Constructing Community at the Epicenter: Collaborative Governance in Post-earthquake Haiti

Jayne Engle, School of Urban Planning, McGill University, Montreal, Canada
jayne.engle-warnick@mail.mcgill.ca

Lisa Bornstein, School of Urban Planning McGill University, Montreal, Canada
lisa.bornstein@mcgill.ca

Gonzalo Lizarralde﹐ School of Architecture, Université de Montréal, Montreal, Canada
gonzalo.lizarralde@umontreal.ca

Abstract

The earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12 2010 resulted in one of the greatest human catastrophes of our time. The epicenter of the earthquake laid under the town of Léogâne, where about 80 percent of buildings and infrastructure were destroyed, 20,000 to 30,000 people were thought to have perished, and tens of thousands were left homeless. Relief and reconstruction efforts have focused primarily on the country's capital, Port-au-Prince, and have taken longer to reach Léogâne. As a consequence, reconstruction is slow, and most people have little to no access to basic services. In this difficult context, a housing settlement called "Habitat Santo Village" has been recently completed in Léogâne, adopting sophisticated community governance mechanisms. This research project investigates these community governance approaches and methods through the lens of collaborative rationality theory. The study draws on qualitative data gathered from interviews, observations, documentation, and participant narratives. Results show that the community governance system is seen as legitimate, functional, democratic, and owned by its participants. These findings contribute to the literature on governance by highlighting the way in which adaptive and collaborative governance can contribute to mitigating the lack of a strong and functional State in Haiti. The study also contributes to a better understanding of collaborative approaches to post-disaster reconstruction and community governance.

Keywords: Collaborative Rationality, Community Governance, Social Resilience, Haiti Earthquake, Post-disaster Reconstruction.

Introduction

There is an increasing interest in post-disaster reconstruction literature in governance mechanisms that contribute to a stronger integration of end-users and local communities in decision-making processes (Kendra and Wachtendorf, 2007; Lizarralde et al., 2010; Pelling, 2003). It has been argued that alternative forms of governance can help reduce the effects of insufficient delivery of public services and housing solutions (Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2004; Özerdem and Bowd, 2010; Sliwinski, 2010), notably in the context in which the State is perceived to be absent and weak (Brinkerhoff, 2007; Menkhaus, 2010; UN, 2010). However, in reality, very few post-disaster housing projects are linked to comprehensive approaches to mid and long-term governance of new settlements. A notable exception is Habitat Santo Village, recently constructed in Leogâne, Haïti.

This paper investigates the case of Habitat Santo Village, focusing on the relationships between the efforts to build the settlement and community governance mechanisms.[1] The work relies on qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Innes and Booher's (2010) collaborative rationality theory provides the analytical lens for examining the data and assessing governance systems. Assertions in the literature that specific governance elements can contribute to enhanced adaptive capacity and social resilience are compelling in the context of Haiti, where community-level governance may provide a substantial contribution to the functioning of reconstruction efforts.

In the first two sections, we present the framework for analysing the case and the research methods. We then present the Habitat Santo Village case and assess how its Good Neighbour Governance processes have functioned. We conclude the article with early lessons from Santo and potential implications for new forms of collaborative community governance in Haiti.

Analytical Framework

Haiti: a Resilient Society in a Fragile State

More than 200,000 people lost their lives and 1.5 million people lost their homes in Haiti's 2010 earthquake. Three years after one of the most tragic human disasters in modern times, substantial efforts at reconstruction have been at times heroic in intention, but have mostly stalled prior to implementation. A devastated landscape, massive poverty, and a fragile, mostly dysfunctional State (Menkhaus, 2010; Heine and Thompson, 2011; World Bank, 2006) mingle with increasing wealth for a privileged few, and the enduring rich cultural traditions of Haitian people. Haiti's society has been characterised as resilient, socially cohesive, and self-reliant (Dubois, 2012; World Bank, 2006). Dubois (2012: 12) argues that a 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 organised 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.''

Haiti's arguably resilient society operates alongside a State with no history of functioning in the interests of the majority of people. Haiti's State has been variously characterised as "failed", "fragile", "predatory", "dysfunctional", "defunct", and "in near complete collapse" (Fatton, 2002; Locher, 1990; Menkhaus, 2010; Brinkerhoff, 2007; Heine and Thompson, 2011; World Bank, 2006), and 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,

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[1] *Community governance* refers to a form of political governance of a relatively small territory -- in this case Habitat Santo Village and its immediate surroundings -- 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). *Collaborative governance* in this paper refers to community governance that engages NGOs, community groups, and local government. *Adaptive governance* involves formal and informal institutions evolving to better use and manage shared resources in collaborative, flexible, learning-based ways (Ostrom, 2005).

it has been difficult to carry out substantial reconstruction projects following the 2010 earthquake in spite of good intentions and major efforts on the part of many organisations, aid bodies, and local actors. The failures of the government and the need for successful collaboration with Haiti's complex societal institutions require that alternative forms of governance be implemented.

Collaborative Rationality for Adaptive Governance

Given the set of complex problems in Haiti's post-disaster context of dysfunctional State institutions that do not serve people's needs nor fit the situation, high levels of social and environmental fragility, and lack of consensus on goals, priorities and how to address problems (Bornstein et al.,2013), it is no wonder that reconstruction seems hardly possible on a large scale. However, given the recognized and proven strengths of the society, might it be possible to develop new forms of collaborative working where the resilient societal institutions can be harnessed and catalysed to contribute to change?

Drawing on Dubois' assessment that collaboration amongst complex societal institutions is needed for rebuilding to succeed, we suggest that new forms of collaboration between community groups, local governments, and - in some cases - international organisations are crucial in both development and governance arenas. Such collaborative mechanisms would need to be adapted to local contexts, build upon the resiliency and strength of Haitian institutions and transform more pernicious forms of governance into those that foster widely understood development. Ideally such efforts could contribute to a broader framework, providing a scalable approach that could be learned from and adapted to a range of local contexts. Examination of efforts – such as that of the governance system in Habitat Santo Village – to foster such collaboration in Haiti provides an opportunity to explore the potential of new forms of governance and development in the rebuilding process.

Collaborative rationality is one set of approaches that calls for "thinking differently for an age of complexity" in order to address such problems (Innes and Booher, 2010: 1). Emerging as an alternative to the *instrumental rationality* that has dominated planning thought and practice,[2] *collaborative rationality* draws on both complexity and negotiation theories. In particular, Innes and Booher (2010) build an argument about the value of collaborative decision-making processes based on collaborative dialogues. These are the main points 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 *diversity of interests*, *interdependence of interests*, and *authentic dialogue* among them (Innes and Booher, 2010: 35-38). The diversity condition means that a collaboratively rational process includes not only agents who hold power, but also those who are affected by outcomes of the process and who need information. There must be an array of perspectives, skills, interests, concerns, priorities, and sources and types of knowledge. Participants should, in addition, have common concerns and must depend on each other in reciprocal ways, such as a shared development problem that brings them together and necessitates the hard work of collaboration towards reaching agreement. At the level of results, Innes and Booher contend that four types usually emerge from collaboratively rational processes: participants discover the reciprocal nature of their interests; they develop new relationships where trust is often engendered; and single and

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[2] *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-sectorial collaborative governance processes.

double loop learning occur, fostering creativity. Finally, as a result of this individual and collective learning, "second and third order effects" or "adaptations of the system" occur. Adaptations often take the form of developing shared identities, shared meanings, new heuristics, and innovative practices and mechanisms for governance.
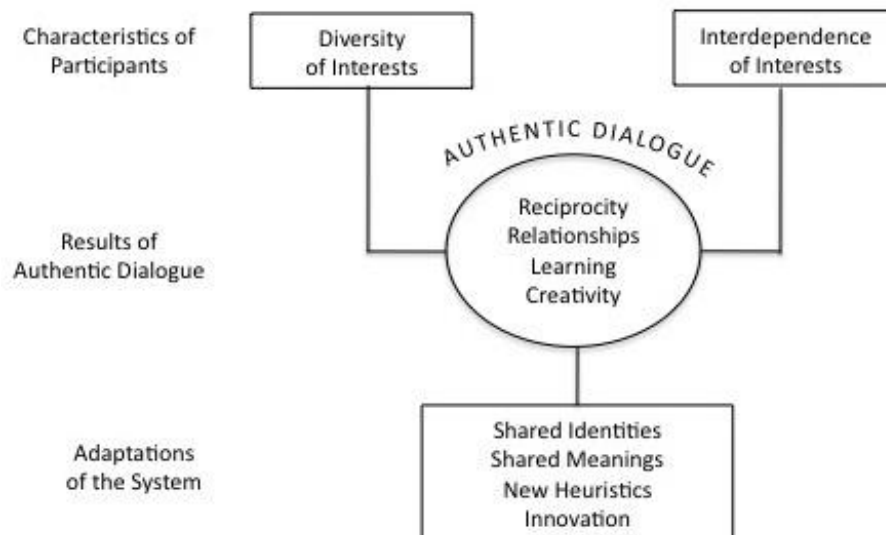

Figure 1: DIAD (Diversity, Interdependence, Authentic Dialogue) theory network dynamics. Source: Innes and Booher, 2010: 35.

Methods

This study relies on the analysis of theoretical propositions found in the literature on community governance, along with learning from narratives of those living the reconstruction process. Literature highlights how governance structures (and weaknesses) have impeded development in Haiti and post-earthquake reconstruction (Bornstein *et al.,* 2013); initial field visits pointed to forms of community governance that could improve both project implementation and later operation of new settlements. These observations informed our analytic strategy, which emphasises learning from community narratives, as revealed in interviews, observations, and documents. 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). Most interviews, observations, and document collection for this study were conducted by the principal author during fieldwork in Haiti in July 2012. Nine interviews were conducted with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Santo residents, and local government.[3] The interviews were semi-structured with Habitat for Humanity and Haiti Partners representatives; open-ended with Santo residents; and unstandardized with the local

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[3] Interviews were conducted by Jayne Engle, with research assistance and Haitian Creole translation by Alex Myril. Eight interviews with NGOs and residents were audio-recorded, and several were also video-taped. Resident interviews were conducted in Haitian Creole, the local government interview was conducted in French, and NGO interviews were conducted in French or English, based on the choice of the interviewee. Informal discussions were conducted with several additional residents. Supplemental documents were collected from Haiti Partners in November 2012, and follow-up interviews were conducted by email through January 2013.

mayor.[4] Our observation data consists of field notes, photographs, and video. Documentation data was collected from three NGOs involved with Santo: Habitat for Humanity (lead organisation), Haiti Partners (governance plan), and Architecture for Humanity (master plan).

Findings: Good Neighbour Governance at Habitat Santo Village

In this section, we explain the beginnings of Habitat Santo Village, describe the structure and process of the Good Neighbour Governance Project, and analyse the project in light of the concepts of collaborative rationality. Santo is the official name of a district within the Léogâne commune (county) of the West department (region) of Haiti, which lies 30 kilometres west of the capital, Port-au-Prince (fig. 2). Santo's residents have traditionally lived from subsistence agriculture. Santo is located near the 2010 earthquake epicenter, and factors of visibility, proximity, topography, and security led to a large parcel of its land quickly becoming a tent camp in the earthquake aftermath. 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 area[5]. In November 2010, the state donated a plot of land located two kilometres from Léogâne's city center. Three months later, HfH established the Habitat Resource Center and community engagement team on site; the organisation worked with internally displaced persons (IDP) living in tents to mitigate rising conflicts, communicate and clarify intentions for the site, and select "beneficiaries" to take up residence in the homes to be constructed.
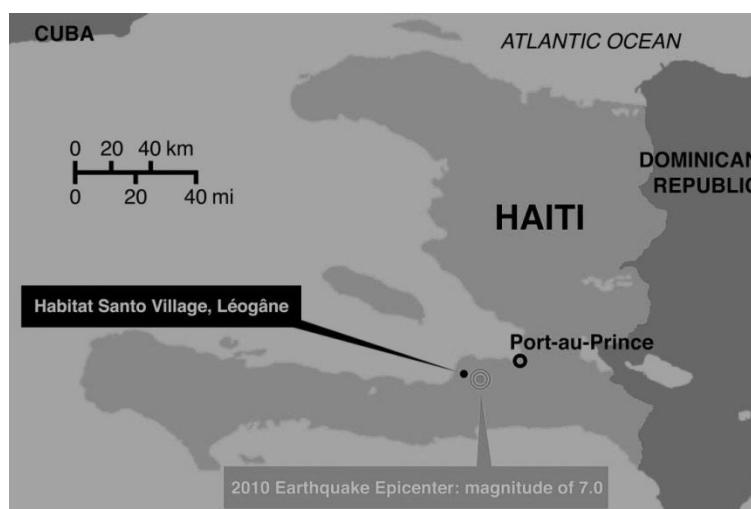

Figure 2: Map: Habitat Santo Village is located at the earthquake epicenter near Léogâne. Source: Haiti Partners.

During early 2011, 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, prepared by Architecture for Humanity with assistance from a local Haitian firm, SODADE, was to construct 500 homes for about 2,500 residents, primary and secondary schools, a community marketplace, agricultural plots, ecological corridors, and recreational facilities including a sports centre, playgrounds, and public spaces. In August 2011, the first beneficiary families were trained in financial literacy, disaster risk reduction and basic

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[4] See Berg 1998 for interview definitions.
[5] Interview with Claude Jeudy, Haiti country director for Habitat for Humanity, July, 2012.

construction skills. About 570 local contractors and workers were trained in improved construction techniques.[6] In February 2012, the first 155 families moved in and began to decorate, furnish and landscape their homes (fig. 3). As of March 2013, the 300 homes initially funded by IDB-MIF had been constructed at Santo, but there were no imminent intentions or secured funds to construct additional homes or any of the planned community facilities.

Substantial challenges have arisen due to a number of drawbacks to the way the project was built and is evolving. For example, kitchens were not built in the original houses, so people improvise cooking outside over a fire or they have constructed makeshift kitchens in their backyards. Another drawback is sanitation design. Residents were highly dissatisfied with household toilets as originally constructed, which led to a complete latrine retrofitting of the original 155 homes. Also, there is no electricity service to homes in the Village. Solar-powered streetlamps provide the sole source of illumination during the night. It appears as well that there are a number of unauthorized home occupations. Residents report that some neighbours have tenants, and some homes are used as shops or for other commercial purposes.

Habitat Santo Village is the largest permanent housing settlement constructed in Léogâne since the earthquake.[7] Given the scale and intensity of the problem of thousands of people living in tents or T-shelters[8], including 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. 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 organisation-civil society organisation) that grew out of the organisation Beyond Borders. Officially founded in 2010, Haiti Partners comprises sister organisations in Haiti and in the U.S.. One of its co-founders and several staff members have been working with a large network of partners in Haiti since 1991, primarily in the areas of education and leadership development, including adult literacy programs, community schools, teacher and community leader training, and providing access to education for children in domestic servitude.

Figure 3: Habitat Santo Village Streetscape: Residents chose their house paint colours and have planted gardens (July 2012, five months following move-in). Source: Engle, 2012.

Haiti Partners agreed to take on the community governance project, insisting that its scope (and budget) be increased to allow for the use of two methods that are the cornerstone of

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[6] Interview with Mimz Diño, community engagement officer, Habitat for Humanity, July, 2012.
[7] Interview with Claude Jeudy, July, 2012.
[8] "T-shelters" refers to Transitional Shelters, Temporary Shelters, transitional houses, consisting primarily of tent-like materials. Many have not withstood post-earthquake hurricanes.

much of Haiti Partners' work: Circles of Change and Open Space.[9] [10] Freirean thought and practice have influenced Haiti Partners' colleagues' work and these methods over many years.[11] The underlying principles of the Good Neighbor project were that village residents would train together to develop collaboration and dialogue skills and that the 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, the residents themselves discussed and designed the principles and practices for a governance system, and Haiti Partners staff facilitated the process.[12]

Good Neighbor project objectives are:

- Nurture a community culture of respect, inclusion, transparency, and authentic dialogue.
- Develop a leadership structure/decision making body in Santo.
- Carry out participatory action planning to determine community priorities and strategies to achieve goals, emphasising the transition in ownership from HfH to the community.
- Establish community governance policies (rules and regulations).
- Mobilise a group of leaders who can monitor Santo.
- Carry out community education.

The key milestones of the Good Neighbor project are set out in Table 1. 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 4 depicts the community governance bodies and structure.

Table 1: Good Neighbor project key milestones. Source: Haiti Partners.

Date	Milestone Event
May 7, 2012	Good Neighbor trainings on communication and dialogue begin.
June 25-29, 2012	Open Space sessions on the 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.

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[9] 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).
[10] The governance project contract was $70,000.
[11] Paulo Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2011, original 1970) has been particularly influential.
[12] Interview with Abelard Xavier, lead facilitator of the Good Neighbor project, Haiti Partners, July, 2012.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SIDDEVAS' largest representative body; responsible for electing the Village Council, general information sharing & mediating disputes neither the Village nor the Ethics Committee can resolve. Meets once a year, unless the Village Council calls a special meeting.

- Active members: Santo residents, block representatives, graduates of BV training
-Supporting members: Institutional stakeholders [Kazèk*, Habitat, Haiti Parters, etc.]
-Associate members: non-resident stakeholders, [neighbors, etc.]

VILLAGE COUNCIL

SIDDEVAS' executive body; responsible for upholding Code of Conduct, creating and executing 2 year development plans, building and maintaining external relations, fundraising for activities, etc. Meets twice a month.

- 13 members: 1 Kazek, 3 supporting members, and 9 members of the General Assembly who are 18+ years old

ELECTION COMMISSION

Created every two years solely to execute elections.

- non-candidate members of General Assembly

- appointed by Village Council

Ethics COMMITTEE

Monitors activities, reports and makes recommendations to General Assembly, settles disputes when Village Council can't. Meets every 3 months.

- Appointed by Village Council
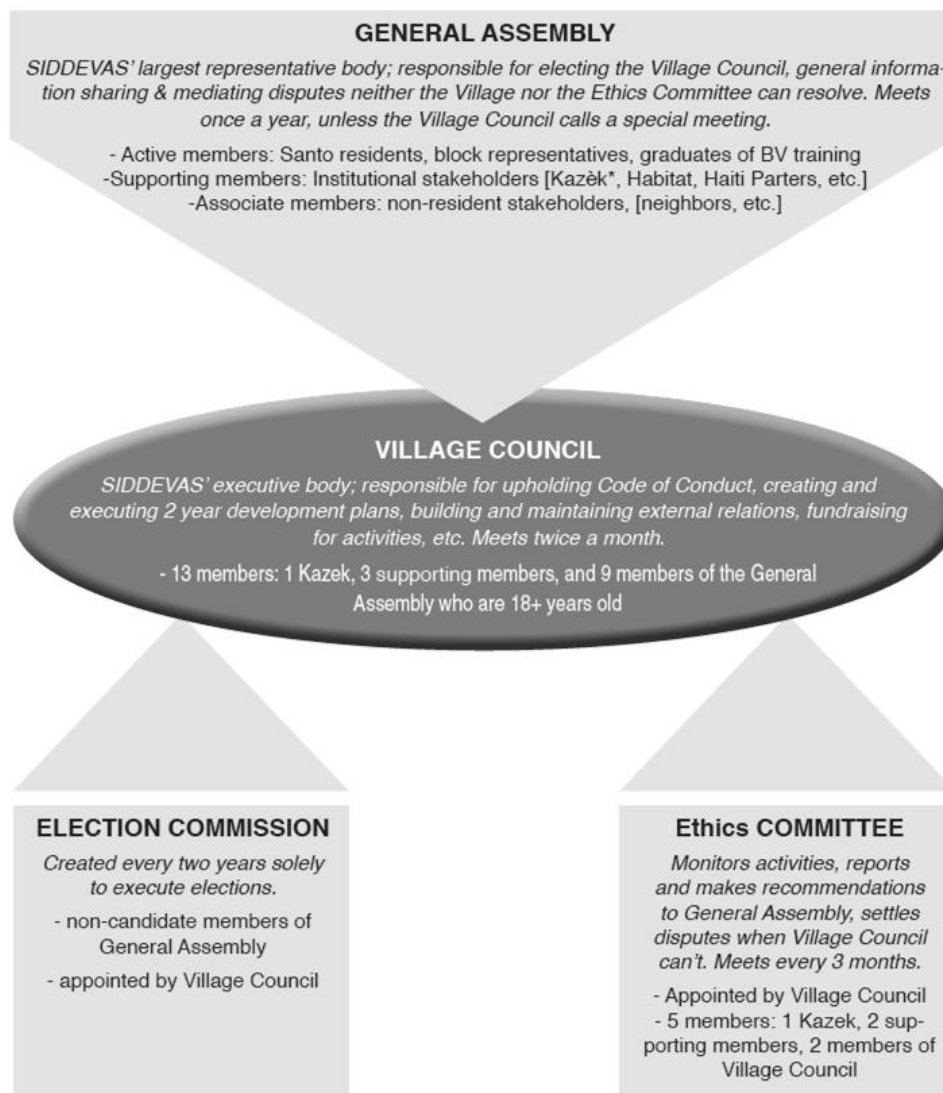- 5 members: 1 Kazek, 2 supporting members, 2 members of Village Council

Figure 4: Community governance structure established through Good Neighbor project (Haiti Partners) *local authority. Source: Haiti Partners.

The Good Neighbor Project through a Collaborative Rationality Lens

To assess longer-term impacts of the project, we analyse the Good Neighbor project through the lens of Innes and Booher's (2010) collaborative rationality DIAD theory (which examines the variables of 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. About 60 percent were women. Participants were not paid for their involvement.

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 spaces in the land behind their homes. Project meeting notes and interviews show that participants were aware that collaborative efforts and coalitions are necessary to tackle their problems. The recognition of interdependence required for collective change is formalised 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 neighbouring communities, and seats on the Village Council are reserved for representatives of local government, HfH, and an "other local organisation". Village Council members showed a nuanced understanding of interdependencies in their first meeting's discussion of how to handle a resident breaking the rules through unauthorized construction of new toilets. While they recognized a ubiquitous discontent among residents with latrine construction, they were concerned that "turning a blind eye" to construction violations by individual households would set a dangerous precedent. This discussion led them to tackle the latrine problem on a Village-wide scale more quickly. 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 interdependence 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, even though they had been invited to do so. 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. However, in the first months of governance implementation in early 2013, the local government representative who was appointed to those seats had been out of the country and had not taken part in these meetings. The Village Council asked that an alternate representative be appointed.

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 worldviews (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 organisational 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 stated 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, and 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 and we then identify additional heuristics that would help further system adaptations and systemic change.

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. Most residents did not know each other prior to the earthquake. Data collected from interviews, meeting observations, document study, and informal discussions reveal commonly-held participant values, which are: solidarity (the importance of relationships, community cohesion, harmony, equality, fairness, and generosity), education – for oneself and one's children, having a voice, meeting basic needs (including housing, health, water, food, livelihoods, sanitation), sense of personal responsibility, and 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 (fig. 5), and the Founding of the SIDDEVAS organisation. 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 gave speeches 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 organisation'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 instil 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."

Figure 5: First Village Election: Residents democratically elected the first Village Council in September 2013, for a two-year term. Source: Haiti Partners.

Discussion

Our findings point to four early lessons from the Santo Good Neighbor project for further developing participatory community governance in Haiti.

Lesson 1: Collaboratively Rational Processes Can Support Adaptations and Systemic Change.

Good Neighbor 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, organisational 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 meanings 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. A key challenge will be maintaining engagement of local government. It will be important not only for government representatives to take part in Village Council meetings, which in the early stages of the project has not occurred, but also for service provision to be enhanced, such as policing and electricity services.

Lesson 2: Collaborative Governance Is Needed to Translate Social Resilience Into 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 and capabilities are spent primarily on subsistence and survival. To get beyond this situation, new forms of collaborative working can bring together community groups, NGOs and government, as has occurred to some degree with the Good Neighbor Governance Project. It is likely to be a challenge to maintain participation by Santo residents, particularly if their voices are unable to reach and influence key decision-makers. The role of external NGOs can help bridge government with people at Santo, but it will be important for people to gain voice and access directly, as well as the freedom to realise their capabilities so that they are not dependent on external NGOs (Sen, 1999). Because there are thousands of NGOs that operate in Haiti and their capacities and performance are highly uneven, engaging any NGO in governance is certainly not a guarantee of success. It is important that NGOs selected to be involved in developing governance projects have a good reputation and established track record in Haiti for collaborative working and who are skilled at matching strengths of informality with social resilience. Social resilience is not enough, particularly in Haiti, where it can be a euphemism for self-reliance. But social resilience that is harnessed in collaboratively rational ways has the power to strengthen individual and collective capabilities.

Lesson 3: Multiple Operative Forms of Governance Should Be Enabled.

Learning from this local collaborative governance process has relevance for institutional planning and design in Haiti. Decentralisation, while planned for in the 1987 constitution, has never been fully implemented. The Good Neighbor project provides an example of decentralised local governance that may be scalable and appropriate for adaptation elsewhere in ways that support the construction of collaborative and adaptive governance capable of empowering citizens and community groups. Efforts at decentralisation in Haiti should take into account the reality of social resilience and sophisticated informality of citizens. 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.[13] We suggest that the experience of Habitat Santo Village, and other initiatives of collaborative governance, inform the institutional design and policy development for Haiti's governance decentralisation. At the same time, it will be important to guard against bottom-up forms of autonomous governance being taken by the government as a way to justify and legitimise its limited involvement in local-scale action. Replacing the central State in this way can potentially backfire by decreasing its responsibility even further.

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

Lesson 4: Language Matters.

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. While reliable statistics on Haitians' language skills lack, according to an astute Haitian colleague (and corroborated by many others), "about 15 percent of Haitians understand French, about five percent can speak it, and there are remote places in the countryside where people do not even know that it exists."[14] Nearly all Haitians speak and understand Haitian Creole. 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 from French or English 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 organisations 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.

Given that our study ended just as the new community governance was established, our lessons are still preliminary and further studies will be needed to assess how the system operates over time, and with the addition of the 145 new families in 2013.

Conclusions

In this paper, we investigated the case of the Good Neighbor Governance Project within Habitat Santo Village via the lens of collaborative rationality. 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 the establishment of this system. It has led to systemic changes, both within the involved NGOs and in Habitat Santo Village. As such, our analysis suggests that there is much to learn from the Habitat Santo Village project, and while there are aspects to improve on, (e.g., local government participation in Village governance meetings) and potentials to avoid (e.g., reproduction of wider inequalities within the new governance system), strong fundamentals are present: an embedded collaborative network of NGOs and local community groups, and a stated commitment by local government to take part in Village governance. Also and importantly, the national government and international agencies have played a role in supporting the project. The skills and knowledge brought to bear in this project of managing complexity and facilitating communications contribute to making this a demonstration project that could well be adapted to other community governance contexts.

While the governance project demonstrates strong early results, the situation remains highly precarious, particularly given the pressures of everyday survival and the lack of access to adequate resources and services for most people in and around the Village. Pressing questions include the following. How will the Village finance operations management, maintenance, and service provision, given the lacks of precedence for paying 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? What will the Village look like in five years, and how should Village leaders best contribute to shaping its evolution? How will it be possible to realise the needed facilities drawn up in the master plan, such as a school, market, and community centre? Addressing these and other questions is likely to quickly

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[14] Interview with Frémy Cesar, July, 2012.

become important, particularly since the Village population is increasing and there is not enough new housing being constructed in the vicinity to relieve demand pressures. Because Habitat Santo Village is one of few large post-earthquake housing developments in Haiti, further research that tracks its evolution can potentially provide valuable contributions to planning and policy in Haiti as well as other post-disaster settings.

Acknowledgements

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Authors' Biographies

Jayne Engle is an urban planner and doctoral candidate of the McGill University School of Urban Planning. She has experience in urban revitalisation, participatory community development, and sustainability planning and policy in nongovernmental organisations, and in public and private sectors. She has lived and worked in Eastern and Western Europe, the U.S., and most recently Montréal, Canada. Her doctoral research is on community development collaborations in post-earthquake Haiti.

Lisa Bornstein is a Professor of the School of Urban Planning at McGill University. Her published research focuses on the politics of planning, with work on collaborative planning, public participation, institutional reform and public deliberations around large-scale urban projects, international development programs, and policy reform. Prior to joining McGill, she spent 7 years teaching at the University of Natal, Durban (South Africa). She is director of the SSHRC-funded Community-Universities Research Alliance, Making Megaprojects Work for Communities.

Gonzalo Lizarralde is a Professor at the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal. He has extensive experience in consulting for architecture and construction projects and has published important research in the fields of low-cost housing and project management. Dr. Lizarralde has taught at the University of Cape Town (South Africa); McGill University, Université de Montréal, and Universidad Javeriana (Colombia) and has given lectures in universities in Europe, the U.S. and Latin America. Dr. Lizarralde is director of the IF Research Group (grif) of the Université de Montréal, which studies planning and development processes of construction projects.