning and practicing how to communicate productively. Authentic dialogue is not merely conversation, and it does not come naturally to large group settings. It must be trained and repeatedly practiced. The Good Neighbor project is explicit about the importance it gives to authentic dialogue, and uses the term in project objective one (above).

Circles of Change training specifies the aim of collective learning and dialogue. It uses selected texts as a basis for learning communication and dialogue skills in a 22-week training process. The communications and dialogue training materials and method of Circles of Change is wholly consistent with Innes and Booher's definition. During the six-month training, Haiti Partners worked with residents on building formal and informal institutions in a gradual, deliberate, collective learning process. The Circles of Change trainings taught dialogue skills through facilitation and engaged content that built on learning each week and contributed to residents deciding together how to govern themselves. They together decided the organizational structure, the content of by-laws, the rules, the mechanisms, and the participants.

Collective learning and authentic dialogue interacted in a number of ways during the Good Neighbor project. Examples include:

- Residents proposed topics during the Open Space sessions. The topics and related small group discussions served as the basis for the Code of Conduct.
- SIDDEVAS by-laws state that it is the duty of the Village Council to promote education and participatory leadership, indicating the value placed on learning and education.
- Participants applied learning from training during the first Village election, where candidates gave presentations to persuade others they were qualified for the seat.

Participants claimed that during Good Neighbor training they learned about transparency, democratic practice, respect, punctuality, conflict management, living in harmony. They also learned skills for listening, public speaking, advising others, and building consensus.

Shared Identities, Meanings, and Heuristics

For systemic change to occur, system adaptations are required, which come about through the development and cultivation of shared identities and meanings and their reinforcement through new and shared heuristics leading to social innovation. In this section we discuss shared identities and meanings that emerged and were consolidated during the Good Neighbor project.

The emergence of shared identities and shared meanings were apparent in observations of Good Neighbor processes and individual interviews. Good Neighbor participants share identities as earthquake survivors and Habitat Santo Village residents who took part in co-constructing their homes. During the Good Neighbor project's training sessions and meetings, participants discussed, debated, and learned how to dialogue together concerning their shared values, aspirations, and everyday challenges. These processes have not been easy, in part, because as one HfH staff member pointed out, "people in Santo are not used to living together". It is not a community that has organically evolved; it is a community of people who have come together out of desperation. Interview and observational data reveal commonly-held participant values, which are: 1) solidarity -- the importance of relationships, community cohesion, harmony, equality, fairness, and generosity; 2) education – for oneself and one's children; 3) having a voice; 4) meeting basic needs -- including housing, health, water, food, livelihoods, sanitation; 5) a sense of personal responsibility; and 6) an adherence to spirituality.

The data provide evidence of four moments that were pivotal to consolidating shared identity and meaning: the Open Space sessions, the Graduation Ceremony, the first Election, and the Founding of the SIDDEVAS organization. The Open Space sessions – both via their content and process – contributed to cultivating stronger shared identities, meanings, and heuristics among residents, and with HfH and Haiti Partners. In terms of content, participants in the various Circles of Change groups agreed that the theme for the Open Space series would be "*What's the long-term dream for Santo Village and what immediate challenges need to be addressed in the short term?*" The content of topics that participants chose for small group discussions also demonstrate evolving shared meaning; the most pressing shared concerns were latrines and security, followed by healthcare, education, livelihoods, food, water, and electricity. Shared meaning among Good Neighbor participants was constructed through elections and the creation of SIDDEVAS. Shared identity was expressed in a graduation ceremony, where many shared stories or sang songs about what the training experience meant to them. Participants were able to stand as Village Council candidates and to vote in elections. They formalized shared identity by signing on as Founding Members of SIDDEVAS in the organization's by-laws, which they had collaboratively developed and refined. The newly elected head of the Village Council and the Country Director of Habitat for Humanity exchanged open letters of welcome and gratitude following the SIDDEVAS signing to mark the significance of this moment in the Village's history.

New and evolving heuristics were also apparent. The Good Neighbor project's training program aimed to instill heuristics associated with dialogue and communication. Participants practiced these new heuristics during training, and through special events between sessions. It is apparent that new heuristics were internalized and extended to practice in everyday community life between sessions. For example, one participant provided this anecdote: "two people were having an argument and all I had to do to end the argument was to remind them what they've learned in the Good Neighbor training."

Collaborative rationality in practice

Innes and Booher (2010), as noted in the framework discussion above, identify consequences emerging from collaboratively rational processes: shared and reciprocal interests; new relationships of "collaboration" and "trust"; single and double loop learning; and, longer-term and systemic "adaptations". Our research suggests that the Good Neighbor Project is a form of collaborative rationality that is fostering precisely these kinds of changes at the micro-level of community interactions in governance.

Indeed, collaboratively rational processes, such as those instituted in the Good Neighbor project, can support adaptations and systemic change. Participants developed shared heuristics that supported adaptation and positive systemic change. For example, the Good Neighbor Governance Project contributed to a sense of individual and collective capacities, new skills as well as democracy building; all of these can lead to government accountability for providing basic services, along with increasing the expectations of citizens concerning both their rights and responsibilities. In order to support needed system changes at the community level, organizational adaptations were needed. In this project both NGOs -- Habitat for Humanity and Haiti Partners -- underwent system adaptations. For HfH, Santo represents its first foray into community development in its 27 years in Haiti. Similarly, Haiti Partners has adapted its work in education and participatory dialogue to community governance for the first time at Santo. Habitat Santo Village has the potential to provide a community governance demonstration project; by continuing to strengthen shared meaning and heuristics over time, and building on the institutions that residents have already created in SIDDEVAS, there is potential for long-term systemic change. On a larger scale, collective action heuristics emerging in Haiti, or in some cases re-emerging, will need to be further consolidated if citizen voices are to permeate government structures and contribute to the systemic change needed in Haiti from the local community to the macro government scale.

Collaborative rationality can also contribute to the translation of existing societal strengths into governance capabilities. Haiti's society is considered to be resilient and its people highly capable in many ways. But in the absence of formal institutions to provide the most basic level of services, the strengths of social resilience are directed towards survival. To get beyond this situation, new forms of collaboration can bring together community groups, NGOs and government, as has occurred to some degree with the Good Neighbor Governance Project. Early findings at Santo reveal that the power to strengthen individual and collective capabilities for social resilience can be harnessed through processes which are collaboratively rational.

Investment in community vs. State capacity: a false dichotomy

The local participatory governance process underway in Santo also provides insight into wider understanding of, and debates around, State capacity for governance. Haiti's State has been variously characterized as "failed", "fragile", "predatory", "dysfunctional", "defunct", and "in near complete collapse" (Locher 1990; Menkhaus 2010; Brinkerhoff 2007; Heine and Thompson 2011; World Bank 2006). The country has been governed by authoritarian, dictatorial, military, and occupation regimes. According to Tippenhauer (2010: 505), "there has never been an execution of a true social contract in Haiti". Most Haitians have not been able to rely on government institutions to supply basic needs – potable water, sanitation, security, healthcare, education – or any sort of social safety net. It is not surprising that in this context it has been difficult to carry out substantial reconstruction projects in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake in spite of good intentions and major efforts on the part of many organizations, aid bodies, and local actors. The failures of government and the need for successful collaboration with Haiti's complex societal institutions require that alternative forms of governance be implemented.

Decentralization is seen as one way to re-build the State (see Bornstein *et al.*, 2013 for other plans). While decentralization is outlined in the 1987 constitution and subsequent plans, progress towards formal decentralization – whether of government functions, authority or budgets – has been limited. The Good Neighbor project provides an example of decentralized local governance extending beyond the State. It is an approach that may be adapted and adopted elsewhere in Haiti to support the building of governance capacities both within and outside of the State. The conundrum of building formal institutions where informality is dominant is that informal institutions have been far more reliable and worthy of trust than formal institutions of the State; as such, people are deterred from trusting and investing themselves in State institutions. Yet there are good reasons for a State to exist, not least to institutionalize a coherent and reliable land ownership and rights system, justice system and the like.¹⁶ The experience of Habitat Santo Village, and other initiatives of participatory governance, could inform the institutional design and policy development for Haiti's governance decentralization. Moreover, the operations of such participatory governance initiatives directly contribute to the building of capabilities within the State. Government officials participate, they come to know the local communities in new ways, they may become accountable to local people, they may undergo learning, and their government practices meaningfully adapt -- as is already apparent, to a limited extent, in the case of Santo's Good Neighbor project.

Reflections on method

On the day of our interview with Marie Veronila, we were escorted by security to her Santo home, an exceptional precaution taken because of a violent outburst on site earlier that day. During that time there were daily conflicts on site, in part because people were fighting for the coveted jobs to construct the second phase of Santo homes. Marie was shaken but not discouraged, saying: "We know that one person cannot hold us back.... today we stood in

¹⁶ The lack of a cadastre and effective land ownership and rights system repeatedly arises as one of the main impediments to development in Haiti.

protest to have that person leave so the project can continue. The project is good for many people.” Nothing would bring down Marie’s spirits that day. As we met, her oldest daughter was at school taking an exam for re-entry. Marie had high hopes for her daughter’s success, and although she did not know how she would pay for school, she was confident there would be a way “si dye vle” (if god wills).

Throughout this paper, we have drawn on interviews, participatory activities and stories told by the residents of Santo and participants in the Good Neighbor project. There are two main observations we make at this point about method, both as employed in the governance project itself, and in our study of it. First, language matters; and second, local voices must count.

Umemoto observes (2001:23), “language carries with it the power to discourage or encourage, repress or release, legitimize or degrade.” Issues of language are much-neglected but ever-present in Haiti. The official languages are Haitian Creole and French but most international NGOs rarely work in Haitian Creole. Haitian Creole is the mother tongue of nearly all Haitians and the only language of the vast majority (Schuller 2012). Our analysis reveals that language was a barrier to communication in the early stages of constructing the community. For example, household latrines are a major problem at Santo; since latrine training documentation had not been translated to Haitian Creole, few residents would have understood it, contributing to their dissatisfaction with the system and lack of ownership of the problem. This situation is not exceptional. Often internationally based organizations function internally in English, French, or Spanish, may communicate with Haitian Government in French, and lack resources or recognition of the need to work in Haitian Creole.

A separate language issue which is more subtle, but deeply meaningful, involves the language of dependency that is often projected on Haiti.¹⁷ Habitat for Humanity originally referred to residents as “beneficiaries”, a word that implies the passive receiving of a benefit, which is problematic for creating an identity of residents as full partners or participants in their housing projects. “Beneficiary” implies being “chosen” to “receive” some benefit. This disempowering language sends a message that beneficiaries are passive recipients of assistance from a benevolent organization. During the Good Neighbor project when participants were empowered to decide on their own governance structure and processes, they chose to call themselves “dedicated citizens”, implying active, engaged commitment, and formalized the term in their naming of the Village Council body, “Dedicated Citizens for the Development of Habitat Santo Village”.

Second, local voices provide insight into the development of governance capabilities that could not otherwise be documented. Both the Good Neighbor governance process and our research methods have sought to emphasize the importance of giving voice to those who are often silenced. According to Ledwith and Springett (2011) “giving voice” entails an openness to ways of knowing that go beyond the intellectual. Authors underline that self-reflexivity and dialogue

¹⁷ Paradoxically, Haiti’s history reveals patterns of heroic independence and self-reliance, but because of its reliance on foreign aid and remittances in recent decades, policy and academic literature during that time has tended to recast Haiti in dependency terms.

are key, but also that different ways of knowing might be expressed in ways such as song, poetry, and storytelling, as was the case at Santo, particularly evidenced during participant presentations during the Graduation Ceremony. In his Good City framework, Amin (2006) talks of *participative parity* as the space that provides possibilities for new voices to emerge, and connects the notion of voice with the “right to the city” where citizens are part of shaping urban life and benefitting from it. In a similar vein, both Young (1995) and Friedmann (1992), emphasize the importance of acquiring political voice for the disempowered poor. Young argues dialogue training and institutional infrastructure and opportunities are needed for marginalized people to be able to make their voices heard. She further holds that political voice can enable *reason* to prevail over *power* in political discussions, and we would argue that such *reason* may be akin to various *rationalities*, such as collaborative in this paper, or the value and practical rationalities of Flyvbjerg (2001) and Flyvbjerg *et al.* (2012). Young further articulates the need for political voice in this way:

... in a discussion situation in which different people with different aims, values, and interests seek to solve collective problems justly, it is not enough to make assertions and give reasons. One must also be heard” (Young 1995: 146).

Friedmann’s warning is particularly relevant for the Santo governance case. He claims that “the disempowered poor need to acquire a political voice of their own”, which is distinct from that of NGOs. Because NGOs “walk the tightrope” negotiating relationships in contested space between civil society and state, they are not necessarily always reliable as effective advocates of the claims of the voices of the least heard that they might mean to represent (Friedmann 1992: 161).

A limitation to studying voice in research is its tendency to elude measurement. Some have attempted gauging “voice and participation”, such as Raworth’s (2012) measurement of same as the number of people who live in countries which are perceived to not allow freedom of expression or political participation. We argue that such a macro quantification is problematic and cannot adequately capture nuance of local cultural contexts, and that such a measure would risk broadly misrepresenting the voices that it would aim to value. More innovative methodologies that not only listen to silenced voices and make them evident in research representations, but also that can assess the effectiveness of programs and governance projects that aim to hear voices of the most marginalized, are sorely needed. We have attempted in this research to hear less heard voices through our choices of participants for discussions and interviews, fieldwork observations, and document analysis. It will be important in future work at Santo to continue to expand opportunities to listen to and hear silenced voices.

While the process of community building through participatory governance is now well underway, it is early days in the implementation process so outcomes are not yet fully known. Our lessons are preliminary and further studies will be needed to assess how the system operates over time, and with the addition of 145 new families in 2013.

Conclusion

In this paper we used a collaborative rationality theoretical lens to investigate the case of the Good Neighbor Governance Project within Habitat Santo Village in Haiti. Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documentation suggest that initial processes in the project have contributed significantly – by drawing on a diversity of interests and interdependencies, and fostering authentic dialogue – to setting up a local governance system that is seen as legitimate, functional, democratic, and owned by its participants. An NGO-managed process that draws on Freirian approaches to dialogue, lived experience and learning has supported establishment of this system. Findings reveal that the project has led to systemic changes, both within the involved NGOs and in Habitat Santo Village. While there are aspects to improve on, there is much to learn from the strong participatory governance fundamentals which are present, particularly the embedded collaborative network of NGOs, local community groups, and local government. The skills and knowledge brought to bear in this project of managing complexity and facilitating communications contribute to making this an important demonstration project. Particularly noteworthy contributions are: 1) attention given to hearing local voices; 2) the emphasis on dialogic approaches; and 3) transformations of multiple levels, from individual and collective understandings, to new practices and relationships and the embedding of more functional and accountable adaptations to governance systems. Also and importantly, the national government and international agencies have played a role in supporting the project.

Despite the strong early results of this new participatory governance structure at one of the few substantial and permanent post-earthquake housing developments, the situation remains highly precarious. Current residents continue to lack most basic services and face pressures of daily survival. The Village population is doubling in 2013, with little relief in sight for increasing housing demand pressure from many nearby who still lack decent housing. Among the many governance-related questions are the following. What will the Village look like in one, five, and ten years, and how should Village leaders best contribute to shaping its evolution? How will it be possible to realize the needed facilities drawn up in the master plan, such as a school, market, and community center? How will the Village finance operations management, maintenance, service provision, and capital investment, given the lacks of resources and precedence for generating property taxes or homeowner association fees? Will gangs move in and take over houses as some people in the community fear, and if so, what will be done about it? Obvious answers are not apparent to many imminent questions, which underlines the need to track the evolution of Habitat Santo Village over time. Research and learning from this significant project can potentially provide valuable contributions to planning, policy, and participatory local governance in Haiti as well as other post-disaster settings.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following people for interviews, discussions, and insights: Marie Veronila Antoine, Erik Badger, Frémy Cesar, Mimz Diño, John Engle, Claude Jeudy, Mayor Santos, Abelard Xavier, Walnord Similien, Jean Samuel André, Josephat Jean Baptiste, and an anonymous interviewee. Special thanks to Alex Myril for research assistance. Financial support for this research has been provided by les Fonds de recherche du Québec - Société et culture (FQRSC) and by l'Observatoire universitaire de la vulnérabilité et la reconstruction durable de l'Université de Montréal (Oeuvre durable).

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