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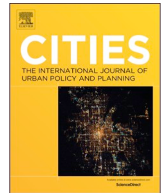

City profile

City profile: Canaan, Haiti - A new post disaster city

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ABSTRACT

From 2010 to 2015, Canaan was perhaps the urban settlement with the fastest exponential growth in the Western hemisphere. Technically, Canaan is not a city—at least not in the administrative sense of the term. Nor is it simply a slum on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. Instead, it is a vast, new and almost entirely self-constructed post-disaster settlement. In this city profile, we reveal the causes of this unprecedented urban phenomenon, draw a portrait of its current problems and opportunities, and present a critical review of recent policy, planning and management responses. Canaan emerged in the wake of the 2010 earthquake that partially destroyed Port-au-Prince and paralyzed the Haitian government for several months. In a matter of only five years, over 250,000 people occupied a previously empty zone. Today, Canaan lacks public infrastructure, but it is a relatively functional city. This profile reveals the gaps that exist between different perceptions of Canaan. Exposing the case of this new city sheds light on the impacts that disasters can have on urbanization dynamics. This profile invites readers to reflect on both the positive and negative impacts that the state, the aid industry, and citizens can have on peri-urban development in the Global South.

1. Introduction—what type of city is Canaan?

Strictly speaking, Canaan is not a city. It has no formal administrative status and the Haitian government does not recognize it as a municipality. But Canaan is a functional city in the sense of what cities mean for the majority of Haitians: it is a meaningful place with enough density of population, services and activities to attract others looking for opportunities. Canaan is also recognized as an environment having its own economy and where Haitians build a sense of belonging and permanence. This said, is it pertinent for this journal to publish a profile of a “city” that is not a city in administrative terms?

We believe it is. The case of Canaan sheds lights unto contemporary urban changes in two ways. First, this city profile invites readers to interrogate patterns of peri-urbanisation in the Global South. Soon, the largest urban centers in the world will be located in the Global South (Angel, 2012; Cohen, 2006). The peripheries of existing cities in poor Caribbean countries and other regions of the Global South are urbanizing in ways that do not correspond to those experienced in Europe and North America (e.g., Roberts, Blankespoor, Deuskar, & Stewart, 2017; Simon, McGregor, & Thompson, 2012). Agricultural and wild areas make way for new industrial parks, free trade zones and touristic infrastructures and activities. In some places, new suburban developments are built for the wealthy, in others, informal development arises for—and by—the poor. In the case of Canaan, it is an entire “satellite city” which emerged, unplanned, on the metropolitan area's limits, creating opportunities, but also tensions between the urban core and its periphery. This unusual case sheds light on the Haitian state's role in peri-urban development. It shows how corruption, elitism, and institutional neglect contribute to and shape rapid urban transformations. But it also demonstrates the role of citizens' agency in responding to needs left unattended by the state.

Second, this city profile contributes to our understanding of how disasters transform territories and urban settings in Latin America and the Caribbean. As disasters are becoming more frequent (Munich Re, 2018), and climate change is having a significant impact on displacement and public health (World Health Organization, 2014), there is an increasing need to understand patterns of urbanisation after destruction.

This profile builds mainly on qualitative data generated through field research conducted between 2015 and 2019, including over 140 interviews with local residents and NGO representatives, as well as focus groups and participant observations. We also draw on quantitative data from a baseline survey on the living conditions of about 2000 Canaan households conducted by the American Red Cross (2016). This is complemented by the analysis of hundreds of press clips, aerial photographs, and reports produced by government agencies and charities involved in the planning of Canaan.

The next section describes the history of Canaan and situates it within the context of urban changes, politics, and risks in Haiti. Section 3 presents Canaan's current conditions and problems and discusses how

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the emergence and characteristics of this new city are explained by citizens, the Haitian government, and charities. Section 4 offers a critical review of recent policy, planning documents, and management strategies for the zone. Finally, Section 5 summarises our contribution to current debates about urban issues. It reflects on the role of the state, the aid industry, and citizens in peri-urban development and post-disaster urban changes in the Global South.

2. Canaan's history and the Haitian context

Before 2010, the area of Canaan was almost entirely uninhabited. A few large landowners (*grandons*) were settled in the far east of the territory and a chapel occupied the top of a mountain. Everything changed after the January 2010 earthquake—a disaster that Haitian Creole speakers called *Goudougoudou*.

The *Goudougoudou* killed something between 60,000 and 250,000 people and virtually paralysed the Haitian state for several months. Yet a few weeks after the earthquake, popular pressure for housing reconstruction was already mounting. By then, about sixty families were occupying a golf course in Pétionville, a wealthy neighborhood. Looking for a solution, politicians and NGOs decided to relocate them to an empty area called Canaan (urban legend has it that it was American actor-turned humanitarian agent Sean Penn who promoted the idea of relocation to Canaan—but this remains to be proven). NGOs opened up the first camp for disaster victims in the zone, building dozens of temporary shelters in a place called Corail Cesselesse (Noël, 2012; Sérant, 2011). Soon after, President Réné Préval passed a decree that designated 5000 ha of land in Canaan for public use. This decree officially aimed at facilitating the construction of camps for earthquake victims. In reality, it paved the way for a massive, and largely unforeseen, voluntary resettlement process. Two years after the disaster, an estimated 60,000 people had moved to Canaan (Décime, 2012). Five years later, the area had over 250,000 inhabitants, making it one of Haiti's largest urban agglomerations (UCLBP, 2015) (Fig. 3). Understanding this exceptionally rapid migration requires putting it in the broader context of Haiti's demographic changes, risks, politics, and planning practices.

2.1. Demography and urbanisation in Haiti

Over the last decades, metropolitan Port-au-Prince has experienced sustained population growth and sprawl (Goulet et al., 2018). In less than 50 years, the capital went from 400,000 inhabitants to about 4 million (2018) without any significant additions to basic water, sewage, and transportation infrastructure. The capital is now home to 36% of the population of Haiti. With over 11 million inhabitants, Haiti is one of the poorest nations in the Americas and in the world.

Port-au-Prince's rapid population growth results from low mortality and high birth rates, a pattern reflecting Haiti's early stage in its demographic transition. Loss of productivity in agriculture and lack of services in rural areas push people to move to the slums, searching for jobs, schools, perceived modernity and the possibility of home ownership. The rural exodus, combined with natural growth, has resulted in an ever-growing demand for housing. An estimated 15,000 to 20,000 new households[1] are formed each year in the metropolitan area (CEPAL, 2015; Goulet, 2006). Informal landlords and land mafias—often closely linked to corrupted politicians—respond to the demand of affordable housing by renting or selling space for housing construction, or by building homes and renting them to newcomers. Scores of citizens resort to building housing themselves in the so-called *cités*, or slums, where about 80% of Port-au-Princians now live. Each of these *cités* has its own identity, defined by the characteristics of its territory, history, and communities (Goulet, 2006). They are mini-cities within the big city, with populations ranging from a few thousands (such as *Cité Lajoie*) to several hundred thousand inhabitants (such as the notorious *Cité Soleil*).

2.2. Risks and disasters in Haiti

The vulnerability index to climate change reports that Haiti has "the highest climate change vulnerable risks in the LAC region" (CAF, 2014, p. 6). In this sense, the 2010 disaster was not totally extraordinary. Several hazards have hit Haiti in the past few decades. Hurricanes Hanna and Mathew, for instance, caused significant damage in 2008 and 2016, respectively. The *Goudougoudou* was followed by a cholera outbreak (Piarroux et al., 2011) and the country is affected by dengue and Chikungunya (Poirier et al., 2016). More recently, in 2018 and 2019, the country experienced significant social unrest marked by looting, economic paralysis, and violence. According to the International Displacement Monitoring Center (2020), in the first half of 2019 alone, as many as 2100 Haitians were displaced by violence and disasters. Quite often, these disasters push victims to informal settlements and to occupy empty land on the city outskirts.

2.3. The "failed" and "absent" state

Peri-urban development in Port-au-Prince has also been historically linked to the state's actions and inaction. During the Duvalier dictatorship (1971–1986) the state contributed to consolidate slums and created new ones on the city outskirts. When thousands of peasants were brought into the city to join pro-government demonstrations (Boucard, 1968; Lucien, 2018), many remained in the *cités*.

The dictatorship was followed by drastic neoliberal policies and market liberalism (Gledhill, 2004; Perreault & Martin, 2005). During the 1980s and 1990s, the country was consistently forced by donors and lenders to reduce deficits and public spending (Fatton, 2014). In order to receive aid, Haiti had to integrate global markets, sell public assets, slash tariffs on imports, and deregulate businesses (Gros, 2000). These neoliberal policies "cemented the country's political and economic dependence" on imports and aid (Dupuy, 2010; Schuller, 2009). By 2010, the country imported 51% of its food, making it the fourth-largest importer of subsidized American rice in the world and the main importer of foods from the United States in the Caribbean (Dupuy, 2010). In the wake of the neoliberal reforms, municipalities went Broke, regional governments almost disappeared, and a few families ended up controlling the nation's economy—and thus, its politics.

After the earthquake, a common narrative was that the state has "failed." Only the "restoration" of the state could solve the country's problems (Bornstein, Lizarralde, Gould, & Davidson, 2013). The generalized perception was that, in the absence of the state, slums proliferated and a sort of anarchy had settled in (Lizarralde, Petter, Olsen, & Bouchereau, 2018). In 2015, the European Union attempted to create a metropolitan structure for Port-au-Prince. Experts noticed that lack of coordination between neighboring cities in the metropolitan area thwarted the development of efficient transportation, key infrastructure, and public services. But the idea of a new level of governance didn't take off. One of the reasons is that lack of resources and capacity already prevents existing institutions from operating in an efficient manner. An additional organization was seen as a burden that cities and ministries could hardly afford. Canaan became one more of the cities that now need to be integrated within the network of metropolitan Port-au-Prince.

2.4. Planning practices in Metropolitan Port-au-Prince

One of the most common misconceptions about Metropolitan Port-au-Prince is that it lacks planning. After the 2010 disaster, most international and local observers blamed the city's apparent "chaos" on lack

[1] Estimate based on a (conservative) average of four persons/household and an urban population growth rate of about 2–2.5%/year.

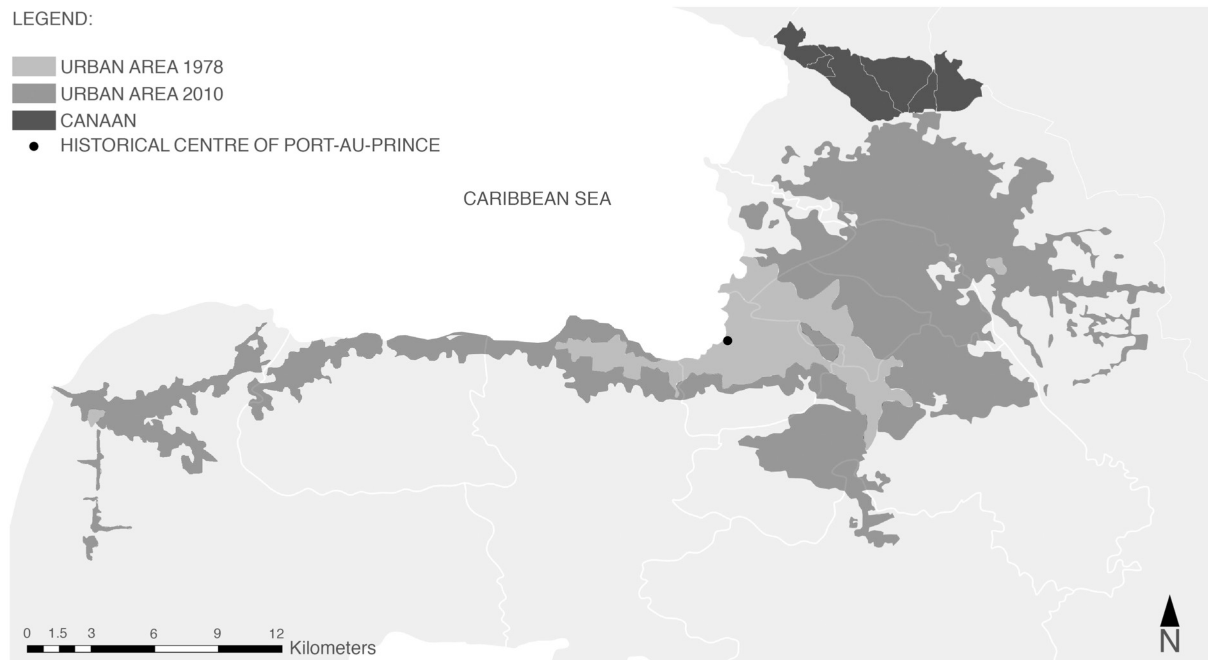

Fig. 1. Canaan's location in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince.
Source: Authors.

of regulations and urban planning. Urban consultants, the Prince Charles Foundation, the Clinton Foundation, and several other international organizations rushed to develop strategic and city plans for the area. But a study conducted from 2015 to 2018 in the capital city showed that after 2010, more than 10 policy documents and strategic plans were adopted by the government (Lizarralde et al., 2018). The same study shows that about 50 different laws regarding housing and urban issues were adopted before 2011. There are also about 12 laws about environmental protection and more than 37 urban plans for several neighborhoods and zones of the metropolitan area. The central district alone has been the subject of over 18 urban plans and strategic documents. If anything, the problem has been the systematic lack of implementation of numerous plans and the weak enforcement of a long list of regulations. Canaan is no exception and, as will be shown below, the plans formulated for this new city are similarly unlikely to be implemented.

2.5. The promised land

Canaan, a 33 km^2 zone that extends from east to west over approximately 12 km, is located 18 km north of Port-au-Prince (see Figs. 1 and 2). The area is bordered to the south by two national roads and its largest portion is situated in the Croix-des-Bouquets *commune* (a territorial unit similar to a municipality) (UCLBP, 2015). This was—and still is—a less than ideal place to build a new city. Roughly half of Canaan's territory (to the north) is mountainous, rugged and traversed by several ravines and water streams. The rest of the zone occupies a flood-plain that stretches towards the capital. Rainfall is rare in this arid and persistently hot region, but when it does come, during the June-to-October hurricane season, it is violent. The place also suffers from erosion and deforestation.

The availability of public land coupled with the presence of humanitarian aid, however, acted as a magnet for thousands of people fleeing the overcrowded camps and the *cités* (Corbet, 2012; Noël, 2012). Settlers were drawn by better living conditions but also by the prospect of affordable land ownership. According to some interviewees, the state, overwhelmed by the substantial reconstruction efforts and previous housing shortages, deliberately paved the way for the emergence of Canaan by means of the public land use decree. Whether this urban development was intended or not, it is widely accepted that the state remained passive in the face of urban construction in the area, implicitly tolerating the settling process.

The first settlers were able to appropriate land relatively freely. But a more structured (albeit informal) real estate market quickly emerged. In Canaan, as in other public land use areas of the capital, spontaneously formed groups or groups operating under the auspices of community-based organizations (CBOs) seized large tracts of land, parceled them out and sold them. According to our respondents, some of these operations were carried out even before the presidential decree. Many believe that politically connected landlords were informed of the decree's impending publication, allowing them to lay hands on land distribution in the zone.

In 2010, the price of a parcel of land (often about 120 sq. m) ranged from US$62 to US$375. Some land-selling organizations included in their sales prices not only the value of the property but also a "contribution" in cash to be put towards infrastructure. Buyers were sometimes provided with makeshift "property titles" composed of forged papers and a copy of the presidential decree (Constant, 2013; Corbet, 2012; Noël, 2012). In addition to what our respondents call "land mafias," and households attracted by the possibility of land ownership, small-scale speculators also took advantage of the new land market. Most were from the local area, although reports indicate that a small number lived abroad (Leader, 2012; Sherwood, Bradley, Rossi, Gitau, & Mellicker, 2014). Their shrewd bet certainly paid off. Some respondents estimate that the value of these plots has risen 20 to 40 times since 2010. Today, there are more permanent and bigger homes, many are for sale. Canaan quickly acquired a double identity: promised land for some, "land of opportunity" for others.

2.6. The model city

Canaanites don't want their promised land, as they call it,[2] to turn into a slum, and want to build, instead, a "model city." Recent data

[2] The name Canaan is a biblical reference to the land that God promised to Abraham.

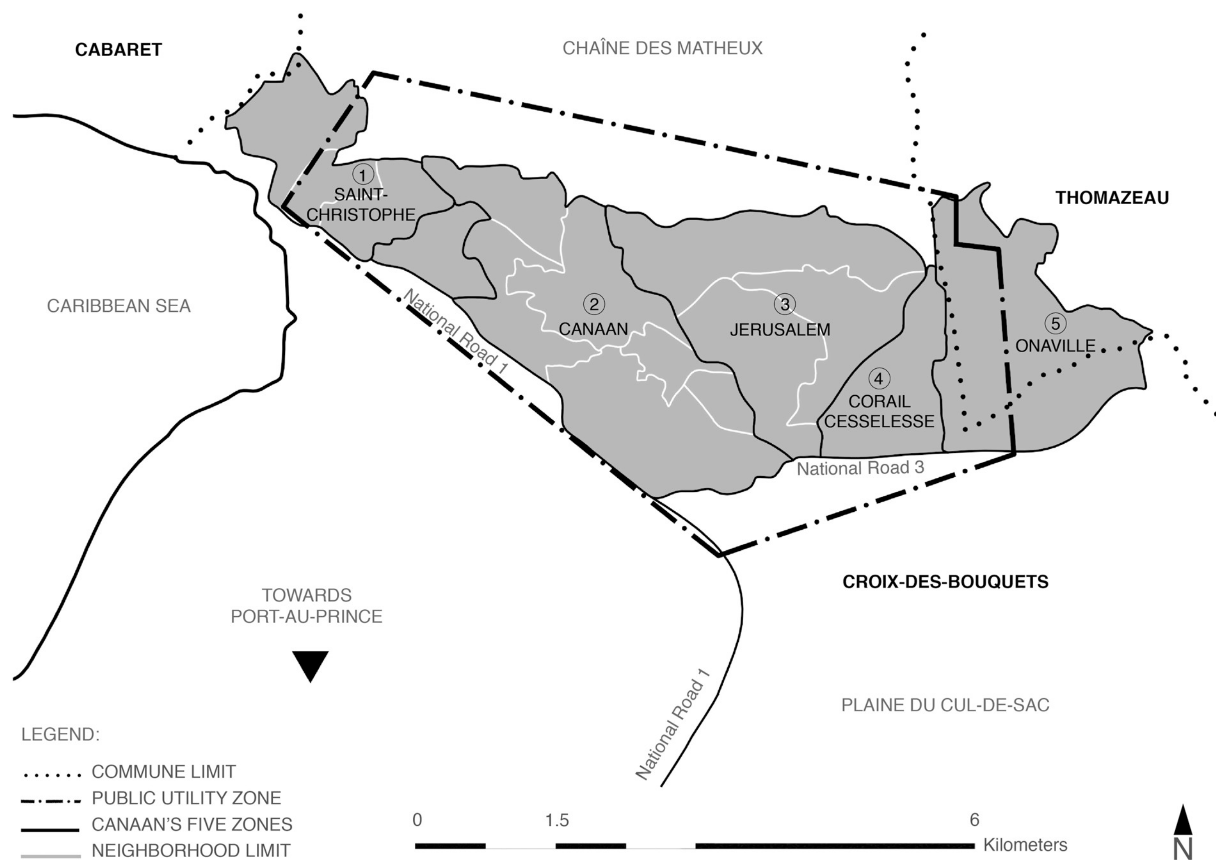

Fig. 2. Map of Canaan.
Source: authors.

(American Red Cross, 2016) suggests that most residents have migrated from the capital city. This distinguishes Canaan from the majority of Port-au-Prince slums, often populated by first generations of rural migrants. Canaan was initially divided into five areas that reflected the strongholds of the early land resellers (see Fig. 3). Each group of landlords appropriated a sector. As these sectors expanded, they began to merge and were eventually re-divided into 15 districts, generally delimited by physical barriers such as ravines and roads. The built fabric expanded both from cores already established in each of the five zones and the refugee camps. The urban footprint increased from 6.9 km^2 to 22.6 km^2 in four years (Fig. 4).

In half a decade, Canaanites built a city that is as complete and functional as it can be given their limited resources and capacities. Until 2015, they made these efforts virtually without support, and within the context of a state that was permissive and neglected their basic needs for infrastructure. In the first two years, land theft, evictions, and illegal resales by landlords were frequent. Residents were often forced to secure their land parcels with rudimentary fencing, a stone enclosure or the construction of a shelter. Some of the wealthier inhabitants laid out foundations to be built upon at a later point. The objective was to mark the property boundaries and signal its physical occupation (Corbet, 2012).

As the perception of land tenure security increased among the population, construction activity intensified. In 2016, there were 40,000 private plots in Canaan (American Red Cross, 2017). Most were occupied by dwellings built incrementally. The process typically started with a temporary construction (a tarpaulin tent, for instance) that would later be replaced by a more permanent one made of wood, corrugated sheets, and cinder blocks. Additions and upgrades followed. New rooms and even floors would then be added to increase the built area (Fig. 5). Some more upscale dwellings, on the other hand, were built directly with several rooms and permanent materials.

This variety of solutions reflects Canaan's mixed social fabric. Contrary to what most Port-au-Princians believe, Canaan is not home to poor residents alone. It is also home to wealthier workers, including lawyers, doctors, dentists, and police officers.

Residents have also built infrastructure and community facilities, filling the void left by the state. There are more than 600 km of dirt roads designed, built, and maintained by the local population. Even more surprisingly, residents have set aside about 60 public spaces in the hopes that, one day, these will host government facilities and services (Fig. 6). More than 200 private schools and as many churches have also been built, in addition to many small businesses and services. These include markets, clothing stores, hardware stores, water and lottery kiosks, hair and beauty salons, pharmacies, dental offices, restaurants and even hotels. Residents have also established their own transit system of makeshift minibuses and pick-ups (called *tap taps*) and motorcycle taxis that operate within the area and offer transportation to Port-au-Prince (UN-Habitat, 2016a). They have also built wells and drainage channels and have managed to plant fruit trees and grow vegetables, edible plants, and other indigenous species in their gardens. These interventions reduce heat islands, prevent erosion and reduce food insecurity.

3. Understanding Canaan in the Haitian context

The state, charities and citizens explain differently the emergence of Canaan and its role in the post-disaster context. Here we summarise the most relevant explanations.

Fig. 3. Aerial photo of the Canaan area in 2015.
Source: Google Earth.

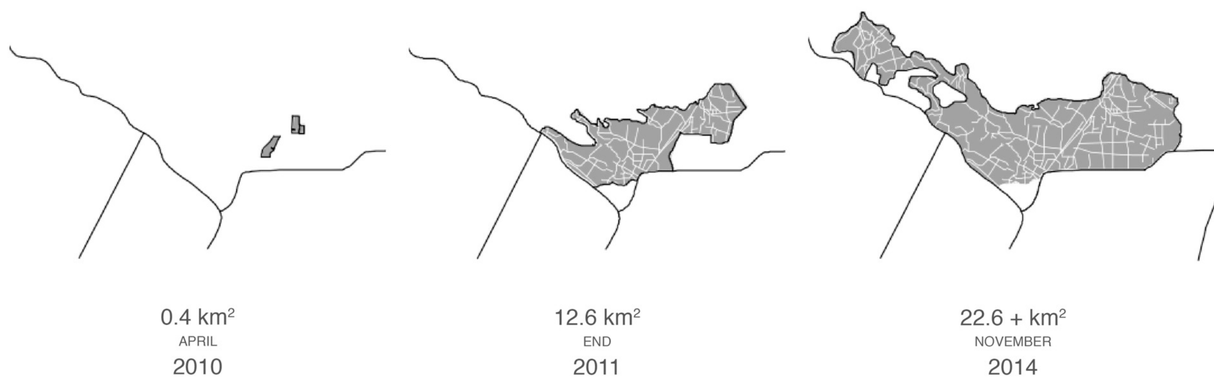

Fig. 4. Urban growth 2010–2014.
Source: Adapted from UN-Habitat (2016a: 41).

Fig. 5. Tarpaulin house (left) and cinder block house (right).
Source: Authors.

Fig. 6. Place Zanmitay (Friendship Place), one of the public spaces set aside by Canaan residents.
Source: Authors.

3.1. *The precarious city*

All stakeholders agree that the area suffers from physical, environmental, and socio-economic risks. Neglected by the state, the area is deprived of investment in public infrastructure and services. In response, it is estimated that Canaanites had already invested about US $100 million by 2013, notably in housing construction (American Red Cross, 2016). The inhabitants' ability to make up for lack of public investment, however, is reaching its limit.

According to a survey by the American Red Cross (2016), households identify access to water as their biggest problem, with nearly all households lacking running water or access to a public water source. While the private sector provides water trucking services, prices are high—especially in the difficult to access mountainous areas (Petersen, 2016). Sanitation and waste management are also major challenges. About 38% of households have no form of toilet, and of these, 41% are forced to defecate in the open, in plastic bags or buckets. Solid waste is often burned, buried, or thrown into rivers and ravines (our observations). These conditions constitute environmental and health threats in a context where cholera is still raging and runoff water can be violent. The territory is also deprived of public health and education services, which are provided by the private sector at a cost that is prohibitive for many (Noël, 2012).

Most of the constructions are precarious, fail to comply with basic safety standards, and many are located in disaster-prone areas. This increases residents' vulnerability to hurricanes, landslides, and tropical storms. The drainage infrastructure dug by the population is not sufficient to contain flooding and prevent erosion. Illustrating the devastation that flooding and runoff water cause, most dirt roads bear the permanent scars of runoff water. Mobility is therefore difficult and even dangerous on a territory dotted with mountains. These various barriers to the movement of goods, persons, and vehicles, hinder economic development (UN-Habitat, 2016b).

Economic conditions are also precarious. About 65% of residents have no jobs and 86% of them experience food insecurity (American Red Cross, 2016). In response, most residents have established their own small subsistence economy. Most resort to home-based businesses such as stores, small manufacture, and retail space.

Canaan falls under no administrative units' responsibility. This leaves residents vulnerable to evictions and extortion by gang leaders. This irregularity also deprives the state of significant tax revenues through which it could provide the population with the infrastructure and services needed. Some Canaanites, hoping to break this vicious circle, are actually willing to pay taxes. In their eyes, this would begin the kind of "social contract" they want to establish with the state and, ultimately, lead to the recognition of the "full citizen" status they long for.

3.2. *The undesired city*

Although Canaan was born of a presidential decree, the government now considers it a problem that should have never occurred (Noël, 2012). Development plans for the metropolitan area adopted in the early 2000s, had earmarked Canaan as a strategic zone that could absorb the region's demographic explosion and contribute to its economic growth.

After the 2010 disaster, billions of dollars were promised in aid. But the vast majority of aid went to foreign consultants and companies. It is estimated that "the Government of Haiti received just 1% of humanitarian aid and between 15 and 20 percent of longer-term relief aid" (Ramachandran & Walz, 2015, p. 27). Lacking the necessary resources, the government was unable to implement the original plan.

The state must now deal with a de facto city and its underlying problems. A senior government contends that "it is impossible to destroy these neighbourhoods, particularly because of their size and the cost that such an undertaking would imply. The state has no choice but

Fig. 7. Digicel football field.
Source: Authors.

to build Canaan where it already is" (Mercéus, 2014). Moreover, any urban restructuring represents a major investment for a state with meager resources. Paving the existing roads alone would require an investment of US$600 million, or 32.4% of the total national budget for the 2018–2019 fiscal year (Authors' estimate based on Saint-Pré (2018)).

3.3. The anarchic city

While research has helped reduce negative representations of self-built neighborhoods (e.g., Lizarralde, 2015; Turner, 1977), many Haitians still maintain a strong aversion to them and would like to see them demolished. The wealthy tend to see precarious neighborhoods like Canaan as a chaotic, anarchic, and threatening (e.g., Décime, 2012). These representations are often cemented in their perception of urban transformation in Haiti. Port-au-Princians often deplore the impoverishment and degradation of the city over the past 60 years. In their eyes, the once beautiful capital, with its Paris-inspired parks such as *Champ de Mars*, has become a gigantic slum invaded by street traders and uncontrolled commercial activities. Canaan is frequently described by Haitian elites as just another *bidonville* (slum), only this time of an unprecedented scale. This perspective is reductive and conceals characteristics of Canaan that might hold solutions to some of the city's most pressing problems. Moreover, this perspective also serves to justify marginalisation, social exclusion, and under-investment in informal settlements (Théodat, 2013).

3.4. The city of opportunities

While Canaan is reduced to a "problem" by the state and local elites, a significant portion of the metropolitan area's population views the zone as a place of opportunities. In this view, Canaan is a virgin land where people with the right dedication can build a sound city and, ultimately, a better life.

Residents insist that Canaan is not a slum and they are making efforts to ensure that it does not become one. They dislike Port-au-Prince's slums, even though (or perhaps, *because*) many of them hail from there (American Red Cross, 2016; Noble, 2015). They do not like having the label of "slum" affixed to Canaan, seeing it as a discriminatory qualifier that deprives them of their rights as denizens. One resident says: "I would like [the state] to think of us, because we're people too. We have the right to have access to health, to education, to basic needs. But our rights are not respected. We want to live like humans, but we're not treated as such".

Building a functional city in Canaan faces several challenges, and residents often acknowledge them. Yet, they refuse to be held responsible for the difficult living conditions and risks they face. Echoing the notion of "conceded informality" (McFarlane & Waibel, 2016), many argue that the state's public land use decree implicitly gave carte blanche to the population to appropriate the territory. A local leader argues: "this land belongs to us. It was given to us by President René Préval." While the presidential decree nurtured Canaanites' hope that the state would take charge of its development, these respondents now feel betrayed by the government. According to a resident "we have been left to our own devices, without water, roads, and electricity; without the state." In their view, Canaan is a place "without," as conceptualized by Théodat (2013, p. 148): "a manifestation of the failure of the state," that leads to urban development produced *without* the conditions for a good life.

4. Planning and urban management in Canaan

Reflecting their divergent perceptions, local and external stakeholders have adopted different responses towards Canaan. Here we explain the most relevant ones.

4.1. Canaan by Canaanites: the aspirational city

While the urban fabric of Canaan takes the form of a jumble of roads with no apparent logic, suggesting a lack of reflection and planning, this chaotic appearance is misleading. In fact, early occupants have laid the foundations for a well-functioning city to the best of their ability. One resident explains, "we made subdivisions, there are through streets." As a matter of fact, most residents often praise Canaan. "We didn't want to create a slum," a respondent says, "we made sure to allow for large lots and to leave room for public spaces. We engaged in urban planning, we have a football field, everything you need for a city." Another one summarises: "we've created a model city." (Fig. 7).

Locals often perceive Canaan to be much better than the Port-au-Prince slums. Most roads have names that reflect their optimism: *rue de la découverte, rue la grâce, rue prospérité* (Discovery street, Grace street, Prosperity street). This enthusiasm can be explained by contextual factors, including the fact that many come from poor neighborhoods. There, they not only experienced the hardships of urban precarity but also witnessed numerous deaths during the earthquake, the high toll of which they attribute to overcrowding. In this sense, the as-yet-undeveloped Canaan offered the opportunity for better living conditions than those they had known and held the possibility of improved disaster preparedness.

Early settlers undertook spatial planning, at times copying the orthogonal grid plan of nearby refugee camps or else taking cues from places they had visited or seen in the media. These initiatives include

the establishment of rules to prevent overcrowding. A minimum area of 250 sq.m, for instance, was established for plots. Roads were also designed to allow space for vehicle traffic, and there is a hierarchy of roads and throughways (rather than cul-de-sacs). Residential sectors were also designed so that each property would be served by a public road. The designation of a large number of public spaces was also a key decision made by early settlers. This type of action is uncommon in self-built neighborhoods due to the high pressure on land resources and fight for survival that often dominates their early years (e.g., Hernández, Kellett, & Allen, 2010). Although land-grabbing and encroachments on roads and reserved areas in Canaan are still frequent, several measures have been put in place to curb them as much as possible.

These responses require strong social organization, itself based on an endogenous structure of governance. In the absence of central or local state authorities, community leaders have emerged in Canaan. Although these leaders are self-proclaimed, their authority is based on tacit recognition of their community involvement. Sovereigns in their respective areas, they govern Canaan and serve their community, managing the territory, security, conflict resolution (especially land-related), and social issues. Our respondents noted that the division and use of the land was spearheaded by these leaders, particularly the pioneers and the most influential among them. The population supports them in “major urban works”; their leadership is strong enough to consolidate collective action for projects like the construction of roads and power grids. These leaders are often heads or members of community-based organizations (CBOs), of which there are reportedly more than 200 in Canaan. Each has its own field of intervention, ranging from social affairs to health, sanitation, education, and the environment. Many, as mentioned, also engage in the lucrative practice of managing the territory by seizing and selling land.

This combination of aspirations, commitment, and organization has given rise to visible efforts to fill the gap left by the state. By sowing the seeds for a relatively sound and solid city, the area's leaders are challenging—whether consciously or not—hasty and unidimensional representations of precarious neighborhoods. Besides, by reserving land for roads and public spaces, they have laid the foundations for the future city—thereby sparing the state the much more costly and laborious future undertaking of integrating such infrastructure into already built-up areas (c.f. Angel, 2008).

With meager means and resources, however, Canaanites can hardly sustain the construction of efficient urban infrastructure. In a context marked by a weak political-legal system and rule of law, the interest of the most powerful often prevails. Land disputes, sometimes violent, are common. Tensions also emerge in the efforts to safeguard the reserved public spaces and to prevent that they be sold. As a matter of fact, an increase in crime and violence in 2018 affected the perception of safety that had existed in the early years of Canaan. Maintaining urban assets is still a significant challenge for Canaanites. In response, residents are now appealing to the state to assume its role as the “good father.” As a resident put it, “we've taken the first step, now it's up to the state to come.”

4.2. The master planned city

Haitians perceive that the state is largely absent in urban decisions (Bornstein et al., 2013). This form of state invisibility should not, however, be mistaken for the lack of political will. Still holding onto the ambition of establishing a new city in the area and confronting a settlement that has developed on the margins of official urban and territorial strategies, the state has described its own response as “ordered” and aimed at “countering the informal development of the area.” To this end, it proposes a “restructuring of this territory in accordance with urban planning standards and principles and in keeping with the international vision of urban development” (UCLBP, 2015).

After the earthquake, the government established the Housing and Public Building Construction Unit (UCLBP), the state agency responsible for reconstruction (among other things). A couple of years later, UCLBP commissioned a diagnostic study and master plan for Canaan (UCLBP, 2015). However, this plan quickly became obsolete in the wake of Canaan's rapid development, and although it was updated, it remained unimplemented due to lack of funding.

In 2014, the UCLBP adopted an action plan for the urban restructuring of the Canaan area and its surroundings. Low on resources and dependent on international aid, the state had to wait until 2015 when a major donor, the American Red Cross (ARC), agreed to finance a program. Two additional organizations, USAID and J/P HRO, joined the initiative, albeit with a modest financial contribution and involvement. The UCLBP served as the supervisory body.

Before the creation of this program, the humanitarian aid response was modest, fragmented, and mostly focused on emergency aid (focusing on water, education, housing, safe construction, and halting deforestation). But the ARC and UCLBP adopted a more strategic, large-scale and comprehensive approach. From 2015 to 2018, the ARC invested about US$21 million in Canaan to tackle three key problems: unstructured development; lack of infrastructure, facilities and services; and inefficient local governance—a condition that had to be addressed in order to deal with the first two.

4.3. The locally governed city

Before the ARC's involvement, governance in Canaan was diffuse and fragmented. A multitude of leaders and CBOs shared territorial management without much coordination. The UCLBP, the ARC, and their partners noticed that this governance structure was not appropriate for operating effectively and quickly in such a large and populated area, and aimed at reconfiguring it. The objective was to identify reliable local leaders who could act as an interface between the local population and external institutions. An underlying objective was also to bring together existing efforts and galvanize the synergy of community groups. This was achieved by establishing a structure of local committees (called neighborhood tables), which brings together leaders and influential members of the community. Nine tables were set up on the basis of the existing neighborhood division (some areas were grouped together to build on pre-existing collaborations or to compensate for their small size).

This governance structure is foreign to the Haitian administrative territorial system, which is based on communes. Thus, it initially had no legal-administrative status. According to our interviewees, the success of this structure is in part the outcome of the political standstill that prevailed in Haiti at the time of its implementation. In fact, the Haitian government was at the end of its mandate and elections were lagging behind. At the level of the town halls (communes), the failure to hold elections in 2011 had led to the replacement of most mayors by interim executive officers (a vote was held in 2015, but the mayor of the commune in charge of Canaan was not inaugurated until 2016). In this political void, the neighborhood tables played a key role in implementing the ARC program's urban component. Although the program ended in 2018, the governance structure created by the ARC is still in place, and Canaanites are taking ownership of it. This structure is now implicitly recognized by the town hall of Croix-des-Bouquets.

4.4. The fixable city

The ARC involvement in Canaan originated in a traditional humanitarian action focused on immediate relief efforts. But it soon mutated into an urban planning intervention, including the formulating of a large-scale masterplan. The plan, designed by UN-Habitat, seeks to guide the development of the urbanised area of Canaan and of the entire northern region of Port-au-Prince. For Canaan itself, the plan seeks to consolidate grassroots initiatives and achievements in terms of land parceling, buildings, roads, and reserved public spaces. It also aims

Fig. 8. Existing (grey) and proposed (black) road network.
Source: Adapted from UN-Habitat (2016c: 29).

at filling in gaps, proposing, for example, to expand and restructure the road network (Fig. 8), public spaces, and reforestation areas, and to designate no-build zones where still possible.

As it was not only a question of planning but also of mapping the territory (and thus formalizing tacitly recognized boundaries), a tight one-year timetable imposed working synchronously with smaller territorial units that were later assembled (UN-Habitat, 2016c). Transmitting knowledge from the field to planners required community mobilization. Each neighborhood, through its table and in collaboration with the ARC, defined its borders. A participatory urban planning exercise then guided them in producing neighborhood plans that were assembled to form the complete master plan.

The approach aimed at building capacity and empowering the population in terms of territorial ownership and management. The neighborhood tables were guided in the planning exercise by UN-Habitat experts to ensure that the resulting urban structure reflects current principles of a sustainable twenty-first-century city: compact, interconnected, economically viable, and resilient. Canaan was designed following international urban planning standards for density, zoning, basic infrastructure and services, public services, road networks, public spaces, natural and environmental resources, and risk prevention (UN-Habitat, 2016c). Stakeholders also wanted to take into account the socio-economic, legislative and land requirements required during implementation. They recognized that land regularization was a key objective, and supported a project for cadastral mapping and regularization.

4.5. Immediate and prospective impacts

To date, this plan has only been implemented to a limited degree, with the construction of some basic infrastructure and a handful of community facilities. Among these are the first public school in the territory, a citizens' service center, a small stretch of a main artery (2.45 km), a water supply system, two small community centers and some 20 public squares, many of which include sports facilities.

Although modest, these specific projects have given visibility to the ARC's planning exercise conducted under the aegis of the UCLBP, thereby legitimizing it in the eyes of the Canaanites. More important, they have helped to show that the state is present in Canaan and to increase the legitimacy of the presidential decree declaring the land for public use. Overall, the fact that Canaanites, who were neglected for so long, have received attention and been "put on the map" has given them hope for brighter days. Their newfound visibility has led to an increasing recognition of their existence and legitimacy. The new structure of governance, endorsed by the current mayor, is also a major step in this direction.

At the neighborhood level, the implementation of the plans has enabled community leaders to visualize the future division and uses of land, and the experience and training have equipped them to better conduct new urban initiatives. The objective of capacity building and empowerment in territorial management has been achieved. The master plan also brings together the desires of Canaanites and the state. It responds to long-term urban needs and builds on the achievements of the Canaanites, correcting and enhancing these grassroots initiatives. For the state, the plan serves as a tool to intervene the territory and plan ahead. It also enables the state to seek funding according to its priorities from the international community. While the approach adopted reflects several current "best practices" adopted by international consultants (e.g., environmental sensitivity, participatory and multiscalar planning, integration of grassroots initiatives), its application to Canaan poses some problems.

First, it would have been desirable to include local professionals in the process—notably those who have experience in informal settlements. Although they have much to contribute given their knowledge of the local context, these professionals are often bypassed in projects supported by international financing.

Second, the participatory planning activities implemented by UN-Habitat remained limited. International standards for road design promoted by UN-Habitat, for instance, were not open for discussion during this participatory process despite their poor fit in the context of Haitian cities. As a result, the urban design (UN-Habitat, 2016c) overlook the multiple uses and vibrant nature of Haitian streets which serve, at once, as places for walking, socializing, trading, playing, carrying animals, and riding motorcycles, *tap taps*, cars and buses. Some Canaan residents seem to have been led to believe that such international standards, and other so-called universal planning principles, are best for them, even when they are practically inapplicable in Haiti.

Third, while laudable in principle, this approach leaves unaddressed

the much more immediate concerns of the population: lack of reliable and affordable infrastructure and services, unemployment, and food insecurity (American Red Cross, 2016). According to a local leader, "people are frustrated with organizations, they feel that they aren't solving their problems even after having conducted many studies. The projects don't meet the needs of the people in the area and organizations are spending resources for nothing."

Finally, we may ask if institutional approaches, by way of master plans, are realistic and adequate in the Haitian context. Expanding the road network alone, from 600 km to 1500 km as prescribed by the current plan, would cost an estimated US$1.5 billion, or 81% of Haiti's national budget for 2018–2019 (UN-Habitat (2016c); Authors' estimate based on (Saint-Pré, 2018)). Implementing the plan would be a monumental challenge. Indeed, problems were already encountered with the financing of the first urban plan (of which the priority intervention phase alone was estimated at nearly $US46 million, IBI-DAA and SODADE (2012)) and with its very rapid obsolescence.

5. Conclusions and implications for urban studies

This city profile traced the emergence and consolidation of a new city that emerged in the wake of one of the deadliest disasters of recent decades. It reveals that although irregular, Canaan is a relatively functional city under construction, with urban planning challenges as important as those of traditional urban centers. Different explanations of the causes and consequences of Canaan co-exist in Haiti and among foreign stakeholders. This profile highlighted the perspectives of those who have written, each in their own way, a chapter in the first (yet determinant) years of a city which likely has a much longer history ahead of it. The Haitian state and local elites perceive Canaan as a problem. In contrast, locals and disaster victims see it as a unique opportunity to improve their lot in a hostile environment characterised by institutional neglect, exclusion, and marginalisation. International charities and planning consultants assess it as an irregular and disorganized entity with the potential to be fixed, master-planned and restructured.

Canaanites are proactive and exercise what they deem legitimate agency to find both physical and organizational solutions. To the best of their ability, they are trying to build a model city that will not turn into a slum. They have planned ahead public space and infrastructure, through sophisticated social cooperation efforts and agile negotiations with foreign institutions. In this way, they are challenging negative perceptions of self-built areas in Haiti. But their efforts have limits. Canaan suffers from many problems that characterise precarious neighborhoods. A weak rule of law leave residents on their own to preserve the plots they have earmarked for future parks, infrastructure and services. These land reserves are in danger of disappearing. Land disputes are often settled with violence, transportation is difficult, and unemployment is rampant. In the face of these problems, Canaanites are calling on the state for support.

Seeing Canaan as a problem to be corrected, the state's response has been top-down, normative, and envisaged over the long term. The laissez-faire approach adopted after the disaster has given way to efforts to produce two successive urban plans. The first, formulated in 2012, was never implemented due to insufficient resources and quickly became obsolete. The second, more ambitious plan was the cornerstone of a program financed and operated by the American Red Cross. The program has had some positive results, including a new, more functional, local urban governance structure, the empowerment of the population in territorial management, and a greater state presence in Canaan (or at least a higher visibility). Yet, this masterplan bypassed local expertise, is based on imported standards ill-suited to the Haitian context, and failed to address the population's most urgent concerns in the short term. Moreover, the lack of resources that prevented the implementation of the 2012 plan and the rapid development of the zone that led to its obsolescence might have the same impact on its successor.

5.1. Lessons from a post-disaster city

The case of Canaan thus illustrates the disconnect that often exists between (a) urban solutions provided by external agencies and consultants, and (b) the realities of cities in poor countries, notably in self-built settlements. Given that a city's basic infrastructure should be developed properly from the start, rather than having to correct it after housing has been built, Canaan calls on us to imagine out-of-the-box solutions for successful urban planning in the Global South. On a small scale and closer to the field, these solutions should capitalize on citizens' achievements while recognizing their limitations. In acknowledging that Canaanites have set aside land reserves to accommodate future public spaces and services, but that it is a constant challenge to protect these reserves, a reading of Angel (2008) invites us to consider the minimum yet crucial measures to be taken today in anticipation of tomorrow. These measures must, as best as possible, acknowledge and embrace multiple endogenous realities, including the agency of the people who built and live in the area. In this way, these measures would remain true to the genius loci of the urban setting they concern. They should also be derived as closely as possible from the field itself, drawing from both its constraints and its opportunities and the perceptions and narratives of the local population.

Canaan further exemplifies the type of influence that the state, aid organizations and citizens can have in shaping rapidly growing peri-urban areas in the Global South. This case shows how a laissez-faire attitude from the state can result in rapid displacement and territorial changes. Corruption and a close partnership between politicians and landlords can easily result in rapid and inefficient urban sprawl. Political influence facilitates dispersed and disarticulated peri-urban development, exacerbating inefficiencies in infrastructure and services, and generating tensions (and additional transportation needs) between the core and the periphery of cities.

The case of Canaan also illustrates the ways in which disasters can impact—and, in fact, even re-orient—urban patterns in metropolitan areas. The existing literature suggests that disasters in the Global South often accelerate urban sprawl (Johnson, 2007; Lizarralde, 2015). Canaan exemplifies how they can also result in the creation of brand new satellite cities. This is a crucial lesson for policy- and decision-makers, who must be attentive to rapid urban changes in the wake of destruction. As climate change increases the frequency and intensity of disasters in the Caribbean, we need a better understanding of their impact on city form and the occupation of territories. It is also increasingly necessary to understand the agency that low-income citizens have in filling the gap left by the state, notably in the provision of infrastructure, services and affordable housing.

Finally, this study invites us to challenge common notions of what a city is, and should be, in contexts of poverty and exclusion. From this city profile, Canaan emerges not as an administrative unit, but as a space of dreams, attachment, and aspirations, and as a place of divergent representations and meanings shaped by marginalisation, elitism, corruption, and catastrophes.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Anne-Marie Petter: Data curation, Writing - original draft, Investigation. **Danielle Labbé**: Supervision, Methodology, Writing - review & editing. **Gonzalo Lizarralde**: Supervision, Conceptualization, Validation, Writing - review & editing. **Jean Goulet**: Validation, Data curation.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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