



**Rethinking Ruralities:
Social reconstruction and aid provision following the
2016 earthquake in Canoa, Ecuador**

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List of Acronyms

CGO	Coffee growers organisations
GAD	Gobierno autónomo descentralizado – Autonomous decentralised government
ICPR	Index of perceived community resiliency
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PDOT	Plan de desarrollo y organización territorial – Development and territorial organisation plan
SENPLADES	Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo - National Secretariat of Planning and Development of Ecuador
SGR	Secretaría de Gestión de Riesgos – Risk Management Secretariat

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Abstract

This research paper looks at the different factors that shaped the perceptions and practices of residents and aid providers in Canoa, Ecuador after the earthquake of April 2016. The paper focuses on the earthquake's social rather than economic impact. The analysis focuses on three main elements that shaped perceptions and practices. The three elements are: conceptions of social vulnerabilities beyond the notion of poverty; the influence that the relationship between people and places has on people's perceptions of risk and aid provisioning; and the discourse of the resilience approach to aid as a way to empower affected populations after a disaster. By applying a qualitative methodology to analyse Canoa as a typical example of small rural town in Ecuador affected by the earthquake in 2016, this paper highlights the importance of a contextualised study of social domains hit by earthquakes.

Relevance to Development Studies

This paper is a contribution to research in the field of disaster studies. With a specific focus on local responses, the paper seeks to bridge the gap between practice and discourse by attributing the perceptions and cultural specificities of local populations with the agency to affect risk management policies; without undermining the pivotal role than Governments and international aid providers have to play in post-disaster aid and development programs.

Keywords

Disaster, earthquake, Canoa, rurality, homogenisation, social vulnerability, social resilience, aid provision, empowerment, community participation.

Chapter 1 When the earth shocked Canoa

1.1 Research statement and questions

On April 16, 2016 the lives of residents in the north part of the coastal region of Ecuador were dramatically changed. A devastating earthquake caused by the clash and sink of the Nazca plate under the Continental Plate hit the provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas. The event lasted about 75 seconds, time enough to affect cities but, above all, destroy small villages. At a national level, the total amount of dead people raised up to 663; missing people to 12; displaced people for lost or damage in their houses/business were 80.000; affected dwellings were around 20.000 (SENPLADES 2016: 32-34). As a consequence, the outcomes of the earthquake mobilised aid at national and international levels.

According to the National Secretariat of Planning and Development of Ecuador (SENPLADES), after the earthquake, poor populations were the most affected, particularly those living in rural areas. Canoa, a small village of Manabí was considered among those zones. Its particular location in the coastal region and therefore in the Ring of Fire of the Pacific Ocean, makes Canoa a place where earthquakes are likely to happen periodically (Theurer et al. 2017); placing its population at a constant risk. Despite the poor information system related to small villages like this one, local news and data collected by volunteers and NGOs that worked there after the seism, stated that about the 80% of the infrastructure in this town was damaged¹. Likewise, according to local authorities, the fatalities reported by the national government were 36 yet, this number may be underestimated as many bodies were collected by family members before the final census was done. However, the different characteristics in the socio-spatial composition of the town were not taken into account to address aid provisioning programs and policies.

Canoa, a small rural settlement located in the northern seaside of the country that was particularly affected by the disaster; was changed in many different ways. Firstly, regarding its physical morphology and economy as about the 80% of the buildings in the town were destroyed. Secondly, the social dynamics in Canoa were transformed as “conflicts and disasters are breakpoints of social order with a considerable degree of chaos and disruption” (Hilhorst 2018: 7). Given that the aim of this paper is to look at the social structures in the town after the quake happened rather than the economic impacts of it, I will focus the analysis on three important factors that shaped social practices and perceptions of residents and aid providers in Canoa after the seism of 2016. The first one is related to social vulnerabilities that go beyond poverty; the second one is linked to the influence that the relationship between people and places have in peoples’ perception of risk and aid provisioning; the last factor is associated to the resilience approach to aid discourses as a way to empower affected populations after a disaster occurs.

To do that, it is imperative to understand that interventions in Canoa were guided by two main discourses. Firstly, one that focused on the economic and physical damage caused by earthquakes; perceiving urban settings to be more exposed than rural ones (Liu and Wang 2015), which in turn, overlooks contexts in peripheral areas. Secondly, one that centres its narratives on the idealisation of ruralities as natural landscapes where everyday practices are involved in socially cohesive activities that make coexistence in those places easier than in cities (Clope 2003: 1). However, both discourses neglect the fact that ruralities have greater sensitivity to the consequences of earthquakes due to social vulnerabilities influenced by low

¹ Final report of Saman Proyect written by Collectivo Madre Tierra and shared to me during fieldwork in Canoa.

income per capita, limited diversification in economic activities and, poor provision of public services (Liu and Wang 2015: 89-96).

Even though human exposure to suffer damage may be greater in crowded areas, the degree of economic and infrastructural development of a place cannot be seen as a reason to downplay ruralities. Rural populations are impacted by relations of power, marginalisation and poverty issues that fashion their responses to disasters and to the policies and programs implemented shocks. There is also a tendency to consider ruralities in developing countries solely as impoverished areas, without linking these issues to other specific vulnerabilities within each place. This heterogeneity within communities means that people's perceptions and beliefs regarding risk and aid provisioning are shaped by the physical places in which they live. Therefore, contextualised approaches to post-earthquake settings need to be acknowledged by government officers, aid providers and researchers in order to better comprehend the realities of residents who they are trying to assist with risk mitigation in the face of a new seism.

By taking Canoa as a typical example of small rural town in Ecuador affected by the earthquake in 2016, this paper will highlight the importance of a contextualised study of social structures hit by earthquakes. Based on findings obtained by applying qualitative research methods, I will look at the aforementioned factors that fashioned perceptions and practices of residents and aid providers in Canoa after the disaster took place while revising concepts associated to social vulnerability, aid provisioning and resilience.

The main question of this research is:

What are the different factors that shaped the perceptions and practices of residents and aid providers in Canoa after the earthquake of April 2016?

To address the central question, three sub question are formulated:

- What are the factors that reproduce social vulnerabilities aside the notion of poverty in Canoa?
- How has the relationship between people and places influenced residents' perceptions about their exposure to aid provision and future risks from natural disasters?
- How is resilience represented in the discourse surrounding aid practices in Canoa?

1.2 Chapter overview

To answer the formerly questions, this research paper has been organised a follow. After a brief description to locate Canoa in Ecuador I will conclude this section by stating the methodology used for data collection and a reflection about my positionality as researcher. Chapter two provides, in a nutshell, the explanation of concepts used in the analysis of the case of Canoa, namely, social vulnerability, empowerment and community participation. Chapter three will look at the homogenisation of ruralities and lack of information as vulnerability triggers beyond the notion of poverty. It highlights the disconnect that often exists between small rural areas and government and non-government institutions. Chapter four starts by analysing different perceptions of residents in Canoa regarding the earthquake of April 2016 and the aid they received as a helpful tool to understand peoples' behaviour and responses after the disaster. It will then connect those perceptions to the physical space where residents experienced the shock. Considering the notion of place as socially constructed, this part of the paper shows how different physical spaces influence differently the relationship between people and aid provision. Chapter five will continue the analysis of the previously mention relationship by looking at community participation and

empowerment as principal elements of the current resilience approach applied to link relief to recovery assistance in the disaster management scholarship. Finally, chapter six will contain conclusions and recommendations for further research.

1.3 Situating Canoa

Canoa is a rural settlement located in Ecuador's northern Manabí province. Its population is approximately 7.000 people, split between the town centre and the periphery. Due to its geography and nature, Canoa's economy is based on livestock, agriculture, fishing, construction and tourism services. However, like most of the rural parishes in Ecuador, the lack of formal employment, basic services and sanitation is an issue that has deepened for years impoverishment and inequalities in the area. As showed in Map 1.2 and Map 1.3, the Ecuadorian poverty report² categorised Canoa as a poor rural settlement where between 49% and 60% of the population are considered as poor in terms of consumption capacity; and between the 80,1% to 100% are considered as poor regarding their basic coverage of needs (Molina et al. 2015: 39-83).

Map 1.1
Canoa



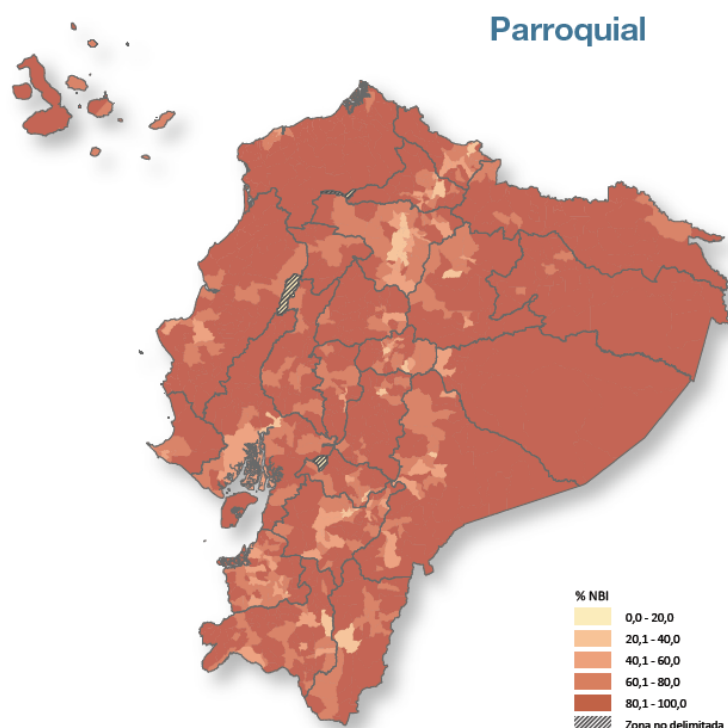
Source: GAD Canoa (2016)

² The Consumption Poverty Report Ecuador 2006-2014 is based in the census of 2010 and the survey of living conditions was made in 2013-2014. While looking into income poverty rates (monetary poverty) and poverty rates related to unmet basic needs (structural shortcomings) the report captures different objective dimensions of well-being in people's live.

[illegible]

4

Map 1.3
Map of unmet needs at a local level



Source: Housing and Demographic Census Ecuador 2010 as presented in Molina (2015: 39)

1.4 From aid provider to researcher in Canoa

Conducting social research in zones that have been recently affected by socio-environmental disasters exposes researchers to contexts that are experiencing constant change. Social practices are being continuously reframed by the different stages that follow disaster like relief, reconstruction or recovery, which all shape the outcomes of research. These processes can also make researchers readjust their methodology design in the early stages of research depending on the reality-momentum of the place where the study is taking place.

People's perceptions played a key role in the study of their vulnerabilities. Their personal relationships with the spaces where they live, the aid they receive, and disaster itself all shaped social structures in Canoa after the 2016 earthquake. Particular community dynamics meant that my methodological approach continuously evolved during this study. For example, interviewees were always in groups and participants felt more confident responding to questions directed at someone else rather than themselves, which altered the way I asked questions. I therefore used flexible qualitative tools like participatory observation and semi-structured interviews in my fieldwork. Secondary data was obtained through online research and literature reviews.

1.4.1 Why qualitative research?

I used qualitative methods for my research because they are useful for adapting to social environments and unearthing their natural dynamics. Qualitative methods have the “capacity to explain how the ‘macro’ (i.e. social class position, gender, locality) is translated into the ‘micro’ (i.e. everyday practices, understandings and interactions) to guide individual behaviour” (Barbour 2008: 4)

Before going into the field, I prepared a small survey and some open questions for the semi-structured interviews. However, the unexpected group dynamics made me realise the need to reframe my initial plan. An exploratory stage of 5 days allowed me to test the initial questions to obtain a better sense of the social dynamics present in the town and to identify relevant issues and possible approaches (Alvesson 2011:10). I soon realised that the relationship of people to the geographical space in which they experienced the earthquake played an important role in shaping their internal perceptions and relationships with aid during the relief process. This shaped the latter recovery stages and allowed me to comprehend peoples' perceptions concerning their own vulnerabilities, the earthquake, and aid provision. These connections displayed specific variations in people's behaviours when interacting with outsiders who came to talk about the earthquake.

Secondly, testing the initial questionnaire showed residents' reactions to formal interviews and surveys. Residents were evidently overwhelmed by the extensive amount of questions they had to answer after the seism, so I switched my interviewing strategy to more informal conversations. Finally, exploring the area showed me that the everyday practices of coexistence were mostly collective. People were always in couples or groups and I could never speak to anyone alone. Consequently, the act of taking one person out of a group to be interviewed could have stressed power relations and drawn a barrier that would have distanced myself from the rest of the group. Equally, this could also have indicated that I felt this person was of greater importance than the others. This could have jeopardised the possibility of building trust, obtaining more spontaneous and honest responses, above all, it could have led me to overlook the influence of these collective dynamics on people's ways of living and the contexts in which their social relations take place.

Therefore, I did not choose this methodology freely. As Barbour states "qualitative research is particularly well suited to studying context. It also excels at illuminating process (...), since it allows us to examine how changes affect daily procedures and interactions" (2008: 6). Due to Canoa's context, this research is mostly built on informal talks and daily participations with groups living in both the town centre and peripheral areas.

Notably, I conducted one structured interview with the head of the town regarding overall vulnerabilities in Canoa and the basic coverage of services, but the rest of the interviews were semi-structured.

1.4.2 Participative observation as an ethnographic tool

Despite ethnography not having a unique definition in social research, it often overlaps with other empirical methodological approaches (Hammersley and Atkinson: 2007: 1-2). Its pragmatism helps to build knowledge from studying part of the "social world (...) in its natural state" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 7). Its main focus is to obtain information via interacting with participants in their daily lives. In disaster studies, ethnography and ethnographic tools are "important in order to grasp how actors in different domains attach meaning to disasters and disaster response and how they influence each other" (Hilhorst 2004: 65).

I therefore conducted ethnographic research in Canoa, in order to Bernard (2011: 256) "[get] close to people and mak[e] them feel comfortable enough with [my] presence so that [I could] observe and record information about their lives". By immersing myself in their daily lives and activities I was able to experience the environment in its normal state. Although, participative observation is often timely, the fact that I spoke the same language, had earlier contact with Canoa, and had experience of the culture, reduced the time needed for my observations (Bernard 2011: 262). I began by giving people time to feel comfortable with my

presence, which allowed me to build the trust needed to allow people to involve me in their activities whilst introducing them to my research.

Urban-rural dynamics within Canoa are of great significance and I therefore chose to investigate both areas of the town. However, Canoa has more than twenty five peripheral settlements spread along its territory, many of which are inaccessible though public transportation. I was therefore unable to get to all of those remote areas. Therefore, based on unsolicited and oral accounts³ (Hammersley and Atkinson: 2007: 99), I got to understand the role of Río Canoa, a peripheral settlement eight kilometers from the town centre where many people from the more inaccessible areas gathered to attend meetings. The strategic selection of Río Canoa helped me obtain a better picture of the context and perceptions regarding the earthquake across the periphery. Moreover, after the disaster Río Canoa also hosted two camps for affected populations and several relief and early recovery projects. It was also a place where I had worked previously and knew gatekeepers that could facilitate my interactions with people. I chose to Río Canoa as the peripheral area to contrast with the urban town centre of Canoa. I aimed to explain the differences in the urban-rural situations and the heterogeneity of rural settings without resorting to generalizations or homogenized understandings of either area.

1.4.3 About my positionality, challenges and unforeseen circumstances

“Recognizing positionality as a central component in the production of knowledge entails a self-introspective or critical reflexive exercise which is necessary to identify power relations embedded in the research process” (Crossa 2012: 114). My positionality as an outsider from an urban setting and studying abroad was also influenced by my background and previous experience in the place where I conducted the fieldwork. Four months after the earthquake struck, I went to Canoa as a volunteer to provide aid in a camp and became involved in early recovery projects intended to raise funds; create and support microenterprises; provide skill’s training and accompany families throughout the post disaster period. Consequently, the first expected challenge to overcome was people’s perceptions of me as an aid provider rather than researcher. It was important to clarify the reasons for my presence to prevent residents from interacting with me as an aid worker from an international organization.

A third unforeseen challenge that I experienced was that people failed to recognize me as Ecuadorian, despite my nationality and previous experience in Canoa. It was surprising to realise that my physical appearance and the connections residents made between outsiders and aid providers, led them to see me as a foreigner, which had a large impact on my research. The widespread vulnerability has resulted in many people trying to evoke sympathy to obtain material assistance from foreigners. For example, many boys in the area attempt to charm foreign girls with tales of struggle and adversity in order to get assets that improve their living conditions. I felt that people’s perception of me as a foreigner often affected their responses to my questions in ways that made their instrumentalisation of their victimhood very evident. The vulnerabilities have also resulted in the intensification of youths involved in drug dealing in the town centre. Interviewing them represented an exposure to danger that affected my overall fieldwork because the need to constantly be in a state of alert mode made me physically and mentally exhausted, which impacted my fieldwork.

³ “In everyday life, people continually provide accounts to one another: retailing news about ‘what happen’ on particular occasions, discussing each other motives, moral character, abilities and so on (...) oral accounts (...) can be stimulated by a variety of motives, including the obligation to relay news: gossip is integral to human social relations. Ethnographers may find ‘naturally occurring’ oral accounts a useful source both for direct information about the setting and of evidence about the perspectives, concerns, and discursive practices of the people who produce them” (Hammersley and Atkinson: 2007: 99).

Chapter 2 Useful Concepts

Disasters used to be conceptualised as unexpected calamities originated by natural hazards that suddenly affected structures and the economy of the place in which it occurred. During the last thirty decades, the study shifted the focus to the close relationship between natural hazards and the social consequences that this kind of shocks generates; linking environmental events to human actions. Labelling such events as socio-natural or socio-environmental disasters. As stated by Mena in his study of socio-environmental disasters in high intensity conflict scenarios:

Socio environmental disasters as well as conflicts, result from a complex combination of multiple factors. On the one hand, natural events have the potential to damage property, produce social and economic disruption, cause death or injury, and environmental degradation (...) On the other hand, vulnerable human populations lack the mechanisms, response institutions, resources, and knowledge to prevent being affected by or to mitigate the impact of socio-natural hazards (2018: 33-34)

To respond the questions addressed and understand the factors that shaped perceptions and practices of social actors in Canoa after the earthquake of April 2016, a revision of the concepts of vulnerability, community and resilience in aid provision is accurate. In that regard, this chapter will start by conceptualising social vulnerabilities; differencing it from the notion of poverty in order to support the argument made about the existence of various elements that, aside from poverty, can increase people's exposure to natural hazards. Then, I will introduce the concept of community as a rarely problematised terminology which usage has led to generalise populations without problematising its context and consider its social domains⁴. Finally, to link the aforementioned terminology to the case studied in this paper, I will revise the debate regarding participation and empowerment as core elements of the currently used resilience framework to aid provision in disaster studies.

2.1 Social vulnerability and disasters

As argued by Cannon, vulnerability, as many concepts used in the development field, is at risk of being overlooked without any problematisation (2017:1). Although widely known conceptualizations of vulnerability agree with this author in the sense that "it is the potential of an entity to suffer harm" (Cannon 2017:1); to comprehend social vulnerabilities related to disasters, an understanding of the causation of such harm in the social domains is essential (Blaikie et al. 2004; Adger 2006; Fuchs et al. 2011; Rubin and Rossing 2012).

Blaikie et al. (2004) studied the idea of vulnerability as a line through which disasters should be addressed. He conceives disasters as "a complex mix of natural hazards and human action...not a single, discrete event" (2004: 5). Suggesting that disasters disrupt economic and social relations not only at a macro level but micro levels where the most adverse effects are usually concentrated in vulnerable populations. Consequently, the status of people before the disaster linked to the political, economic and social situation in the place it happens is highly important when it comes to understand social affections and recovery processes.

Another characteristic of social vulnerability is that it can be studied only in relation to a particular hazard (Blaikie et. al 2004; Cannon 2017), therefore the presented research paper will focus in social vulnerabilities related to earthquakes.

⁴ Social domains are conceptualised as "areas of social life that are organised by reference to a central cluster of values, which are recognised as a locus of certain rules, norms and values implying a degree of social commitment" (Hilhorst 2004: 57)

Earthquakes conceptualised as “energetic natural events that occur irrespective and independently of social action and any modification of the environment” (Blaikie et al. 2004: 237). They occur without warning; regardless of human intervention and; have outcomes that are intrinsically linked to spatio-temporal dynamics, as well as the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural contexts. However, while studying social domains after earthquakes, scholars have tended to focus mainly on urban settings over rural ones because of the “high density of populations combined with the large number of valuable society resources” (Liu and Wang 2015: 89).

A multidisciplinary understanding of vulnerability refers to physical and social structures susceptible to damage. This research will focus on the social component. Social vulnerability will be understood as the threats faced by people and social domains from natural hazards because of human actions, the influence of specific cultural, social, political and economic frameworks (Cannon 2017). This conceptualisation involves the notion of poverty, analysed through Sen’s capabilities approach as valid linkage of this cluster of frameworks with peoples’ vulnerabilities. Poor people are undoubtedly hit hardest by disasters and struggle with recovery. Nevertheless, poverty is also the product of a variety of elements that restrict people’s freedoms. Consequently, poverty and vulnerability need to be understood as separate but related phenomena. Whilst poverty is static, vulnerability is dynamic and shows changes over time. It “is an ex-ante and ex-post state associated with the probability of falling below a minimum threshold of wellbeing” (Vatsa 2004: 8). A failure to separate these concepts could result in the homogenization of targeted populations and the overlooking of essential contexts that are important for the successful provision of aid and implementation of recovery and mitigation programs (Vatsa 2004; Moser 1998). Therefore this paper, by evidencing the concurrence of more factors other poverty in the increase of people’s vulnerability, follows Vatsa’s approach and considers both terms as related yet not equal.

2.2 The notion of community in a nutshell

Community is a commonly used term in development studies. Its semantic flexibility means that the term “can be demographically constructed, gendered, geographically bounded or framed by diverse interests, practices, concepts, beliefs and/or cultures. It can also be temporary or permanent”⁵. The term is rarely problematized in disaster studies despite its common usage as a concept to justify development discourses and social interventions and programs. The term is embedded with internal chaos, power relations and marginalisation (Berner and Phillips 2005: 24). This ambiguity increases the need for a wholly contextual understanding of communities since, although the term is usually taken to describe a whole group of people, these groups are neither homogeneous nor do they operate as a single harmonious unit.⁶ Therefore, by studying a rural setting, this piece of work will highlight differences within one group of affected population as well as the different meaning constructions made around the term in order to rout post-earthquake aid interventions.

Community is rarely problematized in disaster scholarship because communities are usually divided between urban and rural. This would seem to indicate that geographic location alone could explain why some social phenomena occur differently across different places. Often, urban settings are characterized as places where diverse economic activities take place and people have a greater range of labour opportunities. They are also

⁵ Taken from the essay titled “The Truth About Community Participation”. Final assessment of the course “Poverty, Gender and Social Protection”. Term II. ISS-2018

⁶ Taken from the essay titled “The Truth About Community Participation”. Final assessment of the course “Poverty, Gender and Social Protection”. Term II. ISS-2018

characterised as areas where more prominent and complex physical structures are built, meaning that the risks of people getting injured or dying in the event of an earthquake; as well as material damages occurring are higher (Cutter et al. 2016: 1238; Liu and Wang 2015: 89). On the other hand, rural areas are considered as peripheral places where economic activities are usually related to agriculture (Cannon 2008: 4) and where social cohesion and a shared sense of community are taken for granted (Cutter et al. 2016: 1238; Cloke 2003: 1). Secondly, the argument that urban settings are those where the worst consequences of earthquakes are felt has resulted in disaster studies and official statistics focusing their analyses on urban areas where generally accepted perceptions regarding disaster responses in urban areas are uniformly applied to rural areas. That neglect the differentiated dynamics that exist in areas with different economic and social structures, as well as geographical features (Slama 2004).

Rural areas in developing countries cannot be generalized as remote places where all residents are poor, and perform the same crop growing activities (van der Ploeg 1997: 41). The first significant differentiation within rural communities is that rural settings in developing and developed countries are completely different. We can narrow this to the continental level and say that rural areas are distinct in regions all over the world. Each country has its own particularities within rural settings and the social structures of ruralities in one region are often different from others. These differences could be geographical, or the result of other social and physical configurations and challenges that shape theories aimed at understanding disasters and manage risk.

2.3 Social resilience and the meaning flexibility of its elements

In her analysis of both classical and resilience-focused humanitarian aid paradigms, Dorothea Hilhorst refers to new approaches in relief policies based on the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. In these policies, there is a declaration for “the need to bridge humanitarian action to development and to peacebuilding and the resolution of crisis” (Hilhorst 2018: 3) because crisis (disruption of social order) is understood as a new normality. Although this definition is primarily applied to places where, either because of conflict or climate-change issues, crises have become more common, it can also be applied to post socio-natural disaster scenarios where crises are not necessarily persistent phenomena. Both the concept of aid and its practice have gone through different forms of application. These range from the classic Dunantist model, passing through two generations of the Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development approach (LRRD), to what some scholars call the new humanitarianism approach.

The classical approach focuses on humanitarian aid principles (neutrality, impartiality, humanity and independence) and is guided by the values of emergency and crisis. It involves a leading role of UN agencies and non-governmental institutions in affected zones where they provide immediate assistance over short periods of time. In these periods, governments are barely considered, and people are classified as victims, meaning that their agency is overlooked, and their behaviour is often branded as unreliable (Hilhorst 2018: 5). The Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development approach firstly appeared as a linear model that aimed to connect every phase in post-disaster scenarios through steps to build a continuum between relief and development. This is problematic, because phases in a post-disaster will hardly ever follow a specific order since every scenario is the product of social negotiations and specific contexts (Mosel and Levine 2014; Hilhorst 2018).

Further critiques of the classical approach elaborated on the links between different types of aid. They aimed to provide a more comprehensive approach that related aid to political issues and initial recovery processes (Mosel and Levine 2014: 4). This included recognition of the importance of previous vulnerabilities, as well as the role of the state in

creating long-lasting changes. This challenge to the classical principles of humanitarian aid and the work done by its institutions led to the increased popularity of resiliency-based approaches in post-disaster studies, wherein preparedness, response and development are connected. In this vein, the Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction adopted at the Third UN World Conference in March 2015 (current agreement on risk reduction) calls for the strengthening of resilience. It determines that, the way to achieve such goal is through the reduction of vulnerabilities and the boost of preparedness for response and recovery after shocks (United Nations 2015).

Though resilience may refer to both physical and social structures, I will relate the analysis to the social component of the term. In that regard, social resilience in socio-natural disasters denotes three things. The first is the degree of preparedness that social structures have to face an impact. The second is an emphasis on local capabilities to respond, adjust and continue developing life after the shock. The third is the ability to develop the lessons learned from the disaster by viewing it as an arena of continuous negotiations that can grasp a set of new opportunities, rather than a catastrophe (Ray 2017: 646; Hilhorst 2018: 5). Consequently, coping, adaptive and transformative capacities embedded in social structures appear to be the most significant dimensions of social resilience. The Index of Perceived Community Resiliency (ICPR) (Ray 2017: 647) problematizes multiple elements of social resiliency, including community participation and empowerment. They are understood as subjective considerations and shared values of people and their relationships to geographical spaces, which constitute essential drivers of social resilience in post-disaster settings.

However, those elements are usually romanticised in development discourses as a way to validate the absence of governmental interventions in reducing people's vulnerabilities. For example, narratives around poverty reduction policies or programs, frequently discuss community participation and empowerment by emphasising in the self-sufficiency capacities residents have to overcome difficulties. Thus, self-sufficiency is also idealised to justify the lack or weak interventions in the aftermath of disasters. In that regard, though related to poverty reduction, a compelling explanation of the aforementioned phenomena given by Berner and Phillips while describing the three grounds of participation can be applied to analyse resilience in disaster studies:

... As an end in itself. Freedom to make meaningful choices between various options (...). As a means to ensure quality (...), the key word here is ownership: by being involved (...). As a means to increase efficiency and cut costs by mobilising communities (2005: 18).

“The first ground follows Amartya Sen's theory of human development. The second one supports the idea of real empowerment since the users are also beneficiaries. Finally, the third one is closely related the abuse of the term ‘community participation’⁷ as a way to achieve efficiency rather than empowerment.

Looking at empowerment as the principal end of community participation, Frances Cleaver (1999) argues that “there is a tendency to homogenise and ‘organise organisations’, as well as to work on project-based strategies that tend to be more practical than structural and frequently end up misunderstanding efficiency as empowerment”⁸. This can lead to the institutionalization of participative processes, destroying the very essence of participation through bureaucratization (Cleaver 1999: 560-561). Thus, participation can be easily shaped to convince people to get involved without necessarily empowering them. There are political

⁷ Taken from the essay titled “The Truth About Community Participation”. Final assessment of the course “Poverty, Gender and Social Protection”. Term II. ISS-2018.

⁸ Taken from the essay titled “The Truth About Community Participation”. Final assessment of the course “Poverty, Gender and Social Protection”. Term II. ISS-2018.

interests instilled within the ideas of participation and empowerment that are reflected the growing pressures on governments, civil society and international institutions and actors to provide fast results⁹. However, regarding recovery and specifically reconstruction programs after disasters, the aforementioned critique to project-based community participation processes has been challenged. Davidson et al. while analysing the myths of community participation in post-disaster housing projects, establishes that “the main difficulty in the application of this concept is that community participation has not being defined in terms of what it means on a project environment” (2007:102).

⁹ Taken from the essay titled “The Truth About Community Participation”. Final assessment of the course “Poverty, Gender and Social Protection”. Term II. ISS-2018.

Chapter 3 Social Vulnerability: Causes beyond the notion of poverty

Disasters are no longer conceptualized as purely physical events. They are currently being examined through the lens of a mutual relationship between people and the environment and social vulnerability to disasters is considered as an outcome of human actions (Blaikie et al. 2004: 5; Cannon 2017: 3; Liu and Wang 2015: 88; Mena 2018: 34). Social vulnerability attempts to look at the causes that put people and social domains at risk of harm (Cannon 2017: 1). There are factors other than poverty that influence vulnerability such as: marginalization, lack of data, weak policies or lack of contextualization problems. This chapter aims to study vulnerabilities' triggers beyond poverty and understand them as complex, socially embedded and contextually framed phenomena. By analysing Canoa as a poor rural setting severely affected by the earthquake of April 2016, I will firstly, address how homogenization and the lack of information are issues that deepen social vulnerabilities among residents. Then, I will link homogenization issues to the absence of necessary data as obstacles that can constraint the mitigation of further risks as well as peoples' exposure to natural hazards.

3.1 The problem with homogenizing ruralities in earthquake studies: Looking at Canoa as a heterogeneous rural settlement.

Ecuador is organised in regions that contain provinces that encompass groups of cantons that are formed by both an urban part and rural parishes¹⁰. According to the title V in the Constitution of Ecuador, each province, canton and rural parish is autonomous and decentralised (National Assembly, Government of Ecuador 2008). This means that although governments at a canton level have many competencies over parishes, those organisations rely on self-management and tax collection from its residents. Thus, small cantons and peripheral villages are usually at a disadvantage compared to big cantons. This means that their preparedness and mitigation capacity, as well as their ability to cope with the consequences of disasters are almost -if not entirely- absent (Cutter et al. 2016: 1238). Therefore, the previous differentiation becomes relevant to this study because it gives the first insight into the framework in which the earthquake happened.

Canoa is the rural parish of Canton San Vicente located in Manabí province. Despite being a rural settlement, Canoa is split into two subgroups; one mainly located near the beach where more than half of its population lives and the other in the countryside where the rest of the population is dispersed in more than twenty-five villages and peripheral zones (See Map 3.1). While in the former, more people perform activities related to trade, fishing and local tourism, in remote areas residents are usually engaged with agriculture and animal husbandry. However, both nationally and internationally, Canoa is recognised as a touristic place where youth tend to go surfing and partying. The government simultaneously identifies it as a poor rural parish. Both appraisals are too general to describe such a diverse place. Outside of highlighting physical differences, the aforementioned dichotomy had

¹⁰ Here, regions refer to the Amazon, Mountain, Coastal and Insular region or Galapagos; provinces refer to the second largest division; cantons relate to cities within each province and finally, rural parishes to smaller and demographically less dense places that form part of each canton and are located in the countryside. However, it is needed to highlight that parishes in this sense do not have any religious connotation. It is rather used to show an administrative and geographic category of rural settings.

differentiated impacts on the outcomes of the earthquake and the ways in which people coped and adapted after the shock. As Stephen (2004: 114) quotes while suggesting the advantages of treating vulnerability as a science that can construct this subject in a local setting: “adaptations are not characterised by *homogeneity* but their own singular interpretations (...) and by their own context”.

While in peripheral zones, some shared activities were developed as a way of coping with the material and psychological consequences of the disaster, in the crowded area of Canoa activities were influenced by individualism. Marilu, a female farmer from Quito, who had lived in Tabuchila¹¹ for thirteen years, decided to gather farmer women from fifteen different villages around San Vicente after the disaster to sell products as a way of fostering their economic development and, share moments together to release their post-disaster stresses and fears. That is how “Asoproartdul”, association of female farmers, started and developed into an association that is now training its members to provide added value to the products they sell and to get rid of intermediaries whilst sharing knowledge while enjoying their activities.

It was an initiative that appeared from our own ideas. Not because we wanted to attract the attention of aid providers or something like that but because we wanted to be together. Each one of us had their products already. Therefore, after the earthquake, rather than extend our hands to ask for assistance, we worked together. Development projects that are helping us now with the training came after we had set the bases for this association (Marilu 2018, personal interview)¹²

Contrary to that scenario, population in the town centre influenced by uncertainty, displayed a decline in trust between residents and towards authorities (Wamsler 2007: 127). El Guayaco, a man on his 50's who was founder of “*Asociación de Carperos*” (association of people in charge of tent rental at the beach) recognised that after the earthquake, his association as well as others that existed in Canoa disappeared: “we (referring to members in the association) got disorganised after the earthquake. The decrease of tourism and the economic affection after the shock made us focus on improving own lives with the little, we had rather than looking for people to share activities”¹³ (El Guayaco 2018, personal interview).

Summing up, a romanticised of ruralities as in the case of Canoa, may lead to ignore their intrinsic diversities and hence, the how social domains are differently affected by disasters; increasing people's vulnerabilities by neglecting their context. The analysed case showed how urban-rural dichotomies can also occur within a single rural place; influencing the entire spectrum of outcomes and responses in the face of the earthquake. This is why, a uniform reading of ruralities as remote, poor, agricultural and social cohesive places can harm the recovery of affected populations. As different settings are differently affected within rural areas to homogenise them will also trigger people's vulnerabilities.

¹¹ One of the countryside villages in of Canoa.

¹² Personal interview with Marilu, Canoa, 10 July 2018.

¹³ Personal interview with El Guayaco, Canoa, 10 July 2018.

Map 3.1
Peripheral areas in Canoa



Source: GAD Canoa

3.2 Lack of information and loss of social memory as elements that increase social vulnerably.

Time pressures, the crisis and the lack of coordination among institutions involved in relief provision after socio-natural disasters affect the gathering of data that can be used to boost reconstruction efforts and recovery processes (Amin et al. 2008: 4). In remote areas, this issue can be attributed to the aforementioned homogenisation and weak communication procedures among all institutions assisting to update the status of the affections suffered after the sock. As Rubin and Rossing argued while studying national and local vulnerabilities related to disasters in Latin America, “communication and organization networks are often last to be achieved for the poor, leaving them without timely information about how to reduce their risk and protect their assets” (2012: 29). Therefore, the importance of having data and contextualised records of the consequences of disasters is imperative for the success of work involving recovery, mitigation and preparedness for the next shock.

As explained in chapter one, the fact that Ecuador is located in the Ring of Fire of the Pacific Ocean means that its coastal region faces a constant threat of being hit by earthquakes. Indeed, these events have been happening periodically and this is expected to continue (Theurer et al. 2017). However, the important question is whether rural settlements will ever truly recover, and whether their populations ever become resilient and prepared to face future earthquakes.

Despite Ecuador suffered four major coastal earthquakes over the course of the 20th century, there is little information concerning their effects on the social domains within the

affected areas. There is also little information about the prior earthquake that hit Canoa and Bahia de Caraquez (a city located in front of Canoa) in 1998. Material collected from diverse grey sources state that the earthquake had a magnitude of 7.2 in the Richter Scale and 3 people were reported to have died, whilst 61 were injured and 419 structures damaged (Alva 1998; El Tiempo 1998). Newspapers from the time stated that about the 80% of the infrastructure in Canoa was destroyed. Again, there is little information regarding how the social structures were impacted and how residents coped with the consequences of the shock. This is problematic if we are addressing disasters as the consequence of human actions. The absence of such important data negatively impacts the institutional capacity to prepare for and implement social programs aimed at tackling vulnerability both before and after disasters. In the case of Canoa for instance, to compare the human and material losses in both earthquakes shows how residents were not prepared nor were the governmental institutions (Alcarraz 2017).

Indeed, it was not until April 16th 2016 that people, government, researchers and practitioners in Ecuador began to focus on the social exposure of people to the effects of earthquakes and started to develop programs and policies to mitigate risks and ensure preparedness even before the end of the recovery as the national plan of responses to disasters or the local plans for development and territorial organisation, to name some (GAD Canoa 2016; SGR 2018; Ochoa 2017). Nonetheless, it is important to question whether these programs and policies are taking rural context into account. In Canoa, the problem is that failures in data collection processes came up again. During an interview with the head of the town, Juan Carlos Quintero Hernandez, he talked about the vast amount of people that were forced to migrate to bigger cities after the shock; and also, about the immense amount of structural damages in the town. He specifically emphasised the damages to the hotel and rented accommodation sector because his family lost their hotels in the quake. He related both of these with the lack of job opportunities and money in the region. He also ominously stated that there were lots of fatalities in Canoa that were not officially recorded because families took the bodies before the census was taken. Once again, this highlights the disconnect that often exists between small rural areas and government institutions. When I inquired about obtaining official reports and numbers in Canoa to gather information about migration and the socioeconomic impacts on people's livelihoods, Juan advised me to go and check at the municipality over in San Vicente since his local government did not have any of those records.¹⁴ The chaotic reality of the decentralized Ecuadorian system was highlighted when I went to the municipality, only to be told that the national government may have those documents because "Canoa is only a rural parish" and the information is mostly segregated until the canton level, thus, San Vicente.

According to Alcarraz, at the moment of the shock there were no emergency plans in Ecuador or a unified database of means and recourses available to face a similar catastrophe in the future (2017: 12 - 14). Meanwhile, in rural areas, the scarce participation of local actors meant that there were big gaps in the census data concerning registered properties, businesses and assets as well as social affectations in the region. Due to logistical issues, low media coverage and political disputes, responses were centred in urban areas. Humanitarian responses, especially in rural parishes, did not involve local affected populations and overlooked peoples' capabilities to respond in the face of disasters (Alcarraz 2017: 15). It is also important to consider that "under emergency conditions, humanitarian actors necessarily assign a higher priority to the speed of response" (Amin et al. 2008: 4), which means this failure in supporting local participation and gathering information during the immediate aftershock may also be an unintended consequence of emergency assistance

¹⁴ Personal interview with Juan Carlos Quintero. Office GAD Canoa, Canoa, 08 July 2018

processes. This may have important implications on affected population's empowerment to later produce recovery and mitigation practices. This reality hinders the development of policies and programs at a governmental and non-governmental level, as well as the dynamics of the societies they are meant to assist. For instance, the -intentional or unintentional-disregard for people's agency at the moment of entry for aid providers can cause residents to become dependent on aid and the intervention of external actors (Mena 2018: 40); which inevitably has strong consequences for societal structures in the future.

Thus, though the lack of information represents a challenge to researchers, it also constitutes a great challenge for residents to properly recover and prepare themselves for the next shock. Such lack of data harms the development of further policies of risk management that may not take rural context into account, something that affects the place's social memory, which is of great importance. Social memory refers to the set of experiences in the form of past elements and social practices that influence people's actions (Olick and Robbins 1998: 112). A tool that can help residents in future events will necessarily be formed out of previous experiences, especially in high-risk natural disaster areas. However, we must notice that it is unavoidably embedded relations of power and inequality (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004: 349). Canoa and the northern coast of Ecuador are constantly experiencing tremors. In these areas, although people are used to constantly experiencing minor earth movements, nobody expected the catastrophic consequences of the 2016 earthquake, despite the events of 1998. Twenty years later, most of the Canoa's population remains poor; and laws regarding spatial planning and territorial development have only recently started to include risk management measurements. This did not happen after the 1998 earthquake. Furthermore, since there was not much attention given to the event by governmental and non-governmental institutions, nor by the media, residents had to recover as best they could within their already vulnerable living conditions. Thus, there was no time to build collective memories around awareness and preparedness to better organise in the future event of another quake. They instead continued fighting to overcome poverty, which at that time was mainly conceived of as structural and related to damaged buildings. This understanding neglected the multi-variated vulnerability of the population and its social foundations, meaning that, collective memories were framed in such that the disaster of 1998 was quickly forgotten as being something catastrophic, but instead remembered as an extra struggle for people to deal with. A discourse solely focused on poverty reduction rather than vulnerability risks carries a failure to learn from past experiences, and threatens the effective application of resilience building and risk reducing policies in socio natural disaster management.

Chapter 4 Local perceptions, responses and coping strategies in Canoa after the earthquake of April 2016

“Perception, of course, is not knowledge, nor does knowledge necessarily translate into action. Yet, perception is important in understanding why people exhibit certain behaviours.” (Hilhorst and Bankoff 2004: 4)

People’s vulnerability to natural hazards originates in the social relationships that they are continuously building whilst interacting with one another and their environment. Vulnerabilities are socially generated and therefore unequally distributed within populations across time and space (Adger 2006; Ochoa 2017: 213). Post disaster settings expose significant imbalances that highlight notable differences between social processes at national, regional and local levels. For instance, the uneven distribution of power among cantons and parishes led to Canoa receiving less attention than bigger cities (Cutter et al. 2016: 1238). Despite the amount of damage in the town, it was rarely decoupled from San Vicente Canton. The disaster impacted both of these areas in specific ways, yet the generalized response resulted in its widespread social and economic impacts being overlooked. Thus, by understanding vulnerabilities as socially embedded and historically constructed; this section aims to relate part of the social imaginary in Canoa to the different physical areas of the town. The chapter will examine how places influence the ways in which people made sense of the disaster and post-disaster phases. Specifically, I will look at the interaction of social experiences to understand people’s perceptions regarding previous and post disaster conditions. I will then match these local perceptions to physical spaces to comprehend how the place influences people’s notions of risk and exposure and, in turn, how these notions shape local relationships with the provision of aid.

4.1 Social imaginary in Canoa

Collective memory and a lack of information¹⁵ are drivers of a common imaginary that is the internal relativization of the influence of the material world in social life. In zones, collective memories influence people’s perceptions of pre-existing vulnerabilities, the disasters themselves, and ulterior physical and social assistance interventions. In Canoa summing up the challenges put forward by the complex nexus of poverty issues, the unequal distribution of power, and internal conflicts as a homogenized rural parish results in the perpetuation of the narratives and information gaps that ensure that natural disaster responses continue to be structured in the same way as they were in 2016. One of the most evident and damaging examples of a homogenized perception of Canoa was reflected in the number of volunteers and aid workers that solely understood Canoa as a tourist hotspot. Many residents shared this common imaginary where the town’s identity became intrinsically linked to its history as a tourist destination (Pile 1993: 125). The consequence that this had for early recovery programs after the earthquake was that these efforts missed the economic diversities present in the region. Whilst Canoa is undoubtedly renowned as a tourist hotspot, the fact that most of the immediate reconstruction efforts were focused on rebuilding hostels and hotels, as well as providing funding for entrepreneurs that sell food to tourists on the beach, neglected the fact that Canoa is a *seasonal* tourist destination. There are other economic activities in Canoa outside of tourism that contribute to the economy over the whole year, including farming and agriculture, construction, and fishing. Though well intentioned, this provides an example of how the homogenization of a poor rural parish after a disaster led to the

¹⁵ As elements that increase people’s vulnerabilities to disasters which are likely to happen on a regular basis.

inefficient allocation of resources and efforts and complicated the recovery process of the town by creating new forms of social tension between those who received disproportionate amounts of assistance and those who did not.

Over the course of my interactions with Canoa society where I was attempting to better understand the existing social imaginaries I quickly came to realize that, due to the multitude of census and surveys made during the relief period in Canoa (which, moreover, were incoherent given with the lack of existing data), people's answers regarding their livelihoods, assets and economic situations were given automatically, as if they were already programmed in the respondents' brains. Therefore, while conducting the rest of interviews with residents, I decided to ask some participants to spontaneously tell me what came to their minds when I said the following four words: poverty, disaster, aid and recovery. This aim was to take them out of their comfort zone. I observed that it made the interviewees reflect on their automatic recitations of the other aforementioned responses and provide me with more reflexive ones. This interviewing strategy helped me to obtain a broader picture of the social imaginaries built around both individual and collective experiences, and representations in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Given the problems with the generalizing and homogenizing categories that were discussed earlier, it is difficult to combine all the given responses into coherent clusters, as this would not do justice to the multitude of different realities and experiences. However, the following responses seem to reflect in some way or another common perceptions held by most of the participants. The intention is for these responses to give the reader a better understanding of the social imaginaries in Canoa regarding the disaster.

Panchita, a lady in her 60s living in the town centre and whose family trades in groceries, understood poverty as "not having anything to sell"; and disaster as "*que se termina uno*" (the expression she used was to say that disaster is when a person's life is destroyed). Regarding aid she said it is "the fact that people give us something. I do not really know what aid means, but I guess any help given with love". She finally referred to recovery as "outpace the earthquake. Just act as it has never happened"¹⁶ (Panchita 2018, personal interview).

Marixa, a woman who sells typical snacks in a rented space located on the main road of the town where she lives together with her daughter, son-in-law and two grandchildren, related poverty to their actual reality of "not having a house or anything". She saw disaster as "something bad". When asked about aid, Marixa stated, "People who have something should collaborate to those –us– who do not have. Just give us something". Finally, she saw recovery as "moving from not having to having"¹⁷ (Marixa 2018, personal interview).

Mi Nana, a 68 years old lady who sells food next to the school in Río Canoa, acknowledged poverty as "the fact that before the earthquake we used have more profit. Now, for example, a bunch of plantain cost 0,85 cents. It is better to feed the pork with that and later eat the animal rather than sell those plantains". Regarding the disaster she related it to God by saying "my lord punishes us if we misbehave. No matter if only one person is doing wrong things, if someone does bad things everyone pays". She understood aid as *gringos*¹⁸ who came to give us tents and help us after the earthquake". Lastly, she referred to recovery as "being at peace with God again"¹⁹ (Mi Nana 2018, personal interview).

¹⁶ Personal interview with Panchita, Canoa, 16 July 2018.

¹⁷ Personal interview with Marixa, Canoa, 09 July 2018.

Although I met Marixa in a peasants meeting in Río Canoa, she was not a peasant. However, being registered as one gave her the opportunity to get access to social security benefits, she would not have access in other way.

¹⁸ How people in Ecuador refer to foreigners.

¹⁹ Personal interview with Mi Nana, Río Canoa 06 July 2018.

Gustavo, a 29 year old man living in San Jacinto (peripheral village), conceptualised poverty as “what people get if they do not work”. Regarding disaster, he could only describe it with one word, “shocking”. Concerning aid, he related it to “foreigner assistance, houses, tools for work and training”. Finally, addressing recovery he said, “there is no such thing here. Things here are still the same as before the earthquake and it would hardly change. Recovery is supposed to be something good and not the same as before”²⁰ (Gustavo 2018, personal interview).

Cesar, a returning migrant living near the beach in the build-up part of town, conceived of poverty as “not having anything to eat and parents drunk”; and disaster as “in Canoa, only earthquakes”. When it came to aid he reflected on what his employers in Madrid used to tell him “aid is to give people the tools and capabilities so they can learn to do things. Not give water but the well”. Lastly, recovery to him was “reactivation of tourism activities”²¹ (Cesar 2018, personal interview).

These representations not only show the diverse perceptions that residents held about the earthquake and its latter phases of relief and recovery, but also notable differences in people’s mentalities regarding the places where they live. These perceptions illustrate people’s everyday activities, fears, needs and beliefs. They reveal a shift in residents’ perceptions of poverty since local people living in remote areas of Canoa were usually considered to be poorer than those living in the crowded part of the town. The fact of having greater diversity of economic activities for development as well as direct seasonal contact with tourists, made many people in *el pueblo* more financially prosperous than those living in peripheral zones. However, in the face of the earthquake this perception changed. Although poorer in terms of income, many residents living in remote areas maintained access to work and food. This does necessarily mean they had jobs, since work in this case must be understood as the possibility to perform activities related to agriculture and animal husbandry that took place either on their own pieces of land or by selling their labour. It could be argued, then, that after the earthquake, people living in distant villages became the ones with greater opportunities.

Secondly, the responses show how the disaster itself shifted from being an obstacle to becoming a pathway through which people could make social vulnerabilities more visible with a hope of change. The fact that various answers related aid and recovery with gaining “something” shows the trouble that people have in explicitly determining their situations of scarcity and unmet needs. The interviews show that people have started to move on from the earthquake and are now focused on rebuilding their lives; either through “getting things” out of aid providers or making their own opportunities by selling things, performing agriculture, or working in tourism. As witnessed by Wamsler while addressing coping strategies, people are “constantly changing and adapting cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage disaster risk or disaster impacts” (2007: 118). Finally, it is important to contextualise Canoa as a rural town in a Latin American country where religion plays a big role. Indeed, for many people in rural areas, their religious beliefs shaped their justifications for and subsequent reactions to the disaster.

4.2 Can places shape people’s perceptions about disasters?

There are a multitude of factors that influence conceptions of social vulnerabilities, such as power relations, inequalities, individual characteristics of people (race, gender, age, etc.), as well as collective features like cultural values and shared experiences (Cutter et al. 2003: 243; Hilhorst and Bankoff 2004). Studying these elements in relation to earthquake hazard settings

²⁰ Personal interview with Gustavo, Canoa, 12 July 2018.

²¹ Personal interview with Cesar, Canoa, 11 July 2018.

is important to link those subjective realities to the places in which they are happening. Analysing more material components such as physical geography to the study of social vulnerabilities allows us to connect the built environment and geographic location of a place to its social context (Pile 1987: 125). In the case of Canoa, this spatial frame demarcated a clear difference in the ways that residents experienced the earthquake and the ways in which they responded to the early recovery period. The fact that physical effects were lower in peripheral areas made locals living in those places become more focused on using aid to resolve other issues such as improving their skills and obtaining goods for their homes and the tools they need to work. Hence, there was a faster transition from relief to development assistance driven, to a large extent, by the spatial environment. However, this does not mean that structures were not at all affected, some people did lose many material assets. It is just that the proportion of destruction was much smaller than the urban part of Canoa.

Whilst researching social structures in Canoa after the earthquake, I spoke with Rocio²², a woman who is well recognised among inhabitants in the town due to her volunteer work to achieve improvements for people there. Though she left the town one year after the disaster, she is still involved in social programs to help residents in Canoa. Thus, when we met she invited me to join a peasants' meeting she was going to lead in Rio Canoa.

The meeting gathered around 150 peasants from different villages to discuss the peasant's social security insurance (*Seguro Social Campesino*) through which, by paying a small amount of money, peasants get access to health services and social security benefits. The role of Rocio and her committee was to update beneficiaries with new information, take notes of their concerns and complaints about the services they were entitled to receive, and to collect the monthly fee. People began by taking a numbered ticket to determine the order of payment. Although this sounds a quick bureaucratic procedure, it took the whole day. Residents were arriving since early in the morning in order to take good places or ticket numbers, with the knowledge that they would have to spend at least half of their day there. The meeting also involved a set of interactions and social negotiations where people met family members or friends living in other villages, and earned some money and advertised communal activities. Some of them brought typical home-made snacks to sell and others that had vehicles (cars or motorcycles) offered cab services while waiting their turn. There was also a group of young men who were selling tickets for a communal raffle. Thus, rather than being idle, this gathering had become, for many, a space to develop multiple activities, make some money and socialise.

At around 12:30, Rocio's speech started followed by a couple of announcements from other members of the committee. The whole talk lasted one hour and a half before beneficiaries' numbers started to be called. After the committees' intervention, some people who had paid the fee left while others stayed to sell things or only have chats until their friends or family had also paid. Due to the amount of what was happening, I realised that I would not have chance to make individual interviews there nor would I have much time to go deeper in conversations with people. However, it was a good opportunity to collect group perceptions surrounding the earthquake and its pre and post stages, and also schedule meetings for later interviews. As people were moving fast, I started to get involved in collective conversations in which the members were constantly changed. The first chats revolved around the interviewee's curiosity about my presence there. The attendance of an outsider at the meeting apparently intrigued everyone. The chats and gossip that I overheard whilst sitting in the crowd during the speech showed that people were trying to guess whether

²² I met Rocio four months after the earthquake in Saman a camp in which I volunteered. Rocio was a leader in the community but also in the camp. She was in charge of the storage room in the camp and to organise the distribution of goods and groceries (donations) between families living in the camp.

or not my aim was to present a project or program to be implemented in the zone. Because of my previous experience as a volunteer in a camp located in Río Canoa, I was aware of the fact that most of the assistance given in Canoa and its peripheral areas largely came from foreigners, NGO's, national foundations, volunteers and the private sector. Thus, it was easy for people to associate people not related with the Government with aid providers. I confirmed this when Teresa²³ and her sisters told me that I looked like the president of a Foundation from Guayaquil who had given them goods and equipped a camp where some of their family members were hosted together with people from the town centre. They immediately asked me to explain the project I was going to implement, displaying that they had no doubt that I was there to start a program.

Once people who joined the conversations learned the reasons for my attendance, they began to tell me about their experiences during and after the shock. They constantly made connections between aid, their socioeconomic situation, and their surrounding spaces, which, although considered as poorer than the crowded part of Canoa, appeared to be in a better situation at the time. Its distance from the seaside, its fertile land, and the smaller amount of buildings gathered in one place were some of the reasons that made people feel safe in the face of the earthquake.

Based on these inputs, I could later guide interviews with residents in both parts of the town. Advantages seen by people living in peripheral zones at the moment of the earthquake and its immediate aftermath continued to appear alongside contrasting stories of scarcity in the crowded parts of Canoa. The former statement is by no means aiming to build a romantic idea about the peripheral areas. Residents there are consistently deprived of having opportunities to diversify their economic activities as well as to fulfil their basic needs and coverage of their basic services. However, in the immediate aftermath of the disaster and over the relief period, inhabitants in peripheral areas experienced some advantages due to their physical circumstances.

Interviewees likened their relationship with the space to notions of survival. Their physical location seemed to have given them senses of stability, safety and independence during the disaster and relief period. As Knox witnessed in his study of social production of the built environment "all social acts must take place in settings; when these acts are subject to ambivalence, contradiction and conflict (...) setting can help to establish clarity, to suggest stability among flux and to create order amid uncertainty" (1987: 367). Participants reflected over the fact that, due to living there, they at least had food and some natural materials to improve the temporary shelters and assist them in overcoming the peak of the crisis. This made them less reliant on external aid and its conditions at that moment. Mariano (a dweller from Río Canoa who works for a farmer performing agricultural activities) while making an interesting distinction between the types of camps that were built aiming to illustrate part of the aid that was delivered spoke of his community's resilience, saying:

We had our animals and crops to survive and people gave us plastic to set up tents next to our houses (...) In camps built by residents, volunteers, foreigners or NGOs we also got help because, regardless of living there or not, any member of the community could go and benefit from the goods and services they were providing. We did not want to go to the camp set by the government in *el pueblo*²⁴. That was rather a military camp with military forces and police custody that imposed timetables for people who lost everything to perform several activities

²³ Teresa is a lady from another village in Canoa called Río Muchacho who, together with her two sisters, attended the meeting. I realised she kept her attention on me during the whole gathering, however we sat too far from each other to start a conversation. Thus, when Rocío finished her speech I approached Teresa who immediately, offering me some snacks she brought to sell there, started a chat.

²⁴ The way in which he referred to the town centre.

if they wanted to get food and those things they were giving”²⁵ (Mariano 2018, personal interview)

The fact that physical structures and primary economic activities in peripheral zones were less affected than those in the town centre, meant that people were able to overcome the relief period more quickly and start their move towards early recovery. This encouraged them to focus on development strategies such as involving themselves in training programs to improve their skills or starting entrepreneurial activities to diversify possibilities of development for people “*adentro*” or inside; a Spanish word that participants used to differentiate peripheral areas located far from the beach side. Some young people in Río Canoa quickly started to think of alternatives to turn the adversity into opportunities for residents (Aldrich 2012: 4-5; Monllor and Murphy 2017). “Beerkingo”, for example, is an artisanal brewery run by Oswaldo. He is a young local man who bought the business months before the disaster hit Canoa and lost part of it because of the earthquake. However, with the support of the private sector, he was able to repair the damaged structures and continue producing beer. This enterprise prioritises local labour and products, and trains people with skills related to beer production. So far Oswaldo has employed ten people from Río Canoa and buys their materials for beer production from peasants in the area. His idea is “to help people in the periphery to improve the conditions in which they live and lived even before the earthquake”²⁶ (Oswaldo 2018, personal interview).

Next to Beerkingo, young entrepreneur Zeron, started to build a hostel-lodge on his farm as the effects of the crisis decreased. With the support of volunteers, Zeron aims to create a place where he can show tourists a different face of Canoa. While improving people’s skills in construction, he aims to create job opportunities for residents living in the periphery so that they can have more options “inside”. After working most of his life in both agriculture on his land and tourism related activities in Canoa beach, he decided to match those jobs with the aim of bringing tourism to the countryside. “This is a new beginning to do things right. After the earthquake tourists stopped coming and now that tourism activities are starting again, I would like to show people more than only the beach and parties. Canoa is more than that”²⁷ (Zeron 2018, personal interview).

Conversely, if we analyse the crowded part of Canoa, during the relief period and early recovery, scarcity became the rule. After the 80% of the buildings collapsed, most people had no place to live during the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, they did not have anything to eat either and sanitation issues started to increase health problems in the town. Circumstances that forced most people to either join one of the camps, set-up a tent in empty plots once debris were removed or, migrate to another place to be hosted by friends or relatives. Thus, the massive destruction of the space in which they lived shaped internal dynamics among residents and with aid providers. Having to depend on aid for shelter, food, water, hygiene kits and so forth meant that people developed a certain degree of dependency on aid, which, in the long run, seemed to have affected their will to become involved with shared initiatives and foster long lasting changes in the town.

People in the built-up area became more dependent than those in peripheral areas who still had their land to grow food, as well as the choice of joining camps or staying in tents on their own plots, whilst also benefiting from donations. In the part of Canoa located by the seaside, there is no fertile land to grow crops or farm animals, nor any space to place tents next to all of the debris. Furthermore, a rumour spread about the possibility of a tsunami

²⁵ Personal interview with Mariano, Río Canoa, 15 July 2018.

²⁶ Personal interview with Oswaldo in Beerkingo, Río Canoa, 15 July 2018.

²⁷ Personal interview with Zeron, Río Canoa, 18 July 2018.

that scared everyone from engaging in fishing. As Jorge (not his real name), a bar owner on the beach, said:

Before the earthquake me and my cousins used to fish in the sea. Now we are afraid. After the shock we did not went back there (referring to the sea) because you never know if you will come back alive. With these tremors we do not know when the tsunami is coming²⁸ (Jorge 2018, personal interview).

After the earthquake, many inhabitants lost their jobs, businesses, houses, and even family members. Their livelihoods were dramatically altered, meaning that people needed time to resume daily activities for living. Furthermore, their reliance on aid also lasted longer than in remote areas (Mena 2018: 40). There were camps that provided people with shelter and food during the first year after the shock and massive amounts of donated goods that arrived periodically over the first six months. Volunteers, NGO's, religious groups, the private sector, and government officers were constantly visiting the town to distribute products and assistance. However, the fact that much of the built-up part of Canoa was destroyed changed the dynamics between people and the provision of aid. Respondents from this part of the town, were reflexive about the aid they received. A respondent who wanted to stay anonymous for fear of being exposed to governmental officers, said "we got so used to getting things that recently now, that people are not helping us anymore, we can start thinking about doing something (...) Here we got so many things that even to wear brand clothing became important"²⁹(Anonymous 2018, personal interview). Marixa, (the lady who related poverty, aid and recovery to "having something"), said "for a long time we did not need to buy many basic things, just a couple of days ago I threw away the last bag of salt I got from the donations"³⁰ (Marixa 2018, personal interview). Napi, a lady from Esmeraldas³¹ who is currently running a restaurant in one of the principal streets in the town centre said, "people who lived in camps had three meals per day and a place to sleep. Why would they care about working?"³² (Napi 2018, personal interview).

This reliance on aid is by no means a denial of people's agency and capability to cope with adversity. Coping capacity as a dimension of social resilience (Ray 2017: 645) will, in my view, always be present. Even if populations are not prepared to face a disaster, once it hits a place, they do not have a choice other than to cope with it in the best way they can. For some, the way would indeed be to rely on aid for as long as they can whilst for others, coping with adversity may suppose using the aid to overcome the immediate shock and for support while looking for opportunities that can have a long-term impact in improving their lives. As with Napi, El Guayaco, who lost the hostel and house he owned and who, despite having lived in a Governments' camp for one year, started fishing two months after the earthquake to sell what he caught; is currently, adapting a tricycle to distribute coconuts around Canoa and also building small bungalows from cane to host people again.

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that, even though a sense of safety and independence linked to the physical space may have grown during the immediate aftershock in peripheral areas, is not possible to certify that it has continued to persist two years later. Daily activities for recovery and development aid programs have slowly improved peoples' living conditions after the shock in both areas of the town, and diminished the differences that, presented advantages for those living in remote areas in the early stages following the earthquake. The scale is now tipping back to the crowded part of Canoa. Reconstruction

²⁸ Personal interview with Jorge, Canoa, 27 July 2018.

Due to the fact that people working in the bar were involved with drug dealing I chose to protect his name.

²⁹ Personal interview with an anonymous respondent, Canoa, 12 July 2018.

³⁰ Personal interview with Marixa, Canoa, 09 July 2018.

³¹ Esmeraldas is a province located in the north coast of Ecuador.

³² Personal interview with Napi, Canoa, 16 July 2018.

processes, the revival of commerce activities, the slow return of tourists, and the easier access to routes that connect the county to bigger cities, are some of the factors that have helped to revive the crowded part of the town. It is therefore easy to conclude that an analysis regarding the relationship between people and places is a useful step for changing how we evaluate post-disaster reconstruction and recovery programs. The addition of this kind of analysis would guard against generalizations that can blind researchers and policy makers from understanding rural settings in post-earthquake scenarios as arenas where people create their own opportunities.

Chapter 5 Social resilience: Is it likely to be achieved?.

Although there have been many approaches and critiques to aid provisioning built upon the ways in which aid is distributed and delivered, the debate around this topic remains ongoing. While there is still a need focus on people's intrinsic capacities to face, recover and become resilient after an impact; it would be harmful to take this discourse literally and neglect the role of top-down interventions in the recovery process. To do so would risk policies that overlook the importance of support during and after a crisis.

The heritage of top-down interventions from both southern elites and the north on southern "disadvantaged groups" has for decades ignored local contexts and knowledge, as well as people's agency and values, preventing the integration of these factors into post-disaster intervention policy. However, I argue that the eagerness to elevate affected people to the level of experts in their local contexts and attribute them with extraordinary capabilities for resilience has jeopardised the very notion of aid. It is vital to understand that, in many circumstances, people do need assistance in developing their resilience. This could be in the form of infrastructural assistance with electricity and plumbing, or assistance with building efficient organizations. Notwithstanding, this dynamic does not necessarily need to take the form of a masked top-down intervention

Therefore, based in the Canoa context where both top-down and some bottom-up interventions regarding relief and development aid took place, this chapter aims to analyse how resilience is represented in the discourse and interventions surrounding aid practices in Canoa. By looking at community participation and empowerment processes, I will explore the importance of problematise and contextualise those terms while linking post-disaster assistance stages to foster risk reduction practices.

5.1 Linking humanitarian aid to development aid

When entering the ongoing discussion on post-humanitarianism and its link to resilience, is important to acknowledge aid as a system where successful assistance that reduces people's suffering and improves their lives is something that needs to be validated by the concerned stakeholders; that is, the affected population, the government, and the aid institutions (Mena, 2018: 29). This implies a departure from 'pity-based' interventions that victimized populations to a paradigm that recognises them as active agents within the processes of decision-making and the provision of aid. The shift towards ascribing greater value to people's capabilities and agency has turned the function of humanitarian aid from stop-gap and quick emergency solutions into the first stone paving the way for future aid to be provided and also integrated into affected communities. Samán Camp in Río Canoa, for example, was initially an improvised shelter built by residents who left the crowded part of the town looking for a safe place to stay after the earthquake. Although these residents had received assistance from humanitarian aid, they later had the initiative to set this place up and develop a list of fifteen rules of coexistence (see picture 1) to which any person at the camp, including volunteers and aid providers, had to adjust. This showed how the meaning and uses of aid to affected populations evolves over time and space.

Figure 5.1
Common area of Saman Camp



Source: Photo taken by the author in while volunteering in Canoa in 2016

Nevertheless, this reciprocal relationship between humanitarian aid and development aid based on self-help and people's capacity to be resilient and foster recovery must come coupled with an understanding of the threats that a literal reading and application of this framework could involve. It should not be forgotten that the capacity to develop resilience encompasses the multidimensional social factors and complications that were already negatively impacting the development of societies outside of crises or an emergency context. These include dynamics related to community participation, empowerment, and leadership. However, the application of resilience-based approaches has in many cases meant the withdrawal of external institutions and placed all of the responsibility for recovery in peoples' hands (Hilhorst 2018: 6-8).

It must be also noticed that self-help is often the only way for the poor to survive since they lack material resources. As in the previous example, despite people being poor and losing many of their assets, they had the agency to gather together and start building a camp for shelter. This does not however mean they had the resources to fully recover. Therefore, even though this approach has demonstrated that communities are dynamic and can be organised to tackle vulnerabilities; in order to be truly transformative, linkages with external

actors³³ are extremely important (Hickey and Mohan 2004: 12-13; Wamsler 2007: 124). Survival activities, such as those performed by residents in Río Canoa, cannot be conceived as being enough in themselves to overcoming vulnerabilities to future disasters. Rather, they should be seen as the arena where linkages between the relief and recovery process can be negotiated to foster possible long-term changes.

5.2 Complexities of the resilience approach to aid provisioning

The term resilience was firstly used in natural sciences to explain how certain eco-systems can deal with adversity to continue functioning and self-recover after an impact. Because of the crucial relationship between society and its environment, this concept has also been applied to social phenomena and related to the capacities that social systems and individuals have to cope with and adapt to changes; without losing their essence while managing disasters (Wamsler 2007: 118). However, social resilience encompasses certain degree of complexity when it comes to practice. It entails shared activities and empowerment processes that, sometimes, are shaped by the interests of those that advocate for particular notions of resilience-based development, without clearly defining the terms upon which the approach is founded. As Davidson et al. write, community participation “has been so widely expressed that it does not seem to mean anything clear anymore” (2007: 102). Despite these complications, community participation and empowerment have become an imperative part of talking about programs, projects or policies related to aid provisioning and recovery processes. While relying on peoples’ capacity to be resilient, interventions in post socio-natural disaster settings have, by referring to community participation in their frameworks, been made to appear to be more inclusive and successful than they actually were.

My argument should not be misunderstood as labelling participatory processes as invalid or unnecessary in post disaster settings. Involving populations in recovery and reconstruction efforts is the greatest asset that any aid and further development project or programme can have if their aim is to generate long lasting changes. Yet, it is also important to factor in the personal differences that exist between people on an individual level when addressing resilience and the degree of involvement in participatory practices. Although there are people who have the ability and desire to get involved in different processes after a disaster, there might also be groups that cannot or are unwilling to participate. This could be for many reasons such as the fact that their daily lives are focused on immediate survival (e.g. the poorest of the poor) or because they prefer to leave such activities to those they consider as leaders.

Whilst spending time with Liliana, a well-recognised lady in the town centre who is involved in committees and local organizations advocating for the needs of residents in Canoa at the NGO and governmental levels, some people supported her with the development of activities while others only informed about their concerns. One day, while walking through the town, we passed by a multipurpose sports court that was recently inaugurated. After seeing Liliana, residents living in that neighbourhood started to complain about the lack of electricity there and how the place, despite being new, had become dangerous at night. Panchita was part of that group and loudly told Liliana “Lili, you should help us to get light and illuminate the field. Now that your friend is here (referring to me), you can ask her to help us out”³⁴. These words not only revealed how some people delegate functions to those that they see as leaders, but also the relationship they had developed with aid provision. This example illustrates the degree of involvement and empowerment of

³³ That Hickey and Mohan have named as “political contract”.

³⁴ Words of Panchita recorded while walking through Canoa, 19 July 2018.

affected people in projects aimed to help social dynamics in Canoa recover. If interventions do not give people this sense of ownership, projects end up being only a mean to increase efficiency and show quick results (Berner and Phillips 2005: 18). Therefore, participation needs to be understood from both individual and communitarian perspectives and also involve institutions and governments (Cornwall and Coelho 2007: 5). If the core of community participation in post-disaster scenarios is achieving long lasting changes that can mitigate further risks and reduce peoples' vulnerabilities through the empowerment of vulnerable populations, the development of healthy relationships that acknowledge the agency and different functionality of stakeholders, is extremely important.

Political contexts and interests also play a role in the ways that notions of social vulnerability and resilience are addressed (Cannon 2008: 4). When the earthquake hit the coast, Ecuador was going through a decisive political moment. After ten years of government, the former president Rafael Correa was preparing to leave office amid countless allegations of corruption. Thus, in a bid to regain credibility, trust and potential votes for his party-mate in the upcoming 2017 elections, the Government was motivated to lead the post-disaster stage not only out of compulsory duty, but also to achieve quick and highly visible results. Effective disaster responses therefore needed to focus on the physical effects and destruction of natural disasters, whilst also emphasising the transparency of aid distribution and the recovery process.

Consequently, although international humanitarian agencies were deeply involved with governmental and non-governmental efforts during the immediate aftershock to rescue people, remove debris and distribute food, and provide water and temporary shelters; once humanitarian actors left, the national Government elected to focus on increasing the visibility of its role in the process. Military forces were commanding most of vital distributions, while a national plan called "ReconstruYo Ecuador" was launched to rebuild and recover the economy of affected areas. The process appeared to be in line with the resilience approach since national actors had more control over the response period and later phases (Hilhorst 2018: 5). Internal issues between national actors must be also considered. Although at a national level, domestic actors took the lead, at local levels its actors did not (Alcarraz 2017). This revealed the internal relations of power at the national level and the disregard for local contexts in the mainly rural areas of Canoa.

"ReconstruYo Ecuador" was the biggest housing project launched after the earthquake. The name indicates that the plan's emphasis on two resilience-related elements. The first is the reconstruction of buildings and the local economy. The second is the highlighting of peoples' agency and capabilities in the process, as indicated by "yo" in the title, which comes from the Spanish word for "me". The rhetoric of the program was therefore constructed to feel inclusive to both the affected population and aid providers. This makes sense because housing reconstruction projects in post-disaster scenarios can also represent an opportunity to empower beneficiaries by their inclusion in the process (Davidson et al. 2007: 102; Wamsler 2017: 128). However, because of the political campaign going on at the time, the discourse around the largest post-disaster project was mostly focused on the visible part of the recovery process rather than in local contexts and social structures that could have empowered people throughout the development of the program.

The national plan was based on standardised pre-approved anti-seismic housing designs that were unconditionally granted to give people new houses after the earthquake; to rebuild demolished houses on people's own plots; and to repair damaged structures up to certain cost. Clearly, this program was intended to and partially succeeded at improving people's livelihoods. However, it also created a dynamic that in Spanish is called *asistencialismo*, where aid providers adopted the character of givers while recipients adopted the role of victims

(Davidson et al. 2007: 105). Victimhood in this case is understood as being “deprived from basic rights and meaningful agency” (DeChaine 2002: 362). Showing the persistence of top-down approaches characteristic of the classic Dunantist model as the plan was solely directed by the national government. Thus, since people did not have any responsibilities as recipients, the rapid implementation of the plan coupled with an extensive campaign to publicise it, generated high expectations within the affected populations. The inclusive discourse at the core of the program summoned people to take part in various censuses and public gatherings that were held to provide information. This led people in Canoa to feel included (even before being selected as beneficiaries) and fashioned a particular idea of aid in their minds. As DeChaine asserts “rhetoric has an implicit power to shape public perceptions, attitudes and actions in the world” (2002: 355-356). In the case of Canoa, especially in its built-up part, the rhetoric about the plan was one of the reasons why residents started to equate the notion of aid with housing. This understanding also distinctly influenced the interventions of non-governmental institutions and led to the implementation of no cost³⁵ housing development projects in an attempt to obtain legitimacy³⁶. Nevertheless, based on primary data collected and the aforementioned discussion regarding aid resilience, the way in which “ReconstruYo Ecuador” was implemented in Canoa seems to have followed a purely top-down rather than resilient approach. It used a resilience-based discourse that ignored the local context, as well as peoples’ capabilities to contribute in the process and become empowered. This approach was instead used to ensure efficiency and rapid-visible results guided by political interests, which at the same time shaped peoples’ notion of aid. It triggered migration of people from other towns who registered in the census as Canoa’s residents to get a house, deepening the existing internal chaos in the town since many inhabitants that lived there before the earthquake did not received a house. Furthermore, due to inappropriate data collection, some people who already had a house got a new one and are now renting them. Such consequences are constantly causing disputes between people from the town and the new residents in the built-up part of Canoa. Regarding remote areas, the following quote from Teresa’s interview highlights the negative social consequences that emerged out of expectations created by the discourse in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake,

My two-floor house was not affected, but the trauma is such that I thought about demolishing the structure in order to ask the government for a new one-floor house. As victims that is the type of aid we need³⁷

Comparing this process with the one in “El Eje Cafetero” in Colombia after the earthquake of 1999 (Davidson et al. 2007: 104-105), the differences are clear. Although both disasters were followed by the design and implementation of a master plan launched by the central government, in Colombia, different organizations could join it and develop context-based reconstruction projects. Coffee Growers Organisations - CGO’s, for instance, were in charge of conducting the reconstruction process in rural areas. Within this program, affected coffee growers were given a large range of possibilities and also responsibilities rebuilding their houses. They received constant advice and supervision from construction-related professionals, and beneficiaries had the freedom to choose their housing design, the chosen materials, and the ability to make decisions about whether they wanted to do it by themselves or hire labour for it. In exchange, residents were held accountable and forced to periodically prove that they were correctly using the aid received and honouring the contractual clauses to which they were subjected. Empowerment in that case “(i) increased

³⁵ Which not only denotes monetary values but any type of contribution or responsibility e.g. training, service provisioning, or communitarian work.

³⁶ When people are in need and they can choose between getting involved in participatory processes to rebuild their houses or receive unconditional free housing, they are more likely to choose the latter.

³⁷ Personal interview with Teresa, Río Canoa, 08 July 2018.

user satisfaction: users built what they required in the way they needed it and according to their own timetable and resources; and (ii) total user participation in which the users had full responsibility of their own choices. It meant that beneficiaries were not passive “victims” receiving humanitarian aid; they became the ones responsible for their own projects” (Davidson et al. 2007: 105). Hence, even if aid is influenced by either clear political interests (Canoa-Ecuador) or economic-market oriented considerations (Eje Cafetero-Colombia), it is evident that policies focused on people’s capacities to develop resilience through participation, must involve the provision of people with choices and a sense of ownership that involves them in every step of the recovery process (Berner and Phillips 2005: 18). This is in total contrast to projects that place the participatory process as secondary to the urgent emergency response to the disaster.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The earthquake of 2016 changed the social landscape of Canoa in many different ways and unveiled many deficiencies and room for improvement for future disaster response policies in Ecuador. The earthquake in Canoa reinforced the importance of comprehending vulnerabilities from a broader perspective beyond a solitary focus on poverty. Equally as important was the relationship between people and places in Canoa, which influenced dwellers' perceptions about their exposure to natural hazards, their ways of coping with the consequences of the shock, and their interactions with aid provision. A cultural construction of Canoa as a generalized peripheral rurality meant that policies were vague as they were entirely based on a basic conception of poverty alleviation that did not factor in the multitude of vulnerabilities that existed in the region both before and after the earthquake. The homogenization of ruralities and the absence of disaggregated data are factors that reproduce people's vulnerabilities to socioenvironmental disasters beyond the notion of poverty; especially in places such as Canoa where disasters are expected to occur periodically.

Another important factor to consider was the discourse surrounding the representation of resilience in aid provision in Canoa. The discourse from both the Government and international aid providers strongly emphasised community participation and empowerment. However, this emphasis seemed to be purely rhetorical as the policies that were implemented were top down and failed to consider the contextual specificity of the material and social elements of Canoa society. Although the core idea behind resilience is to recognise and foster peoples' capacities to cope with the consequences of disasters and adapt to new circumstances, this should by no means imply that affected populations are capable of overcoming disasters alone. This belief in universal notions of resilience could lead local and national governments to incrementally retreating from their responsibilities to assist these populations because of misguided beliefs based on homogenized notions of community and social cohesion in rural areas. withdrawal. Therefore, in these particular scenarios, a negotiation between top down and bottom up interventions must be done in the different stages of post disaster settings. Resilience and aid need to be understood as mutually dependent rather than mutually restricted phenomena.

By problematising the common urban-rural dichotomy that studies and policies use to split affected areas after a disaster, this piece of work showed how post-disaster interventions overlooked inner social dynamics and power relations in Canoa. Despite of being a rural settlement, there is a clear geographic division that shows the existence of an urban-rural contrast within Canoa. This differentiation presents important social implications to risk management. It has differentiated influences on individual and collective perceptions of affected populations regarding the earthquake and the provision of assistance; and also neglects the existence of the variety of residents' needs that shape their responses to aid and the development of recovery programs. The Canoa case study shows how perceptions are not static. They change over time and according to the development of the different post-earthquake stages. While residents living peripheral areas felt safer than those living in the centre of the town during the relief period as their attachment to a geographical space provided them with food and greater possibilities to improvise temporal shelter; these perceptions changed once economic activities resumed and development aid was implemented in the urbanised part of the town. This displays a degree of variability in relations of power between both settings. Furthermore, the underplaying of the importance of data collection in the rural part had a negative effect on both institutional capacities to

mitigate the effects of further disasters and the ability of people to learn from past experiences and better prepare themselves in the future. If there is no track on how social domains were affected after a disaster and how people responded to it, then it raises the question about adding risk management discourses into policies and programs aimed at fostering preparedness and mitigation. In the case of Canoa, a simple comparison of the reported fatalities in the earthquake of 1998 (3) with the one that occurred in 2016 (663) gives insights into the extreme lack of preparedness and mitigation in Canoa. The town is largely influenced by homogenization, a lack of information and poverty; all factors that continue to deepen resident's vulnerabilities in the face of future disasters.

Finally, the focus on Canoa's social domains and the acknowledgement of its internal differences shifts the attention of the analysis to the relationship between affected people and physical places. This relationship shaped resident's perceptions about their exposure to aid provision and future risks. Although perceptions do not constitute knowledge, they help us to understand human actions (Hilhorst 2004: 5). By looking at people's responses to disasters and the aid provided in the aftermath of the earthquake, we can study how spatial characteristics are intrinsically linked to those perceptions; guiding the aftermath of a disaster. By influencing perceptions regarding survival issues, the geographical distribution of population in Canoa also determined the perception of people regarding their need to rely on external aid and the speed of overcoming the different phases of the post-disaster stage. On the one hand, the fact that people living in peripheral areas had greater possibilities to solve shelter and food issues helped them to move quicker from the relief to recovery phase. These advantages helped them become more independent as the aid provisioning meant that their basic survival needs were covered. Contrary to this, the transition from relief to early recovery in the crowded part of the town was slower. Due to the physical destruction, urban residents lost their sources of income and houses, and had to rely on external aid for a longer period of time. This issue affected the social dynamics and coping strategies that people developed to overcome the consequences of the disaster.

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