

Vulnerability and Power

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Social Justice Organizing in Rockaway,
New York City, after Hurricane Sandy

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UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

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Abstract

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This is a study about disasters, vulnerability and power. With regards to social justice organizing a particular research problem guides the work, specifically that emancipatory projects are often initiated and steered by privileged actors who do not belong to the marginalized communities they wish to strengthen, yet the work is based on the belief that empowerment requires self-organizing from within. Through an ethnographic field study of social justice organizing in the wake of Hurricane Sandy in Rockaway, New York City, the thesis explores whether and how vulnerable groups were empowered within the Occupy Sandy network. It is a process study that traces outside activists attempts at empowering storm-affected residents over time, from the immediate relief phase to long-term organizing in the recovery phase. The activists aimed to put to practice three organizing ideals: inclusion, flexibility and horizontality, based on a belief that doing so would enhance empowerment. The analysis demonstrates that collaboration functioned better in the relief phase than in the long-term recovery phase. The same organizing ideals that seem to have created an empowering milieu for storm-affected residents in the relief phase became troublesome when relief turned to long-term recovery. The relief phase saw storm-affected people step up and take on leadership roles, whereas empowerment in the recovery phase was conditional on alignment with outside activists' agendas. Internal tensions, conflicts and resistance from residents toward the outside organizers marked the recovery phase. It seems that length of collaborative projects is not the only factor for developing trust but so is complexity. The more complex the activities over which partners are to collaborate the less easy it is. Based on this we could further theorize that the more complex the work is the more challenging it is for privileged groups to give away control. The internal struggles of the organization partially explain the failures to influence an urban planning process that the organization attempted to impact, which connects the micro-processes with broader change processes toward transformation of vulnerability.

Keywords: Social vulnerability, Disaster risk reduction, Social movements, Power, Empowerment, Hurricane Sandy, Rockaway

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Till farmor

Sammanfattning på svenska

Det här är en studie om katastrofer, sårbarhet och makt. Avhandlingen springer ur ett forskningsproblem: främjandet av marginaliserade gruppers egenmakt (*empowerment*) tros fungera bäst om den sker inifrån den egna gruppen och utifrån självorganiserande principer, men trots detta initieras och styrs emancipatoriska projekt ofta av aktörer som inte själva tillhör marginaliserade grupper. Genom en etnografisk studie av gräsrotsorganisering inom Occupy Sandy efter orkanen Sandy i Rockaway, New York City, 2012, undersöks utomstående aktivisters försök att främja utsatta gruppers egenmakt. Detta spåras över tid från akut katastrofhantering till långsiktigt förändringsarbete, utifrån tre organiseringsideal som aktivisterna försökte omsätta i praktiken; inkludering, flexibilitet och horisontalitet. Samarbetsprocessen kännetecknades av att den privilegierade aktören sökte främja den icke-privilegierade aktörens egenmakt genom att gradvis lämna över kontrollen över organisationens målformuleringar och arbetssätt. Analysen visar att samverkan mellan aktivister och boende fungerade bra i den akuta hanteringsfasen men sämre i återhämtningsfasen. De tre organiseringsidealen såg ut att resultera i främjande av de boendes egenmakt inledningsvis. I den långsiktiga fasen däremot kom de boendes egenmakt att villkoras av de utomstående aktivisternas agenda; endast de som höll med främjades. Detta ledde till spänningar, konflikter, och motstånd från de boende. Utifrån detta dras slutsatsen att längden på samarbetsprojekt inte är enda faktorn som är relevant för huruvida tillit utvecklas, utan också graden av komplexitet i arbetsuppgifterna. Ju mer komplexa frågor som deltagare behöver komma överens om, desto svårare blir det att samarbeta, och desto svårare blir det för privilegierade aktörer att lämna över kontroll. Analysen visar vidare på kopplingar mellan internt inflytande för sårbara grupper inom organisationen och organisationens externa möjligheter till politisk påverkan, vilket flätar samman de undersökta mikroprocesserna med bredare frågor om förändring av strukturellt differentierad sårbarhet.

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Abbreviations

CB 14	Community Board 14
CBA	Community Benefits Agreement
DCP	New York City Department of City Planning
FDNY	New York Fire Department
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HFA	Hyogo Framework for Action
HPD	New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development
ISDR	International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction
NYC	New York City
NYCHA	New York City Housing Authority
NYPD	New York Police Department
NYSDEC	New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
OEM NYC	New York City Office of Emergency Management
OS	Occupy Sandy
OWS	Occupy Wall Street
SIRR	NYC Special Initiative for Rebuilding and Resiliency
UNISDR	UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UPWARD	United Peninsula Working to Attain Responsible Development
YANA	You Are Never Alone

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1. Introduction: Disasters, Vulnerability and Power

Disaster vulnerability is often conditioned by social, economic and political structures that distribute vulnerability unequally across social groups. Moreover, the same groups that are hit the hardest are often the ones with the least to say about how risk is produced and managed. In light of this, empowering vulnerable groups to partake in arenas that work with issues of inequality is important. Emancipatory projects within social justice movements are such arenas. A particular research problem with regard to social justice organizing guides the work of this thesis – that emancipatory projects are often initiated and steered by privileged actors who do not belong to the marginalized communities they wish to strengthen, yet the work is based on the belief that empowerment requires self-organizing from within.

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the internal organization of emancipatory projects and how they may enhance empowerment of vulnerable groups. Empowerment, in the context of this study, has to do both with the extent to which vulnerable groups gain influence and the process through which influence is gained. Influence is defined as active participation in agenda-setting of an organization (the ends), as well as in strategies for implementing the set goals (the means). The thesis explores these issues in post-disaster processes along the continuum of relief to recovery and I depart from three organizing ideals believed to enhance empowerment within emancipatory projects, namely inclusion, flexibility and horizontality.

Through an ethnographic field study, a case of social justice organizing is explored, which took place within the Occupy Sandy (OS) network in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy that struck New York City (NYC) in 2012. It is a process study that traces outside activists' attempts at empowering storm-affected residents over time, from the immediate relief phase to long-term organizing in the recovery phase. Within the emancipatory project under study, and across the studied phases, this thesis poses two research questions:

1. Were the ideals translated into practice, and if so to what extent and how were they manifested?
2. To what extent did the emancipatory project give vulnerable residents influence over ends and means?

This is an exploratory study. I am interested in whether and the extent to which the ideals are translated into practice, the concrete manifestations that the attempts to put them into practice take on and whether residents gained influence. Answers to these questions may vary and shift over the phases. The use of the term “to what extent” should not be interpreted as a quantitatively oriented question, where the aim is to assess frequency of a certain activity in a large network of people. It should rather be understood as a question that is empirically open to the fact that these are not either-or phenomena. Because more interesting than frequency – in light of the research problem that guides the work – is the process through which residents potentially gain influence over ends and means and how the ideals may or may not be connected to this. Answers to these questions are best found through a qualitative ethnographic approach that can capture participants’ own experiences and understandings of the processes of empowerment. Three primary ways of gathering data will be used: field work and field observations, participatory observations and interviews. These are methods that allow for attention to complexities and nuances within micro processes of empowerment, as well as how the particularities of the area, the disaster and the ideological roots of the actors matter for how the empowerment process unfold. In essence, this is a study about vulnerability and power in the wake of disasters. The thesis brings together disaster risk reduction (DRR) and social justice organizing and demonstrates how we need to understand these phenomena in tandem. Risk reduction in the context of this thesis is thus closely intertwined with social and political change processes that challenge marginalization.

Academic Silences and New Approaches

A steady stream of disasters has plagued the world over the last 15 years. The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami that devastated the coastal regions of Southeast Asia, hurricanes that strike the Caribbean and the United States on a yearly basis, for example Hurricane Katrina that caused havoc in New Orleans in 2005, the overwhelming effects of the Haiti earthquakes in 2010, the 2011 Pakistani floods, Typhoon Haiyan’s destruction of the Philippines in 2013, and Hurricane Matthew that took thousands of lives in 2016 all serve as alarming reminders that DRR theory and practice is highly important.

A somewhat puzzling silence within the DRR scholarship forms the starting point for this dissertation. This silence can be illustrated by way of an anecdote from a book launch I attended in late May 2016. A new anthology about DRR was presented, co-authored by many disaster interested scholars from a range of social science disciplines (Becker et al. 2016). Discussions were highly stimulating and multifaceted. Topics ranged from issues of inter-organizational collaboration in response to disasters to the international community’s inability to overcome problems of climate change mitigation, and to how risk reduction in one agricultural sector in Vietnam produces

unexpected risks in another agricultural sector. On a few occasions the issue of social vulnerability arose. Attention was briefly directed to how factors deeply rooted in our societal structures led to varying levels of vulnerability for different social groups. This is a problem that can be conceptualized as structurally differentiated vulnerability, meaning that disaster vulnerability is often conditioned by social and political structures that distribute vulnerability in unequal ways across social groups (Tierney 2014 p. 141; Bankoff et al. 2004; Enarsson et al. 1998; Jones et al. 2009; Wisner et al. 2004; Fothergill et al. 1999, 2004). The late sociologist Sygmunt Bauman claimed that the likelihood for socioeconomically marginalized people to become victims of disasters is one of today's "most salient and striking dimensions of social inequality" (Bauman 2011 p. 7). The issue is the most "disastrous among the many problems humanity may be forced to confront, deal with and resolve in the current century" (Bauman 2001 p. 9). Differential exposures to the effects of disasters across social groups are often the outcomes of local political economics, where power in decision-making with regard to, for example, land use or development rests mainly with elites (Tierney et al. 2014 p. 146). In other words, the same groups that are hit the hardest by disasters are often also those that have the least say about how risk is produced and managed.

Yet, somehow this problem was left unattended in the following discussions at the book launch. No one commented on how and why social inequalities exist and what can be done to alter them. This lack of attention mirrors an academic silence in research about social vulnerability. The fact that vulnerability is structurally differentiated is a widely known phenomenon. It has been established empirically and explored theoretically within the academic field of DRR. However, very few scholars draw that knowledge to its logical conclusion. If the problem is underlying structural marginalization, why has so little theoretical and empirical attention been devoted to how marginalization can be breached?

In response to this, I would like to put forth the idea here that if we acknowledge the inherent inequalities in how disasters strike, and if we are interested in learning more about how societies can overcome structural inequalities, the emancipatory literature can help. This literature is here used as an umbrella term for research about citizen participation, social movements, grassroots organizing, empowerment, and democratic theory (see among others Lukes 2005; Isaac 1987; Freire 2005; hooks 2010; Young 2000; Fisher 2006; Bacchi 1996; Tarrow 2011; della Porta et al. 2006; Snow et al 2004). In addition to such a theoretical approach, we also need to pay empirical attention to disaster response cases that explicitly incorporate social justice approaches. Scholars within the emancipatory literature often claim that the preconditions for marginalized groups to be politically strengthened are more likely to be found in informal grassroots projects, where truly critical perspectives on the social order can be developed (Fisher 2006 p. 36). Social justice movement forums have a capacity to push the agenda for what should be considered a political problem that formal decision-makers have to

deal with. Social justice movements may mobilize marginalized communities and bring forth new problem formulations that were previously neglected or considered to fall outside of the realm of institutional politics. We witnessed this with the civil rights movement, which made the U.S.'s deeply institutionalized racism into a political problem, as well as with feminist movements across the globe that have put issues of domestic violence against women on political agendas. We also see it in the contemporary U.S., for example the Black Lives Matter movement that exposes ongoing racist sentiments that seem to be part and parcel of police forces (Black Lives Matter 2016), and indigenous groups that join forces with environmental activists to challenge environmental destruction, forcing federal authorities to halt construction of the Dakota Access Pipe-line (D'Angelo et al. 2016).

In line with this reasoning, this dissertation explores how marginalized communities through egalitarian grassroots organizing initiated by outsiders struggled to become agents of change and authors of their own fate. I am interested in how outside activists, together with residents of a marginalized community, made use of the opportunity that a disaster opened up to challenge the economic and social powers that kept the residents in a situation of protracted vulnerability. Because there is no line to be drawn between disaster vulnerability and ongoing processes of social stratification; it is all connected. Thus, to organize against inequality in the aftermath of a storm makes perfect sense.

Self-organizing From Within Initiated from the Outside

A particular research problem with regard to social justice organizing guides the work of this thesis, specifically that emancipatory projects are often initiated and steered by privileged actors who do not belong to the marginalized communities they wish to empower, yet their work is based on the belief that empowerment requires self-organizing from within the marginalized community.

The ideal of self-organizing from within is to have marginalized communities build collective capacity to change the circumstances of their own lives (Houten et al. 2005; Sen 1997; Pilisuk 1996; Cornwall 2002; Jung 2003; Chavis 2001; Scott et al. 2012; Choudry et al. 2012). But given social stratifications in many societies, privileged people often exhibit stronger capacities and resources to engage in social justice organizing than non-privileged groups. Contemporary social justice movements in the U.S., for instance, are often initiated by people with economic, social and cultural resources (Snow et al. 2004 p. 117; Juris et al. 2012 p. 3436). As Campbell notes, "a generation of activists has defined its role as working with marginalized communities to develop their collective agency to resist and transform unequal social relations" (Campbell 2014 p. 47). So, despite the ideals of

self-organizing, initiation and management of emancipatory projects in practice is often done by people who do not belong to marginalized communities (McDaniel 2002; Cornwall 2003; Pilisuk et al. 1996; Campbell 2014; Snow et al. 2004).

The relationship between privileged and non-privileged groups within emancipatory projects begs further pondering. According to activist and scholar Angela Davis, one of the great problems of social justice struggles is that privileged people think of non-privileged people as objects of charity instead of equal partners. This defeat the purpose of empowerment since it reproduces the unequal relation, as it constitutes non-privileged people as inferior (Davis 2016 p. 26). Within development aid this phenomenon has been branded ‘The (White) Savior Complex’, by, among others, Ugandan author Teju Cole (Cole 2015). The savior complex has been described as “the idea that you, as a single (and possibly unskilled) foreigner, can save a whole community. This sort of savior complex is condescending because it implies that you’re a hero while those locals are helpless” (Ferguson 2016). The savior complex is increasingly ridiculed in progressive media outlets, for example in a satiric outline of aid fundraising videos, published under the heading “Poverty Porn or Empowerment”. The article critiques donor organizations for portraying complicated issues of poverty in oversimplified images of helpless children that need saving from white foreigners (Randhawa 2016). The phenomenon transcends the realm of development aid and can be found in social justice struggles within liberal democracies. One example is a contemporary debate taking place within the feminist online movement, wherein women of color question white feminists for dominating the sphere. Such domination replicates some of the same inequalities that the movements seek to address (Holm et al., forthcoming; see also RUMMET 2014; RUMMET 2013; and social media hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen). These examples indicate certain collaboration challenges between privileged and non-privileged groups, even in emancipatory projects that are explicitly set up to liberate the non-privileged actor. Being an ally – a term that is widely used in social justice lingo – seems easier said than done.

Focus in this particular thesis is on issues of DRR and empowerment of vulnerable groups. Exploring this research problem enables a better grasp of how disaster vulnerability may be breached. But the motif may reoccur in every instance in which privileged actors are organizing with non-privileged actors, on their behalf, and with the aim to empower them. Exploring the problem can also deepen our understanding of men’s fight for women’s liberation, white people’s contributions to the struggle against racism, straight people’s work for the emancipation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, development aid projects in the global south and integration projects in Swedish municipalities, or of any kind of emancipatory project in which collaboration needs to happen between privileged and non-privileged actors, where the aim is to alter and challenge deep-seated inequalities.

Structures and Privileges – a Clarification

The research problem is centered on relations between privileged and non-privileged groups, in the context of structurally differentiated vulnerability. A few notes on the terms “structures” and “privileges” are in place here to avoid misunderstandings. The terms “privileged” versus “non-privileged” refer to social groups of people who are either systematically privileged or non-privileged in terms of distribution of social vulnerability. Social structures are institutions like financial markets, government programs, schools, corporations or healthcare systems. These structures form patterns for how social groups are able to live. They shape the kind of resources available to people and the opportunities that govern their lives in terms of education, housing, jobs, and other life opportunities (Young 2000 p. 94). Structural differentiation is when these structures create inequalities between social groups in terms of the resources and opportunities available to them. Structural inequalities are at work when race, gender, class, ability or any other social marker conditions people’s legal status, their educational possibilities, their vulnerability to the effects of disasters, or their access to resources and political power. They are structural because they are relatively permanent, although the specific content and detail of the positions and interactions can evolve, be reinvented or contested (Young 2000 p. 95).

Important to remember is that relations between privileged and non-privileged groups are not necessarily based on explicit domination by the advantaged group. As a matter of fact, expressions of hatred or overt domination are extreme events. Instead, social and economic privileges are reproduced in systems in which fortunate people go about their lives, business as usual, without thinking about themselves as privileged. Nonetheless they are beneficiaries in a system that distributes societal goods unequally (Young in Cudd et al. 2005 p 6).

Social groups are not simple aggregates. While an aggregate group could be of any type – for example, groups could be categorized according to eye color or according to the type of car they own – a social group is defined not by a set of common attributes, but by how the group stands in relation to other social groups. The encounters and sustained interactions between social collectivities that create differences in their way of life is what forms this, rather than any arbitrary external classification. In this way, a person’s particular sense of history, separateness, perhaps even a person’s mode of reasoning and behaving can be partially constituted by group identity. This is not to say that there exist no individual styles or personalities, or that a person cannot transcend their given social identity or navigate and negotiate their position (Young in Cudd 2005 p. 9).

In the case studied here, outsider organizers entered an area to empower residents in the wake of a storm. The outside organizers were in a privileged social position in relation to the residents. They were non-affected by the storm, they were mostly white, mostly educated, and they had existing organizing skills, as well as economic funds that they controlled. The residents

were mostly low-income people of color that were already marginalized socioeconomically before the storm hit. They struggled with getting back on their feet after the storm devastated their homes and their neighborhood, and they had little or no experience of the type of social justice organizing that they were invited to take part. In summary, in the context of this thesis, the privileged group is the outside organizers of OS who were non-affected by the storm and who entered Rockaway to engage in relief and recovery work. The non-privileged group is the storm-affected residents of Rockaway. The term “outside organizers” is occasionally used interchangeably with OS activists, and “non-privileged group” is used interchangeably with residents, and sometimes referred to as marginalized or vulnerable communities. I want to stress that the use of the term “vulnerable” in no way means that individuals from this group are weak, victimized or lack agency (or any other pejorative connotation that the word may have). It is simply a term used to describe a social position that stands in relation to other social positions in a social order that distributes risks unequally.

Previous Research, Gaps and Contributions

This thesis makes use of and contributes to two distinct theoretical fields: emancipatory literature and DRR literature. The aim of this dissertation is to explore the internal organization of emancipatory projects and how they may enhance empowerment of vulnerable groups. The thesis explores this issue in post-disaster processes along the continuum of relief to recovery. This issue lies in the intersection between the emancipatory literature and the DRR literature, so I needed to gather ideas from both literatures. Within the emancipatory literature (see for example Lukes 2005; Isaac 1987; Freire 2005; hooks 2010; Young 2000; Fisher 2006; Bacchi 1996; Tarrow 2011; della Porta 2006; Snow et al 2004) there is a renewed attention to new kinds of participatory cultures where non-hierarchical and counter-bureaucratic forms of engagement are praised and issues of self-organizing are brought to the fore (Saward 2010; Cornwall et al. 2005; Fisher 2006; Hickey et al. 2004; Tarrow 2011; Snow et al 2004). Included in this emancipatory literature is also the philosophical and theoretical debates spawned by social justice movements in the United States (for example Young 2001; Juris et al. 2012; Pickerill et al. 2012). On the other hand, the DRR literature has a few subfields that are relevant in the context of this thesis, for instance research about social vulnerability (Tierney 2014 p. 141; Bankoff et al. 2004; Enarsson et al. 1998; Jones et al. 2009; Wisner 2003; Hannigan 2012; Fothergill et al. 1999, 2004; Thomas et al. 2013; Luft 2009), inclusive DRR (Duyne Barenstein et al. 2013; Kweit et al. 2004; Mathbor 2007; Eakin et al. 2011; Leon et al. 2009; Allen 2006; Norris et al. 2008), emergent groups (Simo et al. 2007; Majchrzak et al. 2007; Stallings et al. 1985; Yu Hung-Lai 2012),

and resilience (Berkes et al. 2003; Goldstein 2009; Walker et al. 2011; Wisner 2012).

The thesis makes use of and contributes to both of these literatures but in slightly different ways. The DRR field has a few theoretical gaps. Firstly it lacks attention on how structural inequality can be challenged or focuses simply on remedies to the symptoms of problems. Secondly the connection between different post-disaster phases is under-theorized and thirdly studies are often based on theoretically shallow understandings of fundamentally contested concepts. These theoretical gaps will be further explored below. The emancipatory literature is a more mature field of knowledge with regard to conceptual analysis, but lacks empirical attention to social justice organizing that has to do with disaster inequality. Through the case studied here and the theoretical approaches used, this thesis contributes empirically, as well as methodologically, to the emancipatory literature and theoretically to DRR research.

Theoretical Gaps in the DRR Literature

The subfield that focuses on social vulnerability looks at the unequal effects of disasters and theorizes how these effects are connected to long-standing inequalities, but lacks attention on how structural inequality can be challenged. For a long time, studies of disasters and their consequences focused mostly on the natural hazard as such, and scholars considered disasters as extreme exogenous events in which human victims were passively affected by the forces of nature. Almost all explanations ascribed to geophysical or meteorological forces. Scholars who studied disasters focused mainly on technological and managerial dimensions. During the 1980s and 90s, social science scholars started to question this dominant paradigm around DRR for failing to incorporate human action as an important cause for hazards and disasters (Thomas et al. 2013 p. 38). The critique was that when disasters are mainly understood as isolated accidental events, this keeps us from recognizing human decisions, actions and processes that place people at risk (Tierney 2014 p. 4). According to this view, disasters are not exceptional events but products of ongoing, daily processes (Thomas et al. 2013 p. 42). Furthermore, researchers started to argue that we need to pay attention to how some groups – but not all – are systematically put in the way of natural forces (Thomas et al. 2013 p. 39). The idea that disasters were ‘equalizers’ – that the forces of Mother Nature strike evenly – was increasingly rejected by social scientists.

Hence, disasters’ effects need to be linked to ongoing socioeconomic and political marginalization (Bankoff et al. 2004 p. 126), and analysis needs to shift from a single-handed focus on extreme events to ongoing political, economic and social relations that shape how disasters strike (Hannigan 2012 p. 15). Kennett Hewitt’s reminder that “most natural disasters are characteristic rather than accidental features of places and societies” (in Jones et

al. 2009 p. 87) and Wisner's classic statement that "there is nothing natural about natural disasters" (Wisner et al. 1976) speaks to the notion that vulnerability is connected to continuous processes of stratification in our societies. Nowadays, it is a confirmed generalization that disaster vulnerability is conditioned by wider social and political inequalities and that these structures function to distribute vulnerability in unequal ways (Tierney 2014 p. 141; Bankoff et al. 2004; Enarsson et al.; 1998, Jones et al. 2009; Wisner 2003; Fothergill et al. 1999, 2004). However, the conclusions drawn from the body of literature that analyzes social vulnerability are often limited. Studies that demonstrate significant structural inequalities often fail to make recommendations that would challenge these inequalities. For example, a study on how Hurricane Sandy affected communities in New Jersey in different ways concluded that public officials ought to increase their public outreach and consider micro-loan solutions (Abramson et al. 2015), which are recommendations with very little, if any, impact on underlying problems of inequality. In brief, studies of social vulnerability mainly focus on the problem at hand, and look less to potential solutions in the form of political mobilization against inequalities.

Within another subfield, inclusive DRR, there is a broad understanding that inclusion of and participation by vulnerable groups is an important step toward reduction of risks and building resilience. Vulnerable communities are to be given a voice in decision-making processes that affect their safety (UNDP 2015 p. 8). Reports focus on communities' capacities in the form of social networks and local knowledge, and suggest how both vulnerability and capacity can be assessed and analyzed in participatory DRR projects (Oxfam Australia 2012 p. 3). Other studies look at how communities can be strengthened by, for example, climate change adaptation or enhanced community resilience (see for example Norris et al. 2008; ISDR 2013; UNDP 2015; Oxfam Australia 2012; Berke et al. 2006; Leon et al. 2009; Allen 2006). But these are merely remedies to the symptoms of the problems and do less to address root problems of inequality. Research that specifically looks to social change processes, where vulnerable communities attempt to take the lead and actively challenge underlying problems of stratification, is scarce (Luft 2009). Moreover, these types of studies and reports are often based on theoretically shallow understandings of fundamentally contested concepts such as inclusion, participation and empowerment. The immaturity of the field probably has to do with the fact that DRR research is highly intertwined with DRR practice, which is often very technically oriented. This does not give much room for critical approaches to issues of power and inequality nor does it allow for deeper conceptual discussions. Not many problems are raised, and instead it seems that inclusion of and participation by affected communities is straightforward and easy – and simply something that ought to be better enforced. Within the emancipatory literature, however, there is an abundance of theoretical and conceptual debates around these

concepts that may help in teasing out an interesting empirical study of social justice organizing around issues of disaster inequality.

Lastly, the connection between different post-disaster phases is somewhat under-theorized within DRR research. Research around disaster relief tends to focus on performance and efficiency in terms of lives saved, structures secured or roads reinstalled (see for example Kovacs et al. 2007). Societies should bounce back from disasters in a swift way (Wisner 2012 p. 31). But by only looking at the immediate management of disasters, we understand less about how to prevent their severe and often unequal effects through long-term organizing. The political, economic and social conditions that throw low-income communities into situations of perpetuated vulnerability to disasters are often invisible in studies of relief phase performance. The question is what communities bounce back to. If risks are indeed a result of skewed political processes that produce unequal vulnerabilities, one might argue that adaptation to such injustices is nothing better than a simple confirmation of a skewed status quo. As Wisner et al. state: “Restoration to normality may be of little use if ‘normal’ was the situation of vulnerability for some of the population now affected” (Wisner 2012 p. 31). Critical analysis of how underlying issues of inequality can be dealt with is lacking. Poor and powerless population groups often live in what could be called protracted emergencies, where they have to be ready for uncertainty on a daily basis. And so even in a situation where relief efforts are successful, the root problems of socioeconomic and political marginalization are still there, problems that have to be dealt with in a long-term perspective (McEntire 1997 p. 232).

It could instead be argued that what is needed is transformative change, or a “bounce forward”. Since underlying issues of inequality are long-standing and ongoing problems, it is important to study not only the relief phase but also the long-term recovery phase that comes after. Disaster management needs to be understood in a long-term perspective since the effects of disasters are conditioned by underlying structures of inequality. This means that we have to look beyond the immediate management of the short-term effects. Instead focus needs to be on attempts at political change that may have a bearing on socioeconomic inequality. The connection between immediate relief and long-term recovery is thus important, but the continuum is somewhat understudied within disaster management literature. Researchers tend to either study the immediate management of disasters or they focus on long-term issues of social vulnerability. Not many scholars focus on the full process from relief to recovery. This thesis may fill in some of the blanks with regard to this since it explores social justice organizing across different post-disaster phases from immediate relief to long-term recovery.

Empirical Gaps in the Emancipatory Literature

The emancipatory literature points to how social justice movements are promising arenas for increasing political participation and influence for mar-

ginalized groups (Snow et al 2004; McDaniel 2002; Cornwall 2003; Pilisuk et al. 1996; Fisher 2006 p 36; della Porta et al. 2006). This literature contains more nuanced understandings of inclusion, participation and empowerment than the DRR literature does – as well as more critical perspectives. Parts of the literature also address challenges to empowerment in the form of conflicts and distrust. Tensions are common between the privileged groups that initiate emancipatory projects and the marginalized communities that these projects are set up to empower (Snow et al. 2004 p. 117; McDaniel 2002; Cornwall 2003; Pilisuk et al. 1996; Mosse 2004; Campbell 2014). To understand such tensions, it is relevant to study micro processes of organizing. Analysts need to pay attention to whether marginalized communities are participating on equal terms and whether they are able to influence the work within these emancipatory projects. However, there is an empirical gap in the emancipatory literature, as it mostly concerns itself with studies of social justice movements that focus on other types of issues than disaster inequalities. Little empirical research exists that explores social justice movements within post-disaster processes in particular, yet post-disaster processes might imply different types of challenges for empowerment within emancipatory projects.

Based on these gaps it seems cases that lie in the intersection between disaster management and social justice movements are relevant arenas for exploring empowerment of vulnerable groups in post-disasters processes, especially if they are studied with the help of theory from the emancipatory literature rather than the DRR literature. However, empirical examples of social justice movements that organize around issues of disaster inequality are rare. But there is one which can be neatly located in the nexus between disaster management and social justice organizing – OS and the subsequent grassroots organization Rockaway Wildfire. Exploring this case is an interesting opportunity to add to the theoretical silences of the DRR literature, as well as the empirical gaps of the emancipatory literature.

Case Selection

The case of this thesis can be placed in the nexus between disaster management and social justice organizing, in that it is both a relief actor and a social justice movement working toward long-term social and political change. The case is not a common one to study within DRR research. DRR research often focuses on formal projects within the realm of resilience, vulnerability reduction and community empowerment – for example the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) work with community empowerment. But such projects focus on adaptation to and better management of risks for the community. They are often coupled with institutional and political administrations, and may be organized around hierarchical steering models with little room for the type of radical ideas and strategies that are more likely

part of autonomous social justice movements. Such projects seldom incorporate explicit ideological critiques of structurally differentiated vulnerability and they seldom challenge long-standing inequalities. If we only study projects where community empowerment is supposed to flow from the top down we may miss important dimensions of empowerment. The case under study here instead allows for exploration of relations between privileged and non-privileged groups, because it constitutes a setting in which ideas around inequality can be formed more freely and in which potentially skewed relationships between participants may be overtly addressed.

OS emerged out of a larger social justice movement, the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, which was a movement dedicated to putting issues of economic inequality on the political agenda. However, in 2012, when Hurricane Sandy hit NYC, OWS was a dormant movement. The storm revealed underlying structural inequalities throughout NYC that were manifested in differentiated vulnerability across different social groups. Inequalities based on income, race, housing, and immigration status were exposed in the aftermath of the storm (Rohde 2012; Align 2013; Solidarity NYC 2013; Rebuild by Design, 2013b; Murphy 2011; Jaffe 2013). In the wake of Hurricane Sandy several kinds of communities mobilized to take political action. Across the city, alliances of community groups, labor unions, faith-based organizations, and environmentalists came together to demand a just and sustainable rebuilding so that “the tens of billions of dollars for redevelopment would not end up in the hands of the same people that created these injustices” (Liboiron 2013). OS is to be understood against this backdrop of general mobilization around issues of inequality, before as well as after the storm.

In the immediate wake of Hurricane Sandy in October 2012, a branch of former OWS activists turned to disaster relief in response to what they saw as a faltering institutional response from city agencies to provide just relief to NYC’s marginalized communities. OS’s relief work was based on a political ideological outlook, yet the work took on very practical expressions of concrete problem solving. OS came to be a successful relief network, and at its peak it gathered roughly 60,000 volunteers that distributed direct aid (food, heat, water), provided medical and legal aid, helped with repairs and reconstruction, and was sustained by private donations running up to approximately \$1.3 million USD (Homeland Security Studies 2013). In the recovery process that followed after the first months of relief work, activists from a local OS hub in Rockaway started to form an organization called Rockaway Wildfire. Rockaway, a peninsula located in Queens, was severely hit by Hurricane Sandy. The area is home to many socioeconomically vulnerable communities who had a difficult time recovering from the storm. After a period of formation, in which outside activists and residents formed the agenda and the structure of the organization, Rockaway Wildfire started to build a coalition of grassroots organizations in the area, called United Peninsula Working to Attain Responsible Development (UPWARD). The goal of the UPWARD coalition was to put pressure on local politicians and develop-

ers to take Rockaway's low-income population into account in an urban planning project that emerged after the storm. Throughout the relief and recovery work, the outside activists aimed to mobilize residents from marginalized communities to take on active leadership roles and form part of the agenda setting and organizational formation. The explicit goal of this emancipatory project was to transform structural inequalities both in relation to and beyond disaster effects. The work was initiated and facilitated by privileged groups but with the specific goal to empower non-privileged storm-affected groups.

This is a case of two things simultaneously. On the one hand, it is a case of a relief actor and in that sense comparable to other types of relief actors such as emergent groups. It is not uncommon to see people voluntarily step up to fill the gaps in available services, either by helping existing non-profits or by creating new forms of emergent networks and collaborative practices (Simo et al. 2007 p. 125). Emergent group research focuses on spontaneous network-oriented relief efforts that emerge in response to disasters. Individuals, citizens or voluntary associations come together in these types of situations, and scholars usually theorize around how they coordinate people, resources, tasks, and knowledge (see for example Majchrzak et al. 2007; Stallings et al. 1985; Yu Hung-Lai 2012). Yet, OS is a unique instance in this class of cases, as it stemmed from a wider anti-authoritarian social justice movement devoted to issues of inequality in general. This sets the case apart from other types of emergent groups who are seldom politically oriented but are rather collective reactions to practical problems.

On the other hand, it is a case of a social justice movement. But since it branched out and engaged in hands-on disaster relief and recovery work, it is different from other social justice movements. Throughout history, marginalized and politically voiceless people have come together in grassroots organizing attempts to advocate for their needs and interests. Egalitarian grassroots organizing comes in many different forms and happens in many different forums. The goals and objectives of these efforts, the strategies used and the structure of powers that they have challenged are diverse. Examples are many, among them is the Chicago urban project in which local residents from a socioeconomically marginalized area built environmentally sustainable greenhouses on the rooftops of their apartments (Pilisuk et al. 1996 p. 22), community groups that are responding to toxic waste in their neighborhoods such as the Mothers of East Los Angeles (Pilisuk et al. 1996 p. 28), or women's community groups mobilizing in the aftermath of economic crises in 1980s Latin America (Cornwall et al. 2005 p. 791). Much community-based organizing is, however, fairly consistent in its fundamental principles. It is a form of organizing that aims to build power sustainably, in other words in the long term, with and through active involvement of community residents in order to confront and transform oppression. Particular emphasis is on supporting and building the power of those that are directly affected (Dixon 2012 p. 47). However, social justice movements rarely branch out to

do relief work in the wake of disasters to the extent that OWS activists did under the heading of OS. Figure 1 below visualizes how the case is located in the nexus between these two classes of cases, on the one hand cases of disaster management, particularly of emergent groups, and on the other hand cases of social justice organizing.

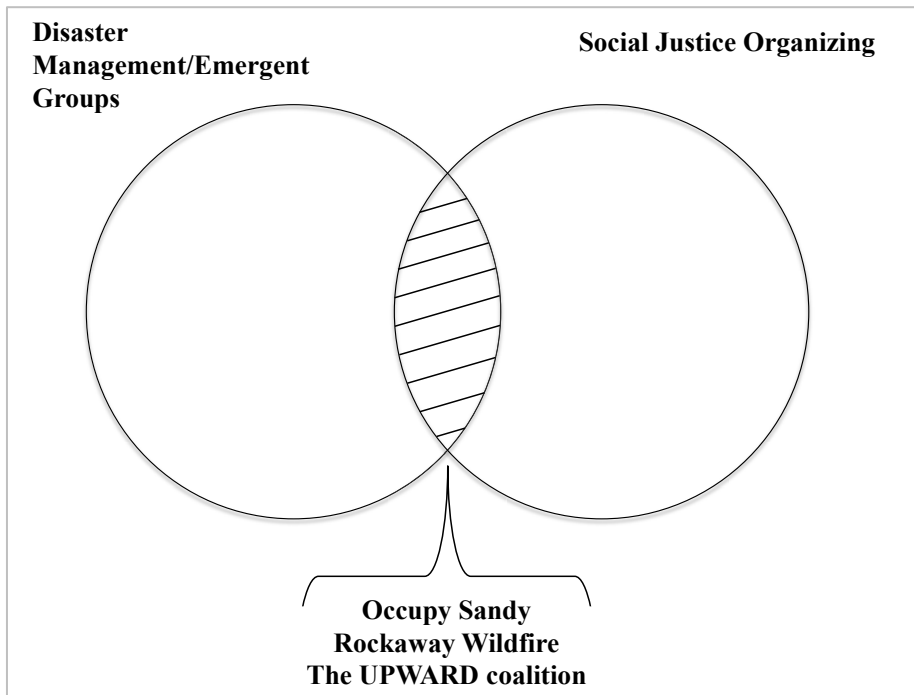


Figure 1: Situating the case

A Thematic Analysis of Three Phases

The empirical description will consist of a chronological narrative over three phases: immediate relief work, covered in the first thematic chapter (Chapter 5); organizational formation, captured in the second thematic chapter (Chapter 6); and external advocacy and collaboration, described in the third thematic chapter (Chapter 7). The second and third phases are part of the overall long-term recovery period. Each phase will be thematically structured according to the three organizing ideals since the activists attempted to organize the work in line with them. The case explored in this dissertation is of a relief process that shifted into a recovery process, but where the three fundamental organizing ideals remained stable over time, across temporal phases and throughout different organizational functions. In this way the ideals are viable lenses through which a very complex and shifting post-disaster process can be conceptually organized.

The Temporal Dimension

Post-disaster processes can be roughly divided into relief and recovery. The relief period includes the first days to weeks, and the focus is on saving lives and homes, securing infrastructure and routes for transportation, evacuations, and providing healthcare, food, water, and shelter (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 96). The recovery stage roughly covers the one-year period that follows the disaster (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 98). Schools, roads, public transports, social services, and businesses are to be reopened and people need to find a way back to sustain their livelihoods. However, depending on how fast or slow it takes for these things to happen, the recovery period can extend into several years. The recovery stage is an opportunity to think about possible ways to reorganize societal systems and organizations in light of the crisis (Lizzaralde 2010 p. 5). If organizing toward social and political changes after a disaster is seen as part of the recovery, recovery covers longer timeframes than a year. In the case studied here, the relief period included the first three months immediately after the disaster in which the OS network worked intensively with relief activities, followed by an approximately one-year process in which Rockaway Wildfire was formed and established, followed by a partly overlapping period of external collaboration and advocacy. This is visualized in the timeline below (*Figure 2*):

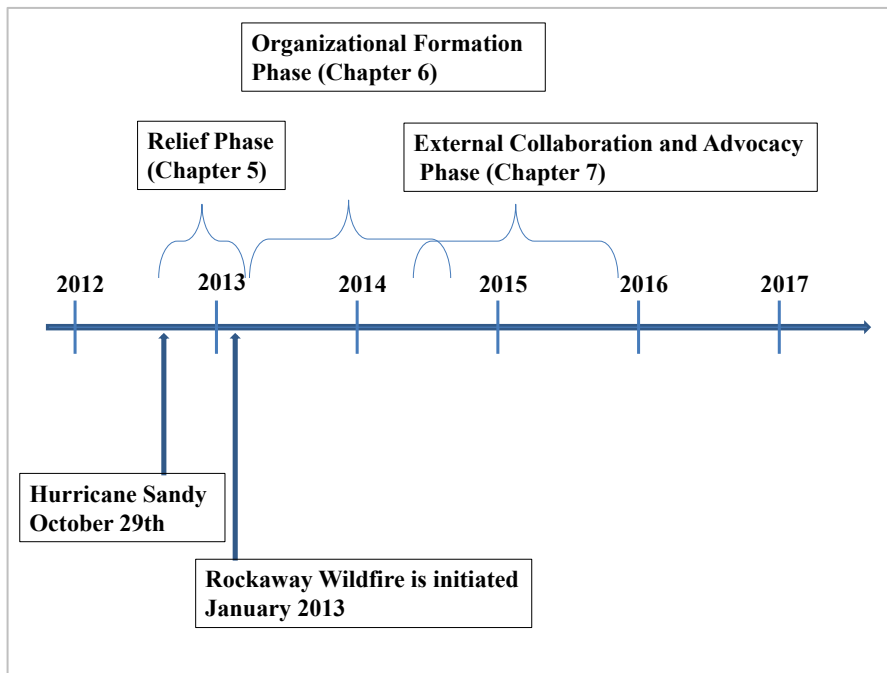


Figure 2: Post-disaster time-line

The Thematic Dimension

This thesis explores a privileged actor's (outside activists) attempt at empowering a non-privileged actor (storm-affected residents). Based on an ideological outlook on how aggressive capitalism creates persistent socio-economic and political marginalization for some social groups, while other social groups reap the benefits, the goal of the outside activists was to build residents' collective capacity to alter the unfair life circumstances they were in, which had made them particularly vulnerable with regard to the storm. Thus, the work was initiated by an actor deeply aware of privileges and power imbalances who aimed to change the social order that prescribed them. The privileged actor organized the work in line with three organizing ideals that were thought to create an empowering milieu for the non-privileged actor. The idea was that the residents would eventually be in charge of the work, decide on the agenda, be responsible for the implementation of the agenda, and assume leadership roles.

The three organizing ideals were inclusion, flexibility and horizontality. The ideal of inclusion means that organizers aim to create a project that is open to anyone who wants to be part of it. The ideal of flexibility means that outside initiators refrain from predetermining the agenda, and instead let this be in the hands of the non-privileged actor, and that there is room for participants' improvisation and innovation with regard to how the work should be implemented. The ideal of horizontality means that leadership is shared, and that anyone who feel compelled to take on leadership roles are welcome to do so. The ideal of horizontality further means that inequality between participants are compensated for through various meeting techniques meant to challenge differences in social status. The ideals have emerged in opposition to projects that are rigidly managed through a hierarchical steering model, where the objectives have been predetermined, and where only selected participants are invited to take part and are expected to follow already determined plans and strategies. The portrayal of the three phases will include the work carried out in each phase, focusing on whether these ideals were translated into practice and the various expressions that this ambition took on. Ultimately, the focus is on the extent to which residents gained influence over ends and means and the processes of negotiations that underpinned this, as it was understood and perceived by the participants.

Transformation of Structurally Differentiated Vulnerability

This section offers a discussion on what can be expected from this particular case with regard to transformation of structurally differentiated vulnerability. In brief, it is argued in this section that local social justice organizing will probably not result in transformation of structurally differentiated vulnerabil-

ity given the pervasive structural character of this problem, but may contribute to vulnerability reduction locally. Such a material outcome of the organizing is, however, merely one instance of this empirical study, and not the most important one. I also argue in favor of paying attention to non-material gains such as developed capacity for collective action, gains that can be found in the process of organizing.

Structurally differentiated vulnerability is a problem that requires several kinds of transformational solutions that span the whole spectrum from global to local. Addressing it would, for example, require more regulated markets so that the extreme economic growth paradigm within our capitalist societies can be reined in, a halt in greenhouse gas emissions could be achieved, and a thorough redistribution of wealth from privileged to less privileged groups can be enforced. A transformation would also require that the international community overcomes the collective action problem that is climate change mitigation and adaptation, and it would require substantially different urban planning in many countries so that the discriminatory effects of housing and dwelling that result in unequal exposure to disasters for different social groups can be altered. On top of that a complete shutdown is needed of the racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, and ableism that is part and parcel of many societies, which add to the problem of structurally differentiated vulnerability. In brief, transformation calls for a complete reconfiguration of the social system as we know it. Needless to say, such transformation is a utopian idea, and it is not likely that we will see such ubiquitous change in the near future. And expecting local social justice organizing to have any substantial impact on such macro level social and political changes is probably misguided.

But there are less ambitious goals that social justice organizing might bring about, especially if this organizing takes place in conjunction with a disaster. Within social movement and crisis management research alike there is a theoretical notion of crises as windows of opportunity for social mobilization and political change. Some social science resilience thinkers talk about how a crisis or a rupture might bring about new ways of life. The inspiration for this idea is the complex ecological system thinking that assumes that systems will reorganize at critical points of instability (Berkes et al. 2003 p. 6.) This idea features commonly within much of the crisis management literature. The basic notion is that communities that are overwhelmed by crises may need to reconfigure their way of reasoning, living and governing, and the crisis can be seen as an opportunity that enables actors to advocate new ideas and question pervasive assumptions and norms (see for example Goldstein 2009; Walker et al. 2011).

However, these are merely theoretical notions. Whether vulnerability reduction is achievable in the recovery phase remains an empirical question. Previous studies give no conclusive picture of what to expect. On the one hand, a rather gloomy picture emerges. Even if physical recovery in the aftermath of a disaster may occur, the changes are not likely to resolve existing social inequalities. Macroeconomic analysis of disasters shows that disasters

can lead to significant capital influx, but that the inflows benefit more affluent social groups. Unequal vulnerability is a result of poverty and powerlessness, and interventions that challenge these social structures are likely to be resisted by privileged groups. Moreover, external assistance in disaster situations tends to reinforce rather than undercut existing social structures (Dynes 2002 p. 8; McEntire 1997). On the other hand, there are indications of how communities have become politicized due to social inequalities that were laid bare in disaster situations, examples that are in line with the idea of disasters as windows of opportunity. Disasters may also increase the divide between vulnerable and privileged groups – in that they often enhance vulnerability for the affected ones (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 96; Peacock et al. 1997). Disasters often shine a spotlight on inequality and can highlight and fortify ongoing political struggles along the lines of regional/ethnic/class inequality (Green 2008 p. 245; Pelling et al. 2010 p. 24). Some disaster situations have been shown to set forth open policy dialogues, create an enhanced sense of ethnic identity, or even play a role in post-disaster elections (Fothergill et al. 1999 p. 167). One example is the development of permanent social security systems in Zambia following a 1992 relief program (Buchanan-Smith et al. 1994 p. 8). After Hurricane Andrew struck the U.S. in 1992, new community projects were implemented to improve poor neighborhoods, and after the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989, efforts were made to create affordable housing for low-income families (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 103). Another example is the Chilean earthquake in 1939, which killed 30,000 people and triggered accelerated policy change (Pelling et al. 2010 p. 24). Moreover, the flooding that inundated New Orleans in 2005, for example, brought to the fore race and class discrimination, and set loose a national crisis that was further exacerbated by the largely inadequate federal response together with the revelations that the Bush administration was guilty of cases of cronyism that served as a precursor to the disaster (Pelling et al. 2006 p. 3).

Research has shown that political change is most likely when losses are high and where income inequality is significant (Drury et al. 1998 p.153). Thus, disasters can function as critical junctures and contribute to political change where more egalitarian policies emerge in the post-disaster phase (Pelling et al. 2010 p. 22). State failures to respond accurately to disasters may create temporary power vacuums that open up for contending civil society actors working for systemic change (della Porta et al. 2006; Boin et al. 2008; Hannigan 2012 p. 107; Pelling et al. 2010). So even if it seems farfetched that local social justice organizing would result in full transformation of structurally differentiated vulnerability, it is still relevant to explore local expressions of social justice struggles that may contribute to vulnerability reduction. The relationship between political mobilization at a community level and social change on structural levels has been theorized within the emancipatory literature on social change. The goal of community mobilization can be centered on social change of material conditions

(Campbell 2014 p. 47) since these are determinants of the exposure to disaster risk. In the third phase of organizing, Rockaway Wildfire initiated a coalition of grassroots organizations in Rockaway. The goal of the coalition was to influence a process of urban planning and development by putting pressure on decision-makers. The coalition drafted a so-called Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), and the ambition was to put pressure on developers to assure social benefits such as affordable housing, local jobs and social services. Given an interest in whether mobilization leads to social change of material conditions, one could assess whether the coalition's work resulted in any changes in the material conditions for low-income communities of color in Rockaway, as these conditions are closely connected to their disaster vulnerability.

But given the pervasive inequality, woven as it is into the fabric of life in the poorer neighborhoods of Rockaway, even this would be too taxing a standard. Its low-income communities bear the brunt of a reality of unjust marginalization. People seldom make a conscious choice to live in socioeconomically marginalized areas. Most people do not choose to be homeless, unemployed, or to reside in hazardous areas or work underpaid jobs. The life choices for people who do so are most likely restricted by forces outside of their control. Larger conglomerates of corporations of today are increasingly global, resulting in great geographical mobility of capital. They often operate in multisector domains and have resources to scan for opportunities and appropriate capital in a short time if needed. They often have the power to negotiate tax favors, and can influence zoning and infrastructure of the areas they wish to develop in (Pilisuk et al. 1996 p. 23). Given the economic powers at work we cannot expect a small-scale social justice project to alter the material conditions of vulnerability that Rockaway's residents find themselves in. A local justice fight that aims to increase influence in one particular building project will not, no matter how successful, result in any greater improvements for the large majority of Rockaway's low-income communities of color.

But the work still has the potential to alleviate some of the manifestations of vulnerability, at least for the potential residents and employees of the new area. If the demands of the CBA go through, low-income individuals and families would get access to less costly living options instead of staying in substandard housing, and they would be able to relocate to a residential block that is better protected against future storms and floods. The individuals, who would benefit from the demands for minimum wages and local jobs, would be locally employed with decent salaries, making them less dependent on faulty infrastructure and it would free up time since they would not have to spend several hours a day commuting. These would of course be improvements – benefitting a small group of residents – but it would still be a reduction of vulnerability. In line with this, the potential influence that the coalition had in the urban planning process will be assessed in the empirical study.

But the analysis goes further and deeper than only assessing this. I argue that an assessment of material gains is insufficient. A success in improved material conditions is but one instance of a community struggle; it is a one-time gain that does little to transform underlying structures of inequality. As Young states, we need to look beyond mere redistribution of goods, as long as “institutionalized practices and structural relations remain unaltered” (in Cudd 2005 p. 18). To reach actual transformation, practices of decision-making are just as important, according to Young (in Cudd 2005 p. 18). Therefore, a different outlook suggests that the analyst looks for non-material goals of community mobilization, focusing instead on small gains in improved capacity for change. Empowering marginalized groups can be seen as important regardless of whether it leads to any objective change of the social and economic structures (Campbell 2014 p. 47). We thus need to pay attention to other potential gains that the organizing may result in. And these gains are more likely to be found in the process leading up to any potential success in the CBA work. In this process, a collective capacity may be built that extends beyond the potential material success of one instance of community struggle. And so, even if Rockaway Wildfire’s project of reaching an agreement with the developers fails, empowerment of vulnerable residents may still have happened. Such empowerment is best identified empirically through an exploration of micro processes.

However, it is precisely because this potential empowerment is situated in larger oppositional struggles against structural inequality that it is of interest. What happens in these micro processes is connected to the broader problem of structurally differentiated vulnerability, in that they are one instance of a broader struggle for transformation. Campbell writes about the development of more complex notions of power and social change noticeable both within the wider anti-authoritarian movement and among emancipatory theorists. She writes about an emerging net “of small-scale acts of resistance to inequality, pockets of social protests apparently randomly blossoming in local contexts all over the world” and mentions Occupy as part of this (Campbell 2014 p. 53). Such small-scale projects of activism, often improvisational in character, are thus believed to be part and parcel of a wider movement toward transformation of inequality globally, based on the idea that “the local is global” (Campbell 2014 p. 53). In a way, micro and macro levels make each other interesting. If we were to focus only on the macro level, this eagle’s perspective would paint a very gloomy picture with regard to the prospect of transformation. The micro-level processes with their potential for empowerment are interesting because in these we might find the seeds for change, or we might encounter inner dynamics that can hinder social organizing processes toward larger transformation.

Overview of the Dissertation

After this introductory chapter the theoretical chapter follows. This chapter has three main sections. The first section centers on the concept of power since it is important to understand in light of the research problem. The section elaborates on the research problem with the help of previous research from the emancipatory literature and the DRR research field. It also teases out how a structural and an agency-oriented perspective on power can be integrated. Structural notions of power aids in understanding background conditions of vulnerability, whereas an agency-oriented perspective helps identify what to focus on when researching micro processes of empowerment within social justice organizing. Following this, in the second section of the chapter, attention is paid to the thematic dimension. Here, the three organizing ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality are outlined in greater detail. The third section focuses on the temporal dimension: post-disaster processes along the continuum of relief to recovery. A few tentative expectations of what the different phases may entail with regard to influence for vulnerable communities are discussed. Factors believed to have a bearing on influence for vulnerable groups are the work that the organization forum is engaged in, the specific phase the organizational formation is in, and the external challenges: all factors that go through changes as relief shifts to recovery.

In Chapter 3, the ethnographic method of the thesis is discussed. Given the aim, research problem and questions, a qualitatively-oriented single case study based on a political ethnographic approach (Gustafsson et al. 2016) was deemed the most suitable option. Methods needed to allow for attention to complexities and nuances in the micro processes. The particularities of the disaster, area and actor were also seen as potentially important. Three primary ways of gathering data were used: fieldwork, participatory observations and interviews. The ethnographic method further became more integrated and sustained in time than planned because in Rockaway, widespread suspicion and distrust exist toward outsiders among many residents. This made my attempts at getting interviews somewhat challenging. In order to overcome these difficulties I had to integrate myself more closely with the area. In total I spent 11 months in NYC between 2013 and 2016. Forty-four interviews were carried out (32 respondent interviews and 12 informant interviews), as well as 8 participatory observations. Eighteen field observations were conducted, and in addition I worked for about one month as a volunteer in a community-based organization. I also engaged in daily field conversations, out of which a small number were used as direct data and the rest served to familiarize myself with the area and the issues (*see Appendix 1 and 2 for overviews of interviews and observations*). In studying the first and second phases, respondent interviewees were selected through a theoretical/purposeful sampling (Mattoni 2014 p. 27). I was interested in a particular actor, OS and the subsequent Rockaway Wildfire. I was interested in interviewing all of the core coordinators, residents and outsiders, as well as drop-

outs, and people who were politically aligned with the ideological messaging of OS but had chosen not to partake. In the participatory observations I was interested in exploring the inner dynamics of Rockaway Wildfire in practice. The focus of the participatory observations was on the micro processes, the ins and outs of the meeting techniques, the facilitation of exercises, and the environment of collaboration of the hub. In studying the coalition that Rockaway Wildfire initiated in the third phase, the sample included other grassroots organizations that were part of the coalition or that had been invited but had chosen to not engage. I also interviewed decision-makers in the urban planning process to gauge the level of visibility and influence of the coalition.

In Chapter 4 the case is presented. This chapter links the case selection discussion with the empirical case under study and offers a description of the manifestations of structurally differentiated vulnerability with regard to Hurricane Sandy. It also situates OS and Rockaway Wildfire in the larger Occupy movement and provides an overview of the chronological narrative of the three phases. In addition, there is an outline of the three organizing ideals that guided the work. Apart from linking theory to the empirical material, the context of this chapter also functions as an important backdrop to the thematic analysis that follows in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, the research questions are addressed. Chapter 5 provides a thematic analysis of the relief phase, Chapter 6 captures the organizational formation phase, and Chapter 7 looks at the external collaboration and advocacy phase. The thematic analysis is structured with the help of the three organizing ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality. The thematic analysis shows that collaboration functioned better in the relief phase than in the long-term recovery phase. The same organizing ideals that seem to have functioned to empower storm-affected residents in the relief phase became troublesome when relief turned to long-term recovery. The relief phase saw storm-affected people step up to take on leadership roles, whereas empowerment in the recovery phase was conditioned on alignment with outside activists' agendas. Internal tensions, conflicts and resistance from residents toward the outside organizers marked the recovery phase, which partly resulted in limited external influence for the coalition.

The dissertation concludes with a final chapter that provides an analysis of the empirical and theoretical findings. It seems length of collaborative projects is not the only factor for developing trust but so is complexity. The more complex the activities over which partners are to collaborate the less easy it is. Based on this we could further theorize that the more complex the work is the more challenging it is for privileged groups to give away control. The internal struggles of the organization partially explain the failures to influence an urban planning process that the organization attempted to impact, which connects issues of micro processes with broader change processes toward transformation of vulnerability. The concluding chapter also offers a few notions on implications from the study and provides a tentative sketch for future research about disasters, social justice movements and inequality.

2. Theoretical Perspectives: Empowerment in Post-disaster Emancipatory Projects

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the internal organization of emancipatory projects and how they may enhance empowerment of vulnerable groups. A particular research problem with regard to social justice organizing guides the work of this thesis, specifically that emancipatory projects are often initiated and steered by privileged actors who do not belong to the marginalized communities they wish to strengthen, yet the work is based on the belief that empowerment requires self-organizing from within. The thesis explores this issue in a post-disaster process along the continuum of relief to recovery, through a thematic analysis that is structured around three organizing ideals: inclusion, flexibility and horizontality.

This chapter has three main sections. The first section centers on the concept of power since it is important to understand in light of the research problem. The section starts with an elaboration on the problem with the help of previous research from the emancipatory literature and the DRR research field. This is followed by a conceptual discussion of power. A grip on how this elusive concept can be applied in this case will be attempted by teasing out how a structural and an agency-oriented perspective can be integrated. Structural notions of power help in understanding the background conditions of vulnerability that set the stage for micro processes within social justice organizing, and agency-oriented perspectives help identify what to focus on in the actual empirical investigation of empowerment within emancipatory projects. An integrated perspective implies that the structural conditions of the situation are taken into account, yet the analysis is still open for individual variations from the participants as they negotiate their positions in the social order. Following this, in the second section about the thematic dimension of this thesis, the three organizing ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality are outlined in greater detail. The ideals are distillations of ideas from both the emancipatory literature and the DRR literature. They are organizing ideals that emancipatory activists sometimes strive toward in their organizing work based on the belief that putting these ideals into practice will create emancipatory projects in which marginalized communities can become empowered. The third and last section of this chapter focuses on the temporal dimension. Interest in this thesis is on post-disaster processes along the continuum of relief to recovery. Factors believed to have a bearing on influence for vulnerable groups are the work that the organization is en-

gaged in, what phase of the organizational formation it is in, and what the external challenges are. The case under study is therefore explored over time through three different phases from acute relief work in the immediate aftermath of the storm to a period of organizational formation in the first stages of recovery, and finally to a period of coalition-building and external advocacy in the later stages of the recovery phase. A few tentative expectations of what the different phases may entail with regard to influence for vulnerable communities are discussed. Lastly, a recapitulation of the research questions is offered.

Self-organizing From Within – Elaborating the Research Problem

The ideal of self-organizing is that marginalized communities can build collective capacity to change the circumstances of their own lives in response to their powerlessness. Choudry, a student of the North American anti-authoritarian social justice movement describes it as such:

The fundamental value around which much grassroots organizing within the anti-authoritarian current revolves is the belief that social change happens through two phenomena: self-governance, or when people have a direct say in decisions that affect their lives and self-organization, when they are the main participants in the applications of these decisions.” (Choudry et al. 2012 p. 159)

Within the emancipatory literature, community empowerment involves a process in which people gain increasing control over their own lives, often through some form of participation in democratic arenas that work toward social change (Houten et al. 2005; Sen 1997; Pilisuk 1996; Cornwall 2002). Empowerment, according to this reasoning, can tap powerful resources of hope and enthusiasm among marginalized people who might be used to seeing themselves and their life opportunities in negative lights (Sen 1997 p 3). The creation of self-organized forums is seen as important for this and the enhancement of collective problem-solving capabilities that come with it (Houten et al. 2005 p. 643; Jung 2003 p. 147; Chavis 2001 p. 311; Scott et al. 2012 p. 2752). The anti-authoritarian current that many North American social justice movements are part of today are often based on similar notions. Social change is believed to happen when people have a direct influence over decisions that affect their lives (Choudry et al. 2012 p. 158). Organizational forms and techniques of these movements are often assumed to be empowering, in that “membership, practices and activities tend to be fluid, tasks, skills and resources tend to be shared and decision-making and leadership is collectively shared” (Choudry et al. 2012 p. 159). Similar ideas around bottom-up organizing can be found within the disaster management literature, especially the segments that focus on local communities (McEn-

tire 1997; Fothergill et al. 2004; Peacock et al. 1997). Within theory and practice around DRR there is an extensive rhetoric around the need for increased inclusion and participation of disaster-affected communities. It is believed that for societies to be effective in building resilience, local level inclusion and participation are crucial (Duyne Barenstein et al. 2013; IFRC 1999; Kweit et al. 2004; Mathbor 2007; Eakin et al. 2011). Top-down, rigid and centralized processes are thought to fail, suggesting that more participatory and flexible structures are needed for societies to prepare for the unexpected (Berkes et al 2003 p. 4; Eakin et al. 2011 p. 339-340). A non-hierarchical organizational model is increasingly acknowledged as a way to improve disaster management, as opposed to traditional notions of the efficiency of hierarchical systems. Inclusion of disaster-affected people, flexibility of mandates, roles and activities, and horizontal decision-making are ideals that can be traced within the literature on network organized relief work (Tierney 2014).¹

Interestingly, however, despite the ideal of self-organizing, the start-up and overall management of emancipatory projects are most often done by actors who do not themselves belong to marginalized communities (McDaniel 2002; Cornwall 2003; Pilisuk et al. 1996; Campbell 2014; Snow et al. 2004). This is due to social stratification that distributes cultural and political capital unevenly. Privileged groups of people often exhibit stronger capacities to engage in social justice movements than non-privileged groups. Contemporary social justice movements are thus often initiated by people with economic, social and cultural resources (Snow et al. 2004 p. 117; Juris et al.

¹ It should be noted, however, that within the disaster management literature there is an ongoing empirical and theoretical discussion with regard to which type of approach functions best in relief work, with the alternatives broadly speaking being: a) central coordination from above in a hierarchical relief effort or b) self-organized non-hierarchical networks. The debate as to which of these systems is most effective stems from a fundamental difficulty in dealing with crises. Crisis management researchers often stress three central characteristics that make dealing with crises a daunting task: uncertainty, time pressure and threats to fundamental values (Boin et al. 2003, 2005; Parker et al. 2002; Brändstrom et al. 2004). Many crises are marked by uncertainty about the reasons for the problems, the scale of the problem, who is affected by the problem, and following these uncertainties there is an unclear picture of which activities and efforts are needed (Moynihan 2008 p. 350). At the same time, the timeframe of action is limited. Walker et al. state that “the longer a community stays in a disturbed state after a disaster the more difficult it becomes for that community to recover, and eventually it will not be able to recover. Being in a disturbed state erodes capacity to organize and respond, and induces new feedbacks that tend to keep the system in the disturbed state” (Walker et al. 2011 p. 1; see also Galaz et al. 2010 p. 6). Therefore, it is important to organize relief efforts as fast and effective as possible to avoid second-order problems that otherwise might arise in the wake of disasters. In crises there is a need for strategic and overarching decision-making from a “helicopter” perspective. Yet, at the same time, it is important to let involved actors at all levels have the possibility to independently assess the situation and move immediately to get things done, if needed. Opposing situational needs are present at the same time, and so crisis management scholars are split in their views on what is most effective. Although this debate is not yet solved, the non-hierarchical network model is increasingly acknowledged as a way to improve disaster management, as opposed to traditional notions of the efficiency of hierarchical leadership.

2012 p. 3436). As Campbell notes, “a generation of activists has defined its role as working with marginalized communities to develop their collective agency to resist and transform unequal social relations” (Campbell 2014 p. 47). So, in practice – despite the ideals of self-organizing – initiation and management of emancipatory projects are often done by people who do not belong to marginalized communities, yet they operate with ideals of self-organizing from within (McDaniel 2002; Cornwall 2003; Pilisuk et al. 1996; Campbell 2014; Snow 2004).

Davis claims that one of the problems of many social justice struggles is that privileged people think of non-privileged people as receivers of charity instead of equal partners. Thus, the outlook merely reproduces the unequal relation, as it constitutes non-privileged people as inferior (Davis 2016 p. 26). A similar problem, mainly raised within discussions around development aid, has been branded the “white savior complex” (Cole 2015). It is “the idea that you, as a single (and possibly unskilled) foreigner, can save a whole community. This sort of savior complex is condescending because it implies that you’re a hero while those locals are helpless” (Ferguson 2016). The savior complex is increasingly ridiculed and critiqued, and donor organizations are said to portray complicated issues of poverty through oversimplified images of helpless children that need saving from foreigners (Randhawa 2016). The phenomenon underscores social justice struggles within liberal democracies as well, for example within feminist online movements. Here, women of color question white feminists for dominating the sphere, which in turn replicates some of the same inequalities that the movements seek to address (Holm et al., forthcoming, see also RUMMET 2014; RUMMET 2013; The Guardian 2013; and hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen). There seems to be certain challenges to being a good ally. Collaboration between privileged and non-privileged groups in emancipatory projects that are explicitly set up to liberate non-privileged people may be more complex than at first sight.

Previous Research in the DRR and Emancipatory Literatures

In this thesis, two main bodies of knowledge have been used, the DRR literature and the broader emancipatory literature. Systematic reviews of these literatures unearth slightly different understandings of inclusion, participation and empowerment. On the one hand, within DRR practice and research, inclusion, empowerment, local ownership, and participation are highly held ideals. Bottom-up organizing is believed to strengthen disaster affected communities and reduce social vulnerabilities (UNDP 2015; Oxfam Australia 2012; Norris et al. 2008; ISDR 2013; Leon et al. 2009; Allen 2006). The almost fetishizing discourse around community participation and bottom-up DRR probably stems from the fact that its research field is highly intertwined with the practical policy field. This does not give much room for critical approaches to issues of power and inequality. A certain theoretical

immaturity is noticeable within DRR research and conceptual analysis is often skimmed over. Not many problems are raised, but instead it seems that inclusion of and participation by affected communities is straightforward and easy – and simply something that ought to be better enforced. On the other hand, the emancipatory literature (that focuses on grassroots organizing, community empowerment and collective action) contains more nuanced understandings of inclusion, participation and empowerment, as well as more critical perspectives. Emancipatory scholars have a more complex understanding of processes of inclusion and participation. This literature points to challenges in the form of conflicts, distrust and tensions between benevolent initiators of emancipatory projects and marginalized communities. It has been shown that projects that are formed by outsiders are less successful in reaching set goals (Aquilari et al. 2010 p. 432; Baxamusa 2008 p. 267). In unstable, risky areas residents might view outsiders with great suspicion (Lewis 2010 p. 332). It has also been demonstrated that local leaders might feel threatened by benevolent outsiders that enter communities to empower the powerless, which might lead to acts of local resistance (Campbell 2014 p. 50). Not uncommon when outsiders create grassroots participatory projects is the feeling of resignation that community members have of “helpful” outsiders. Outside organizers and program officers may have come and gone before, without contributing to any observable change. Or worse, they may have capitalized on the work to create jobs and opportunities for themselves without leaving anything behind (Pilisuk et al. 1996 p. 30).

It seems that relations between benevolent outsiders and initiators of emancipatory projects and the marginalized communities they are bent on empowering can be complicated and tense. It has been argued that the potential for emancipatory projects to be empowering depends on “the nature of the power issues which surrounds and imbues these new, potentially more democratic spaces” (Hickey et al. 2004 p. 25). Emancipatory projects are not neutral forums but are shaped by participants’ positions in societal hierarchies (Young 2001). Social hierarchies might hence be reproduced even in projects where participants are well aware of them and even though these projects may be explicitly geared to overcome inequalities (Cornwall et al. 2005 p. 793; Holvino 2008 p. 18; Pilisuk et al. 1996 p. 31). Given these tensions scholars contend that emancipatory projects might boil down to nothing more than forums in which only the voices of a vocal few are actually heard. They point to how top-down, superimposed frames of references hinder broader influence for marginalized actors with regard to agenda setting or implementation. The differences between rhetoric and actual practice is recognized here, where grand-sounding promises of empowerment may be masking projects that in reality simply enlist people in predetermined ventures where an agenda has already been set (Cornwall 2003 p. 1327).

To sum up, the research problem that guides the work is that empowerment is believed to happen through self-organizing, yet most often, emancipatory projects are initiated and managed by privileged actors. The DRR

literature gives little guidance in understanding this puzzle since there is a theoretical and conceptual immaturity with regard to issues of inclusion, participation and empowerment. The emancipatory literature on the other hand is more helpful, but points to potential conflicts, tensions and distrust between initiating activists and marginalized communities, issues that seem to center on how the emancipatory project is set up and organized, and the extent to which marginalized communities gain influence within them. Discrepancies in power between participants seem relevant to look further into. The following section therefore offers a discussion around the concept of power that will help in developing relevant questions to pose to the case under study.

Structural and Agency-oriented Perspectives on Power

A line of difference that undercuts many ontological and epistemological differences within social science is between structural and agency-oriented perspectives. The two perspectives entail slightly different understandings of what drives us as human beings to act in certain ways and not others, and how free we are to make decisions about our lives and what shapes our preferences. Not surprisingly, this debate is also central to the concept of power. There are two main schools of thought. Firstly, we find a liberal, agency-oriented perspective represented by, among others, political theorist Dahl and his disciples. Secondly, there is the family of theoretical perspectives that could be called structural.² Gramsci, Young, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Lukes are among the structurally-oriented scholars who have interested themselves in the concept of power (Boréus in Beckman et al. 2009). The two perspectives rest on different ontological assumptions and will therefore reach different conclusions on how power is best conceptualized. In very simple terms, the agency-oriented perspective assumes a more unified, free and autonomous individual with greater agency than the structural perspective, which more often focuses on the social context surrounding and often circumscribing individual maneuver room. Structural theorists often ask that if we are free to act in the way that the liberal perspective assumes, why do we not see more rebellious acts and revolutions? Why are subordinate groups of people not resisting the unjust circumstances they find themselves in? (Lukes 2005). To explain this passivity, structurally interested scholars have gone to great lengths to tease out the exact ways in which social structure limits behavior. Bourdieu, for example, coined the term “doxic consensus”, a theoretical construct that points to the existence of deep-rooted cul-

² I include in this family of theoretical perspectives structural, Marxist critical theory, as well as post-structural and post-colonial perspectives. I am fully aware that such a clumping together could be considered problematic since these perspectives in many ways differ from each other. It could, however, be argued that these perspectives share an overall understanding of the social world as constitutive of the individual rather than the other way around.

tural assumptions that make certain power imbalances, for example between men and women, seem natural and self-evident (Hayward 2004 p. 7).

I do not wish to engage too deeply with this long and perhaps essentially unsolvable debate, but rather come to a fruitful stance with regard to the particular research problem and empirical material of interest in this thesis.³ To do so, I suggest that we need not choose either an agency-oriented or a structural perspective, but they can in fact be combined, as long as we keep in mind the level of analysis that we operate on. This thesis takes as its starting point socially differentiated vulnerability, which reflects a structural perspective on power in that it identifies how the social system produces systematically unequal effects across social groups at a macro level. However, empirical interest is on micro processes of change within an emancipatory project in which privileged actors are interacting with non-privileged actors with the aim to empower them. A completely structural perspective on power would not help us in understanding such micro-process interactions. Instead, we need conceptual tools that allow for attention to individual agency. The integrated perspective means that the structural conditions of the situation are taken into account, yet the analysis is still open for individual variations from the participants as they negotiate their positions in the social order. In the following sections these two perspectives on power will be outlined, as they relate to the particular case under study here.

A Structural Perspective

This section outlines how a structural perspective on power can help in understanding the phenomenon of socially differentiated vulnerability. Social structures, for example financial markets, government programs, schools, corporations, police systems or healthcare systems, are institutions that shape the kind of opportunities that govern people's lives in terms of education, housing, jobs, and other life opportunities (Young 2000 p. 94). To the extent that occupations, educational possibilities, access to political power or exposure to the effects of disasters are correlated with social markers, such as race, gender or class, there is structural differentiation at work. These structures are relatively permanent, yet the specific content of them can vary from place to place, and they can be challenged or contested (Young 2000 p. 95). Structurally differentiated vulnerability is closely connected to issues of powerlessness. This section will demonstrate how the same social stratifications that disadvantage some social groups — in terms of their exposure to

³ Isaac is critical of definitions of power that only serve to be operational, in other words are only formulated so that they can be empirically tested. Isaac asserts that such definitions will fail to provide a real definition of power (Isaac 1987 p. 21). I agree in general that analysts should not stop themselves from thinking about what it is that we actually mean when we think and talk about power, just because it would be unfeasible to find a way of investigating the concept empirically. Yet, in the context of this particular thesis, an operational definition is crucial.

the effects of disasters — are manifested in the lack of influence that these under-privileged groups have in decision-making processes in general. As Fothergill et al. state, the “underlying issue is one embedded in our social structures, which dictate access to resources, power, and information” (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 104). Since risk exposure and vulnerability are socially produced results of political decisions (or lack of decisions), there is a double burden here. At the same time as some social groups are most heavily affected by the effects of disasters, they are the ones with the least to say about how society is organized, including how risk is produced and managed.

Structurally Differentiated Vulnerability

In line with a structural perspective, the term “structurally differentiated vulnerability” conveys an understanding of vulnerability as being produced by ongoing processes of stratification. The structural perspective, as will be demonstrated in this section, helps tease out how social groups systematically gain or lose from the current order, when it comes to the effects of disasters and possibilities to influence these circumstances. A structural understanding of power enables an identification of exploitation, and how it consists of “social processes that brings about a transfer of energies from one group to another to produce unequal distributions, and in the way in which social institutions enable a few to accumulate while they constrain many more” (Young in Cudd 2005 p. 18). For example, the systematic neglect by government agencies that put low-income communities of color at higher risks than white high-income groups with regard to Hurricane Katrina – and in fact led to a higher death toll for poor and minority communities (Stivers 2007; Price 2008; Elliot et al. 2006) – is one example of how vulnerability is structurally differentiated. Bauman offers an insightful overview of how this was manifested in practical terms. Everyone in New Orleans knew that the hurricane was coming, yet, as Bauman notes, not all “could act on their knowledge and make good use of the time for escape. Some – quite a few – could not scrape together enough money for flight tickets. They could pack their families into trucks, but where could they drive them? Motels also cost money, and money they most certainly did not have. And – paradoxically – it was easier for their well-off neighbors to obey the appeals to leave their homes, to abandon their property to salvage their lives: the belongings of the well-off were insured, and so Katrina might be a mortal threat to their lives, but not to their wealth” (Bauman 2011 p. 6). Bauman names the resulting casualties “collateral”, as they were either dismissed as non-important or they came as surprise effects of political urban planning processes that did not take matters of inequality into account (Bauman 2011 p. 8).

A structural perspective is common in research around social vulnerability. Researchers understand vulnerability to be the result of social structures and norms that work to the disadvantage of some social groups (and to the advantage of others) (Thomas et al. 2013 p. 39; Abramson et al. 2015 p. 8).

Vulnerability has been defined as the “conditions created by physical, social, economic, and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impacts of hazards” (Thomas et al. 2013 p. 42). Social vulnerability, to specify further, are those characteristics of a person or group that affect the capacity to predict, withstand and recover from a disaster (Thomas et al. 2103 p. 42). The framework of vulnerability developed by Ben Wisner, JC Gaillard and Ilan Kelman captures the extent to which social status determines if someone is impacted by a natural hazard, as well as the social processes that led to and preserve these social statuses (Wisner et al. 2012 p. 22). The framework helps identify direct, dynamic and root causes of vulnerability (Wisner et al. 2012 p. 26). Direct causes are, for instance, unprotected housing or dangerous locations. Dynamic causes may be rapid or unplanned urbanization resulting in heavily populated areas with higher risks for floods, for instance, due to unplanned and non-functioning infrastructure. An example of a root cause might be unequal distribution of wealth resulting in poor groups of people having to populate more hazardous areas or being unable to move from them. These direct and indirect conditions of vulnerability work together to create disaster risk, when the natural events strike (Wisner et al. 2012 p. 23). The sections below provide an outline of previous research on structurally differentiated vulnerability, focusing on socioeconomic marginalization, issues of housing and urban planning, and issues of political powerlessness.

Socioeconomic Marginalization in Relation to Disaster Vulnerability

Research on structurally differentiated vulnerability has been conducted from various perspectives. Two examples are gender, where scholars looked at how disaster management harbors what can be called a gender silence, failing to acknowledge that disasters may have gendered effects (Enarsson 1998), or ethnicity, where researchers focused on how ethnic stratification matters in all parts of the disaster cycle (Fothergill et al. 1999). Here, issues of residence status also play a role, especially in the U.S., where many undocumented immigrants shy away from recovery assistance for fear of deportation (Fothergill et al. 1999 p. 165). Perhaps the most explored perspective is economic class, which is a lens used to understand who is exposed to a disaster and the differences in recovery capacity (Jones et al. 2009 p. 86). Often times, low-income communities live in neighborhoods near transportation routes or industrial corridors, as a result of historical patterns of enforced segregation and discriminatory zoning regulations (Tierney 2014 p. 144). Emerging in the field of vulnerability research is also the notion of intersectional overlaps between vulnerabilities (Olofsson et al. 2009 p. 265). Previous research shows, for example, that economic insecurity places low-income women at higher risks than men after disasters, as they have a harder time withstanding material losses (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 102).

It has also been shown that government agencies that manage disaster assistance sometimes reproduce differentiations between social groups. In

general, most disaster relief programs by government agencies are reluctant to handle structural problems of poverty and often want to limit their assistance to disaster-specific aid (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 100). But acute assistance does not offer sufficient alleviation to people who live in protracted crisis situations on a daily basis. Within the confines of disaster-specific aid, high-income residents often know how to “work the system” better with regard to assistance bureaucracy and so acquire the financial aid they need to a larger extent (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 98). FEMA has also been shown to discriminate according to class and race. In the disaster loan process following a 1995 flooding in New Orleans, low-income elderly women were three times less likely than other elderly households to receive low-interest loans, although being over-represented in the population applying for the loans (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 100).

Segregation, Housing and Differentiated Vulnerability

Access to safe and affordable housing is an important issue for disaster vulnerability. People without access to safe housing are usually among the worst affected by natural hazards in urban settings. Urban planning influences which places and populations are made vulnerable and which are not (Adams et al. 2009; Wisner et al. 2004; Collins 2005; Dooling et al. 2012).

In the U.S., housing access is often interlinked with issues of discrimination based on race, gender, health/ability, and age (Sandersson 2000; Mooser 1998; Pelling 2003; Thomas et al. 2009). With regard to race, researchers show how racial prejudice inherent in city planning disproportionately place minority and immigrant population at risk (Dooling et al. 2012 p. 7). Discriminatory policies function to limit housing options for poor people of color, which confines them to neighborhoods that are unpopular among more resourceful people (Bullard 1993 p. 10; Fothergill et al. 1999 p. 167). Thus, as part of ongoing trends of race and class-based gentrification in the U.S., socioeconomically marginalized people of color are warehoused away from services and jobs. In the areas available to them, investment is hard to attract since the value of property is declining. Economic downturns are often harder felt in these areas since layoff policies often disadvantage black and Latino people, and there might be outfluxes of both local business and larger employers. Moreover, politicians are generally more responsive to neighborhoods that are populated by affluent and (often times) white people, where schooling, policing, fire protection, garbage removal, and other social services are higher prioritized than in lower-class neighborhoods. Poorly maintained infrastructure and housing often result in the isolation of neighborhoods. As a result, many black and Latino neighborhoods are populated by people who are poorly educated, whose prospects for employment are bad and who live around a higher concentration of crime (Young 2000 p. 97; Gupta 2013; Klein 2012).

These ongoing housing trends affect what happens in disaster situations. Low-income communities of color tend to face housing problems in disaster

situations. Challenges include living in unsafe buildings with greater exposure to disasters but also having to deal with housing shortages following a disaster. The Loma Prieta earthquake in Northern California, for example, mostly displaced the elderly, the homeless and low-income Latinos. After Hurricane Hugo in South Carolina, out of the 60,000 people who became homeless, most were of low-income and ethnic minorities (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 94). Moreover, displacement of low-income vulnerable groups (both homeowners and renters) has been identified as a result of disaster rebuilding and recovery. Low-income homeowners often prefer to sell their homes rather than take on the extra cost of rebuilding disaster-damaged property, as they often cannot afford to rebuild according to federal and national regulations (Whittle 2005). When considering building codes, for instance, middle- and high-income households will be more likely to have the necessary resources to elevate their homes, a requirement for some insurance options (Gupta 2013). Racial differences in insurance settlement claims have been found after Hurricane Andrew, where black neighborhoods were less likely to have insurance with major companies due to redlining practices (Peacock et al. 1997 p. 180). Low-income renters are often even worse off. In post-disaster repair, services are geared toward homeowners and legal tenants, excluding multifamily and affordable housing units. Some studies show that low-income renters are the least likely of all households to receive emergency assistance in terms of repairs (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 99). After the Loma Prieta earthquake, single family homes were rebuilt at a much faster pace than multifamily units – occupied by low- and moderate-income renters – which remained unrepaired for many years following the disaster (Comerio et al. 1994). Among low-income renters, public housing tenants are often affected most severely. After Hurricane Katrina, public housing tenants were evacuated to FEMA trailer parks outside of the city, and were ineligible for much of the aid homeowners could apply for. Available affordable housing then dropped since many houses were destroyed and rents soared to levels that were out of range for previous tenants, preventing their return. Furthermore, the city implemented plans to tear down storm-affected public housing apartment buildings and in their place make room for mix-income rental units instead (Adams et al 2009 p. 616). Affordable housing, which there is a shortage of in non-disaster situations, can become even scarcer as reconstruction demands require landowners to raise the rents in order to afford the rebuilding (Gupta b 2013). After the Whittier Narrows earthquake in 1987, many low-income tenants were evicted for late rent payment, although the earthquake had occurred on the same day as rent was due, preventing many of the tenants to pay it (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 101). Further, it is not uncommon for higher-income evacuees to obtain surplus housing in a community, at the same time as low-income communities face a problem finding rental housing after disasters (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 99).

Political Marginalization and Structurally Differentiated Vulnerability

Socioeconomic marginalization of low-income communities of color can be broken down into a number of factors significant for life opportunities – access to education, employment, housing, and health, for example. People who reside in racially segregated and disadvantaged metropolitan neighborhoods often face long-standing difficulties in all or some of these aspects of life. These disadvantages are manifested in disaster situations as well, and help explain how it is that some groups are worse off than others. However, socioeconomic marginalization is closely intertwined with political marginalization (Shelby 2014 p. 253; Griffin et al. 2008 p. 7). Political participation – in other words everything from voting to getting engaged in civic work and activism – is lower among low-income communities of color as compared to participation among more privileged social groups (Stoll et al. 2007 p. 880). In the U.S this is a result of age-old processes of formal and informal discrimination and racism. (Frampton et al. 2008 p. 6). The legacy of racism with regard to political marginalization dates back to the era of slavery, where slaves were exempted from voting rights, and later instances wherein white supremacists harassed African Americans. Once African Americans gained the formal right to vote, they were threatened and beaten for attempting to exercise that right. Later examples include enforced literacy tests that functioned to the disadvantage of poor people of color. Contemporary instances are today's disenfranchisement regulations (Alexander 2012 p. 1; Tucker 2009 p. 3), which disproportionately diminish voting rights for people of color – primarily African Americans – the group that is the primary target of racialized mass incarceration (Frampton et al. 2008 p. 2; Forman 2010 p. 996; Haney Lopéz 2010 p. 1023).

Such discriminatory regulations notwithstanding there are also more subtle forms of political marginalization. Distrust toward the political system is high among many low-income communities and communities of color. Such distrust is often for good reasons. Many political institutions have either not taken these communities' interests into account or have actively worked against their well-being (Griffin et al. 2008 p. 5). However, even among those who are actively seeking engagement, there are other types of barriers to political participation such as language barriers or lack of equal education opportunities that affect the level of self-confidence or knowledge needed to partake on equal terms (Tucker 2009 p. 3). Finally, it could also be a matter of finding the time and resources to get engaged. It is not uncommon for low-income communities and communities of color to have to devote a large chunk of the day to work in order to simply survive. For example, as of 2015, over 800,000 New Yorkers are officially below the federal poverty line, yet are still employed, but with wages that do not meet basic needs (Fiscal Policy Institute 2015).

What we find is that the same stratifications that work to the disadvantage of low-income communities of color when it comes to disaster vulnerability also manifest in the lack of power these communities have in civic and polit-

ical work. This is of course problematic since risks and vulnerability are “the result of decisions that communities, societies, organizations and political actors make, or fail to make” (Tierney 2014 p. 39). Within processes of urban planning, for example, differential exposures to disasters across social groups are often the outcomes of local political economics, where control in decision-making with regard to land use and development mainly rests with elites (Tierney et al. 2014 p. 146).

With help of a structural perspective on power and privilege, a picture of the larger problem of structurally differentiated vulnerability has been painted here. This problem is located at a macro level of analysis. However, the empirical case under study is at another level of analysis, in that it focuses on micro processes of social justice organizing. To understand what power, and thus empowerment, is in such micro settings, the structural understanding of power needs to be combined with an agency-oriented perspective. This will be covered in the next section.

An Agency-oriented Perspective

Among agency-oriented theorists, a classical liberal notion is that power is the ability of actor A to get actor B to do something actor B would otherwise not do (Dahl 1957). The empirical focus in this thesis is on micro processes in an emancipatory project in which a privileged actor collaborated with a non-privileged actor. We could ask if this means that the privileged actor necessarily exhibits more power in this setting than the non-privileged actor. With a completely structural understanding of power, the answer would be yes since their social positions place them in a superior position in relation to the marginalized communities they wish to empower. But that’s not necessarily the most likely answer. At micro levels there will always exist individuals who negotiate and relate in various ways to the social structures they find themselves in. A social position does not fully determine individual identity or actions. As individuals we have little control over the conditions imposed on us by virtue of our social position, but we are free to relate to these structural positions in different ways (Young 2000 p. 101). Actors might work around and navigate the conditions to which they were born into and ultimately change them. Such navigations often revolve around precisely the issue of power. Relations of power themselves can become the object of contention. Subordinate groups might fight back and struggles might emerge between social groups. In this way power relations “approximate less a model of stimulus and response, and more a model of endemic reciprocity, negotiation, and struggle, with both dominant and subordinate groups mobilizing their specific powers and resources” (Isaac 1987 p. 24). In summary, agency is an important aspect of emancipatory micro settings, and we need apt conceptual tools to understand how agency is manifested in processes of potential empowerment. This is not to say that we should abandon structural understandings, only that they are not the only factors with bearing on what

takes place in micro processes. Structural definitions of power would not enable empirical identification of instances of agency. Rather, while still leaning against a structural understanding, we could search for the cracks, the unexpected instances of agency that human beings are capable of in the midst of social structures. Doing so requires close empirical readings of the micro processes of interest and attention to how individuals understand the social positions they are in and the attempts at empowerment that they are part of.

Steven Lukes (2005) critically assessed Dahl's notion of power, as well as the next tier of theories that followed Dahl. Lukes is interested in answering the question of how a privileged actor secures domination, and specifically how willing compliance from the subordinate is secured (Lukes 2005 p. 12). This question is immensely important. In the case of this dissertation it has a twist, however. This is a case in which the privileged actor aims to empower the non-privileged actor. In other words the aim is to give away power, by transferring influence and control to the marginalized actor, rather than create willing compliance. The interest in this study is thus not on how superior groups secure their domination but rather the opposite, how and if they manage to unlock their own domination. But Lukes' conception of power is still interesting, in particular the second dimension of power that he presents. Lukes critiques Dahl through a classification of three dimensions of power. Dahl's conception of power (the ability of actor A to get actor B to do something he would otherwise not do) represents the first dimension, according to Lukes. This one-dimensional conception focuses on observable behavior in decision-making on issues over which there is an observable conflict (Lukes 2005 p. 19).⁴ The second dimension of power is, according to Lukes, more nuanced than the first dimension, in that it takes into account not only which propositions on the political agenda are successful, but it also captures the way in which the agenda is shaped, especially the control that certain actors may have to hinder items from reaching the agenda in the first place (Lukes 2005 p. 20). Dahl missed this crucial aspect of power: the suppression of conflict (Isaac 1987 p. 10). As an answer, Bachrach and Baratz launched the concept of "non-decisions" to describe this expression of power, namely

⁴ The one-dimensional conception assumes that interest equals observable policy preferences. This assumption is problematic, according to Lukes. Interests could just as well be unarticulated or unobservable, or people can in certain instances be unaware of their interests (Lukes 2005 p. 19). This relates to a central debate within the field of power studies, namely whether power should be defined according to what is observable. Hardcore behaviorists would of course say so, and some political theorists – notably Dahl and other pluralists – have adhered to this ideal (Lukes 2005 p. 17). Power in the hands of the pluralists is thus something that can be readily observed by investigating which items on the political agenda are being adopted, and then ascribing power to the actor who initiated the item. A critique put forward of this way of conceptualizing power is that it only captures observable manifestations of conflicts between actors with clear and opposing interests (Boréus in Beckman et al. 2009 p. 116). Lukes states that just because it is difficult to demonstrate that power has been exercised in any given situation does not mean that the analyst ought to conclude that it has not occurred (Lukes 2005 p. 41).

decisions that result in suppression of latent or manifest challenges to the values or interests of the decision-makers (Isaac 1987 p. 10).⁵

Observing Influence Over Ends and Means

I agree with Lukes that only observing items on an agenda is too formalistic a way of understanding what power is. It seems pertinent to also include the process by which certain items end up on the agenda and other items do not. When researching agenda setting, empirical attention should thus be directed to the suggestions that are competing with each other, but also be directed toward identifying the suggestions that could have ended up on the list of propositions but never made it, and whether there were some actors who in the process enjoyed control over this. Therefore, I suggest that in order to understand empowerment of marginalized groups, the analysis ought to look at the extent to which the non-privileged actor gains influence over the agenda, or the ends, of an organization, as well as the process through which this influence is gained.

But I would also like to propose an even closer look at the issue of influence. Attention also needs to be on deeper dimensions of influence in a community forum. The research problem of this thesis focuses on interactions between benevolent outsiders and the marginalized communities they wish to empower. As some scholars contend, those who have the freedom to shape the boundaries of a forum are the ones with the most power (Hickey et al. 2004 p. 34; Cornwall et al. 2007). Given this, it is interesting to see whether marginalized communities gain the autonomy to shape not only the agenda but also the way the overall work is supposed to be carried out, or in other words the means. To do so seems particularly pertinent when exploring cases of organizational formation such as the one under study here.

Based on this reasoning, to explore empowerment we ought to focus on whether the non-privileged actor gains influence over the ends and the means of the emancipatory project. The ends here have to do with which

⁵ Lukes states that even the second dimension of power is too limited. The second dimension, with its focus on agenda setting, implies that an actor's interests exist in an observable reality (although an analyst might not necessarily detect them by investigating political agendas) (Lukes 2005 p. 23). Lukes instead suggests a third dimension of power, proposing that decisions are not always made consciously by actors, but behavior "can be mobilized, recreated and reinforced in ways that are neither consciously chosen nor the results of particular individuals' choices" (Lukes 2005 p. 25). Accordingly, analysts need to go further than to just look for observable instances of power being exercised, and try to capture instances in which one actor exercises power by "influencing, shaping and determining the perceptions and preferences of others" (Isaac 1987 p. 13). As Lukes states, the most supreme exercise of power is to "prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable" (Lukes 2005 p. 28). This is a theoretically interesting notion of power but will not be explored in this thesis, because it brings with it deeply problematic methodological baggage of having to second-guess interviewees' stated views and preferences, an exercise I do not wish to engage in.

issues to focus on in the work. The means is captured by looking at the structural features of the organization: which types of bodies make up the organization, which decision-making capacity do these bodies have, and how are individuals recruited to these bodies.

However, interest is not only on how this falls out in the end, but also on how the process of negotiation over the ends and means evolve. Influence over these things is believed to be something that is teased out in interactions over time between actors. There might be considerable variance in members' views on this, as well as struggles and conflicts over the right identity of an organization in which members engage in attempts to influence what kind of organization they are part of (Dutton et al. 1993 p. 95). Individual vantage points and different interests that members bring into the setting inform the way they enact these struggles (Young 1989). For example, we might expect to find resistance from residents against the propositions made by activists, given that they enter from the outside. Such resistance from non-privileged groups has been researched before, with interesting results. Researchers have shown different forms of subtle resistance that non-privileged actors have made use of. One scholar who has looked into expressions of resistance is James Scott (1985), who explored peasants' resistance to elite classes, and demonstrated that the peasantry seldom resisted through full-blown explicit protests because that would create overwhelming backlashes. Rather, resistance was carried out through daily low-intensity expressions such as subtly ignoring decrees, engaging in boycotts, thefts, quiet strikes, and even malicious gossip – all the while keeping a façade of compliance (Scott 1985 p. 304). Similarly, Mosse (2005), an anthropologist who studied British development projects in India through close range ethnography, demonstrated that targeted communities exercised a form of silent agency and shaped the course of the projects in a way that was not immediately observable (identifying this required a long-term ethnographic presence by Mosse). Mosse concluded that in projects that are composed of a range of actors with different worldviews and interests, targeted communities may appropriate projects resources and pursue their interests, albeit in subtle ways. Such manipulation of organizational programming, that suits the communities, is a form of community agency, often not predicted by initiators. The process by which this occurs is, however, “messy” (Mosse 2005). Campbell likewise describes how efforts by white northern women to strengthen women's networks in the global south, were challenged by black women. They claimed that they in fact had more in common with black men than with white women, given that their health-related challenges had to do with poverty and racism, rather than gender inequality (Campbell 2014 p. 50). With this in mind, we need to make sure our conceptual tools are able to untangle such instances of agency. It also points to the need to peel away the layers and decipher subtleties, complexities and nuances.

The Thematic Dimension: Three Organizing Ideals

Three organizing ideals have been developed in this thesis, which will be presented in this section: inclusion, flexibility and horizontality. They are ideals that are believed to create empowering milieus for marginalized groups. The ideals have been distilled by merging notions from the DRR literature and from the emancipatory literature, in addition to inductive eliciting from the empirical material (see Chapter 3 for a detailed outline of this inductive part of the thesis). I found that both fields had equivalent notions about egalitarian organizing ideals (although slightly different terminologies). The ideal of inclusion means that organizers aim to create a project that is open to anyone who wants to be part of it. The ideal of flexibility means that outside initiators refrain from predetermining the agenda and instead allow it to be in the hands of the non-privileged actor, and that there is room for participants' improvisation and innovation with regard to how the work should be implemented. The ideal of horizontality means that leadership is shared and that anyone who feels compelled to take on leadership roles are welcome to do so. It further means that inequality between participants is compensated for through various meeting techniques meant to challenge differences in social status. The ideals emerged in opposition to projects that are rigidly managed through a hierarchical steering model, where the objectives have been determined beforehand, and where only selected participants are invited to take part who are expected to follow predetermined plans and strategies.

Inclusion

Contemporary social justice movements can be understood as primarily working toward social transformation, meaning that struggles are centered on the people who live under different forms of oppression such as women of color, working class people or the LGBT community. It is thus an important objective to include oppressed groups in social justice forums because doing so is believed to disrupt the power structures that otherwise marginalize them (Dixon 2012 p. 43). Similar ideas are traceable within DRR research. It is acknowledged that disaster-affected people possess useful knowledge on how to best solve their own problems, which came about as a response to problems of top-down approaches to disaster relief. Disaster relief has traditionally involved little local feedback; international organizations set up camp in disaster-affected areas and directed relief efforts without consultation with local communities (McEntire 1997 p. 223). Furthermore, existing structural stratification are often manifested even stronger in disaster situations. It is not uncommon that marginalized groups receive help to a lesser extent than other groups in the immediate relief phase of a disaster. Interactions between relief personnel and socioeconomically marginalized communities are contingent on relations between these two groups in gen-

eral. It is often the case that responders and public officials are white whereas the brunt of people affected by disasters is not – which can add tension to response and relief work (Aptekar 1990). Poor and minority groups are among the most likely to fall through the cracks of emergency relief operations. With regard to Hurricane Hugo, research shows that many affected people had special needs due to poverty, illiteracy and physical isolation. Furthermore, many poor people in the area were living out of sight of public authorities, in unmarked homes or on unmapped roads, thus receiving little or no aid (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 96). Other research points to more blatant racial prioritizing, where responses are targeted to white areas before they reach socioeconomically marginalized ones (Beady et al. 1986). Language can be an issue too (Fothergill et al. 1999 p. 163). After Hurricane Andrew, many women of color who spoke no English became targets of dishonest practices of construction contractors (Peacock et al. 1997). In San Francisco, the Red Cross declined an offer of support from community-based organizations to do outreach in low-income and non-English-speaking communities (Fothergill et al. 1999 p. 166). Sometimes immigrant communities shun public officials and relief workers because of previous experiences of political repression, which is the case for many immigrants from Guatemala or El Salvador (Peacock et al. 1997). Research shows that in California, residents originating in Central America had difficulties with the National Guard tents and fences because these structures reminded them of death camps in their native countries (Phillips 1993). As a response to such problems, the contemporary DRR literature explicitly acknowledges the need to include disaster-affected people in disaster risk management and planning to avoid problems of discrimination. The ideal of inclusion translated into practice thus implies that disaster-affected communities are invited to partake in relief and recovery efforts, and that outreach is conducted for neglected areas and communities ensuring everyone who wants to join can do so.

Flexibility

The second organizing ideal is flexibility or the idea that there needs to be room for improvised solutions to problems, as well as openness for non-privileged participants to take active part in shaping the agenda. Flexibility is seen as a democratic organizing mechanism since it allows for everyone to act freely and based on their own judgment, particularly people who traditionally are not part of political organizations or movements. Instead of including oppressed communities into organizations with set agendas, flexibility is seen as a way of allowing for oppressed groups to construct political ideas and be active partners in forming the agenda (Dixon 2012 p. 48). This becomes impossible if the initiators of emancipatory projects arrive with predetermined ideas on what to focus on in the work, or with already decided plans with no room for innovation and improvisation from participants. Flexibility is a reaction against organizing in labor organizations and politi-

cal parties. There, relations with oppressed groups are merely instrumental, as marginalized people are included only to work toward predetermined goals and objectives, and no room is left for marginalized people's problem formulations (Dixon 2012 p. 48). Flexible organizing instead places importance on the potential strategies and activities that can emerge when people come together, share their stories and interact in dialogue in an open-ended manner (Dixon 2012 p. 48). Thus, flexibility is believed to increase the influence of marginalized people, allowing them to take active part in problem definition and implementation of solutions, something that several social movement and empowerment scholars argue for (Holvino 2008 p. 5; Yeich 1996; Pilisuk et al. 1996 p. 34). Not taking into account marginalized people's problem definitions is problematic and leads to skewed results. Examples of this include: environmental risk assessment, which does not take into account affected people's voices; AIDS healthcare professionals who failed to see the disease as a national epidemic before grassroots organizations took to the streets; and white feminists failing to see that the public-private divide so important in white feminist theory is turned upside down when feminists of color raise their voices within academia (Holvino 2008 p. 5; Yeich 1996; Pilisuk et al. 1996 p. 34).

Another notion that underpins the ideal of flexibility is that formally structured organizations put unnecessary strain on spontaneity. Activists instead prefer fluid and malleable processes since these are seen as more responsive to democratic impulses (Smith et al. 2012 p. 288). Linear planning is refuted in favor of improvisation, shared learning and organic action (Campbell 2014 p. 51). This ideal also surfaces within the growing field of resilience research, where attention is sometimes directed to the role of civil society and flexible self-organizing attempts to respond to crises (Goldstein 2009). The phenomenon of so-called hot groups or emergent groups can be described as emergent structures of people who come together voluntarily and organize themselves in response to crises (Wollenberg et al. 2007 p. 2). Large-scale disasters function as magnets for individuals, groups and organizations who feel that they can contribute in relief work (Tierney 2014 p. 206). Research about emergent groups focuses on individuals, citizens or voluntary associations, and studies how they emerge spontaneously during disasters (Majchrzak et al. 2007; Stallings et al. 1985; Yu Hung-Lai 2012; Rodriguez et al. 2007 p. 225). Flexibility is a notion that permeates the literature around emergent groups, often times understood as an ability to improvise. Organizations and individuals set to handle a disaster situation might be faced with unexpected events that generate unorthodox or unplanned strategies. Wiggle room for these kinds of improvised solutions is hence needed (Walker et al. 2011). According to the research around the phenomenon of emergent groups, people's behavior in these kinds of situations has a certain "spontaneous, self-organized emergent pattern that is irregular and highly complex" (Wollenberg et al. 2007 p. 2). Emergent networks are loosely structured and often lack boundaries, so people enter into

them freely. Networks that operate outside of formal authority structures are seen as free from the obligations of formal systems and as such can be more flexible in dealing with surprises (Goldstein 2009). Relations between actors within an emergent network are fluid (Tierney 2014 p. 206) and the activities undertaken are of an improvised character. Techniques draw upon ideas and models from other fields and activities are called forth by the needs of the moment (Lewis 2010 p. 324). Emergent networks are thus self-organized, whereas hierarchical systems are based on predetermined organizational structures, regulations and plans. It has been noted (though not without a pinch of wishful thinking) that disasters “disrupt social order, free people to be creative and resourceful and to feel, more so than during non-disaster times, that the help they are able to give really matters. According to this perspective, bureaucratic organizations and command-and-control hierarchies do not work as well in disaster situations as decentralized decision-making and action by those who understand their own communities and are sensitive to local problems and needs” (Tierney 2014 p. 203). When translated into practice in relief work, the ideal of flexibility could mean that everyone is able to work with whatever they are good at or want to do and that improvised and spur-of-the-moment activities materialize. Practicing the ideal in long-term organizing could mean that disaster-affected people are active participants in shaping the agenda, and that the agenda may shift depending on what the group collectively decides.

Horizontality

Horizontality as an organizing ideal is thought to counteract social inequalities that might exist between privileged initiators of social justice projects and the oppressed people that participate in them. The wider power structures such as race, class or gender divisions, of which individuals in an organization are part of in the outside world, often find their way into organizations. In essence, the wider power structures of which individuals in an organization are part of affect influence within the organization (Hayward 2004; Holdo 2014; Fung 2005; Young 2001). In opposition to this, shared leadership models and compensatory techniques to alter social inequalities are suggestions for how inequalities can be breached within emancipatory projects. The ideal of horizontality is an example of a radical equality perspective, whereby equality is not necessarily arrived at by what seems at a first glance to be the most equal distribution of influence. Traditional notions of political equality prescribe a simple rule: one person equals one vote (Beckman et al. 2009 p. 39). A radical equality perspective instead prescribes attention to the entry value of every participant and any potential power asymmetries that might exist between participants in the outside world (Beckman et al. 2009 p. 44).

Horizontality Through Shared Leadership

Social justice forums often explicitly oppose hierarchical organizational infrastructures, where decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a few people, often privileged in terms of race, education and class. The ideal of horizontality in practice often entails that leadership is shared, something that is supposed to make place for and empower leaders among oppressed groups. Within research on disaster management are similar ideas around horizontality, yet they are less normatively charged and focus more on effectiveness of relief operations. Horizontality is believed to increase effectiveness in that it enables faster transmission of communication (Tierney 2014 p. 206). Horizontality within disaster relief networks means that there are several leaders in place and that communication flows horizontally between them. High velocity and broad diffusion of communication channels between individuals, organizations, groups, and communities are assumed to increase effectiveness of response situations, as faster transmission rates of information are thought to result in quicker responses to threats (Gotham et al. 2011 p. 9). In hierarchical systems, roles and mandates are established beforehand, and shifting them in the midst of a crisis situation can be difficult. In horizontal network systems, roles and mandates are more fluid (Tierney 2014 p. 206). Within horizontal networks there might be several leaders, whereas within hierarchies there are only a few and they are hierarchically organized. Within hierarchies decisions are made at higher levels to be implemented at lower levels. Within networks, decisions can be made everywhere in the system (Tierney 2014 p. 206). The ideal of horizontality in practice may entail that disaster-affected people are invited to take active part in relief operations, rather than being recipients of aid, and encouraged and supported in whatever activities they may already be doing. In long-term organizing it may mean that disaster-affected people are encouraged and supported to be leaders in a shared leadership structure, where no actor is in charge of any other actor.⁶

Compensatory Horizontality

In addition to shared leadership, the ideal of horizontality also implies that power imbalances that exist in the outside world are actively challenged in order to make room for otherwise oppressed groups of people to thrive. Given unequal distribution of power in society at large, inequalities might find

⁶ It is worth mentioning here that there is a certain overlap between shared leadership as an expression of horizontality and open agenda setting as an expression of flexibility. Shaping agendas is part of the task of leading, and so if horizontality as an ideal prescribes how leadership ought to be shared, this in turn is connected to agenda setting, simply because shaping the agenda is part and parcel of what leaders do in an organization. I have chosen to treat the two ideals as separate despite this overlap. I believe it is feasible to do so because horizontality has to do with questions of who gets to lead, whereas flexibility has to do with questions of how leadership functions, as well as with other issues such as how the work is organized in terms of fluidity, improvisation and changes. These are different cluster of ideas even if they are connected in some aspects.

their way into the emancipatory project (Hayward 2004 p. 4; Holdo 2014 p. 8; Young 2001 p. 678). As Young states:

In a society structured by deep social and economic inequalities, he [*the activist*] believes that formally inclusive deliberative processes nevertheless enact structural biases in which more powerful and socially advantaged actors have greater access to the deliberative process and therefore are able to dominate the proceedings with their interests and perspectives. (Young 2001 p. 679)

To correct this problem, the forums need to have compensatory methods in place to challenge these inequalities. There are various compensatory methods that can be employed to alter and challenge domination of privileged individuals, such as demographic restrictions on trainers and facilitators, and ongoing mechanisms like calling each other out for racism or sexism, for example. One instance is so-called progressive stacks in which individuals from unprivileged social positions are allowed more speaking time in rounds.

Much of the work within emancipatory projects is centered on critical pedagogy, developed by Paulo Freire (Freire 2005). Critical pedagogy is a practice in which marginalized people are thought to develop a critical consciousness by critically examining reality around them (hooks 2010 p. 187). This is believed to liberate the mind and simultaneously challenge systems of oppression such as racism, sexism and class elitism (hooks 1994 p. 3). It is a process in which one comes to understand one's own social position and how it stands in relation to other social positions (Batliwala 1994; Young 2000 p. 117). The method was developed with a clear message: it was for people on their own terms. Participants are encouraged to explore and challenge the practices that solidify their own subject positions in the social order. Through these exercises, participants ideally build networks of solidarity and confidence in themselves and their own local knowledge (Fisher 2006 p. 31). Important here is that participants from marginalized groups are seen as equals to the initiators or the facilitators (Fisher 2006 p. 31). The initiator in these types of learning milieus is seen as a co-producer of knowledge; they are but a collaborator in a setting that is egalitarian, as all relationships are horizontal (Pilisuk et al. 1996).

The Temporal Dimension: The Post-disaster Continuum

Post-disaster processes can be divided into two phases: relief and recovery (Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 98; Lizzaralde 2010 p. 5). A few tentative expectations for what the different phases may entail with regard to influence for vulnerable communities are discussed in this section.

In studies of relief management, the political, economic and social conditions that throw low-income communities into situations of perpetuated vul-

nerability are often invisible. By only looking at how swift communities bounce back after disasters, we understand less about how their often unequal effects may be prevented through long-term organizing. The question should rather be what communities bounce back to. Adaptation to pre-disaster states of injustices is nothing more than a simple confirmation of a skewed status quo (Wisner et al. 2012 p. 31). Even in cases of successful relief efforts, the root problems of socioeconomic and political marginalization may still be present. These are problems that have to be dealt with in a long-term perspective (McEntire 1997 p. 232). Given this it is important to not only study the relief phase but also the long-term recovery phase that comes after since the effects of disasters are conditioned by underlying structures of inequality. We may, for example, pay attention to attempts at political change. However, the relief-recovery continuum is somewhat understudied within the disaster management literature. Researchers tend to either study the immediate management of disasters or they focus on long-term issues of social vulnerability. Not many scholars have focused on the full process from relief to recovery. Previous research around trust and collaboration has therefore been included, which can guide the expectations with regard to the potential empowerment of vulnerable groups.

Empowerment of marginalized groups may vary in the different phases. One could, for instance, theorize that the possibilities for influence for vulnerable communities in the recovery phase might have something to do with what takes place in the relief phase. If the relief phase is characterized by an approach in which disaster-affected people are active partners, this may build the basis for further political participation and influence in the recovery phase. Conversely, a top-down, rigid and bureaucratic relief phase, in which disaster-affected people are isolated or victimized, might be less conducive to participation and influence in the recovery phase.

With regard to the interaction between outsiders and marginalized communities, previous research around trust can guide our expectations. Within social movement theory, as well as within research around collaboration, the issue of trust has been identified as crucial. Trust can help alleviate conflicts of interest, facilitate cooperation and create functional relationships between collaborating partners (Helmke 2011 p. 133; Aquilar et al. 2010 p. 432; Vangen et al. 2003 p. 8). Trust is a cyclical phenomenon that recreates itself over time. When actors interact with each other and learn what types of expectations they have on other actors, mutual trust is created (Helmke 2011 p. 132; Vangen et al. 2003 p. 8). It is believed that trust needs to be built one small step at the time, where the first common goals should not be set too high and where more ambitious common goals could be set gradually (Milner 1992 p. 477; Pitsis 2004 p. 576; Sloper 2004 p. 576). Actors who have been collaborating before are more likely to initiate new collaborative projects based on previously developed mutual trust (Milner 1992 p. 477). Finding common grounds to establish a working agenda and a structure for the work ahead across a range of actors could be seen as no small goal. Nat-

urally, interests across actors may be competing and there can be shifting power dynamics in the process. This might trigger internal politics and hamper mutual trust (Chavis 2001 p. 310; Salkin et al. 2008 p. 321). With these notions in mind we might expect that attempts at empowering vulnerable groups may be easier in the long run, as actors develop trusting relationships with each other, and a recovery phase that follows a relief phase that saw the active inclusion and participation of vulnerable groups may be conducive to empowerment.

Research Questions

This chapter illustrated that in order to assess empowerment the analysis must take into account whether residents gained influence over ends and means in the emancipatory project. Secondly, the discussion pointed to the importance of also including the process by which negotiations over such influence happened. Initiating activists aimed to put the organizing ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality into practice. Therefore, investigations of the processes ought to have a close look at whether, to what extent and how these ideals were translated into practice. Furthermore, the organization went through different phases that shifted organically, as relief turned to recovery. Influence over ends and means was hashed out in negotiations between residents and activists, across these phases. In other words, power was teased out in interactions over time, making it relevant to study these interactions as they unfolded, to untangle potential instances of agency, resistance or compliance from residents.

In order to answer these research questions, the empirical investigations will aim to capture participants' own understandings and perceptions of the process of negotiating over power. The participants might experience their own social position and possibility for agency in varying ways, as well as the process in which they found themselves. This is important for the way they negotiate over and understand power, as well as how they view relations with other participants.

In summary, the empirical description will consist of a chronological narrative stretching across three phases: relief work, organizational formation, and external advocacy and collaboration. Each phase will be structured according to the three organizing ideals since the initiating activists attempted to organize the work in line with these ideals. Within the emancipatory project under study, and across the studied phases, this thesis poses two research questions:

1. Were the ideals translated into practice, and, if so, to what extent and how were they manifested?
2. To what extent did the emancipatory project give vulnerable residents influence over ends and means?

3. Methodological Approaches: Possibilities and Challenges of Ethnography

Ethnography has particular relevance for the study of social movements and social mobilization, being on the ground to accurately capture fluid, shifting conditions. Such methods enable the researcher to trace developing mobilization patterns in embedded social contexts. (Balsiger et al in della Porta et al. 2014 p. 149)

As the above quote suggests, this thesis builds on an ethnographic approach. This chapter provides an overview of the methodological underpinnings and the strategies and techniques used.

To answer the research questions, I needed methods that allowed attention to complexities and nuances since these were assumed to bear on the answer to the research questions. Attention also needed to be paid to the particular context of which these micro processes were part since the particularities of the area were seen as potentially important. This reflects a political ethnographic orientation. In line with such an orientation, I explored a “from-within” perspective and I deemed it as important to gain deep-seated knowledge of the context (Gustafsson et al. 2016 p. 13). The ethnographic method was based on three primary ways of gathering data: fieldwork, semi-structured interviews and participatory observations. I spent in total 11 months in NYC between May 2013 and April 2016. During that time 44 interviews were carried out (12 informant interviews and 32 respondent interviews), as well as 8 participatory observations. I conducted 18 field observations, and I worked for approximately one month as a volunteer in a community-based organization. Daily field conversations took place out of which a small number (3) were used as direct data, and the rest served to familiarize myself with the area and the issues.

Political ethnography lends itself well for exploring previously understudied or complex micro practices and especially informal practices of power (Gustafsson et al. 2016 p. 22). With ethnographic techniques we can explore how social movement actors understand and navigate their contexts and analyze internal complexity within movements (Wolford 2006). If we study issues of power and participation on aggregate scales we might miss important dimensions. Instead, we want the methodological approaches and techniques to add “texture to an analysis but also demonstrate meanings and

understandings about problems and phenomena that would otherwise be unidentified” (Berg 2001 p. 102). Thus, the analyst needs to get close to processes on the ground and listen carefully to what people have to say. The gaze should be trained very closely on micro processes within local organizations, as the key to understanding empowerment can be found in the complex interactions between privileged and non-privileged groups. The methodological strategies employed were aimed at observing and understanding actual behavior, both in real-time through participatory observations and through interviews with involved actors. In this sense the methods captured “interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains, wholes rather than isolated parts, and processes of change rather than static snapshots” (Wilson 1997 p. 753). However, to employ an integrated ethnographic method is not without its challenges. To sink oneself into a context and steadily integrate into its myriad of small realities, piece by piece, requires a fair amount of social competence. It is this competence that shapes the relationship the researcher builds with informants, which in turn influences the data one can elicit. To offer the reader a fair chance to estimate the work, I will in this chapter reflect on my own social position with regard to interviewees and field contacts, and try to be transparent with the methodological process.

The chapter has three main parts. The first section is an anecdote – the story of my first encounter with Rockaway and Rockaway Wildfire – that serves to explain the preconceptions that steered the work, the bafflement and wonder that this meeting sparked, and how this meeting functioned as a starting point for the dissertation as a whole. The second section focuses on the methods of data gathering: the fieldwork, interviews and participatory observations. The third section elaborates on the methods of analyzing the gathered material. It offers an overview of the temporal versus the thematic coding of the gathered material. Lastly, the section elaborates on differences in analyzing the three phases, in terms of analytical depth.

Meeting Rockaway Wildfire for the First Time

The methodology of the dissertation is characterized by a partly inductive approach, simply because the dynamics of the empirical field influenced which data collection opportunities became available. In line with this approach, I moved back and forth between theoretical abstractions and empirical inquiry (Chakravarty 2012 p. 268; Mattoni 2014 p. 28). Common within such research processes, the analyst starts out with a few sensitizing concepts. In my case it started with a meeting in Rockaway in May 2013, about six months after Hurricane Sandy had wreaked havoc in the area.

At that time, I was still searching for actors, locations and organizations that would form the empirical material for the study about Hurricane Sandy I was intent on conducting. I was in NYC on a study visit with a group of Swedish emergency managers, mostly police officers and fire engineers, to

learn more about how Hurricane Sandy had been handled. We visited responding agencies that had been active in the relief efforts after the storm. After a week visiting official organizations such as FEMA, NYC Office of Emergency Management (NYC OEM) and New York Fire Department (FDNY), I was eager to get closer to people on the ground and listen to their stories. Possibly, I thought, I would encounter something different than the sometimes self-glorifying narratives of the official representatives who were all bent on presenting themselves as heroes of the hurricane relief efforts. I had contacted a number of OS activists because I was curious of what seemed like a pretty remarkable effort on their behalf. I knew little about OS but the its seeming ability to pull volunteers and resources together in otherwise neglected and politically marginalized areas of the city spurred my interest.

One afternoon I received an impromptu phone call from a resident who welcomed me to an OS meeting with activists and residents in one storm-affected outskirt area of the city – Rockaway in Queens. She told me that the group, called Wildfire, was newly established, aimed to facilitate political education among residents in the neighborhood and wanted to promote local leadership in the recovery process after the hurricane. I quickly rearranged my plans for the afternoon and made a two-hour long train and bus ride out to Rockaway from my hotel in Manhattan. I expected this meeting to be very different from the previous more formal visits. What distinguished OS from the other relief actors was the framework of mutual aid. Based on an ideological criticism of the inherent power imbalances between “saviors” and “victims”, OS activists were encouraging storm-affected residents to be active partners in the relief efforts rather than passive recipients of aid. I figured I would see some interesting dynamics take place, in which otherwise victimized storm-affected people would be in charge, encouraged by activists paving the way for local leadership. But what I witnessed was far from this expectation – and it rocked my boat.

Held in a worn down house that served as a local church, and with roughly 50 people of all colors present, the house was buzzing with life and activity. Residents, OS organizers, and a bunch of children were eating food, talking with each other, shouting across the tables, mingling, coming and going as they pleased. When the actual meeting finally started after an hour or so, one OS activist – a white woman in her mid-20s – initiated a discussion exercise. To my surprise she was constantly questioned and interrupted by a few of the residents, who were visibly annoyed. After a while a few of the other activists came to her defense and asked the residents to back down. However, this only served to fuel the heated discussions further. The meeting dragged on for roughly four hours, and much of the time simply consisted of people shouting at each other across the room. Issues of finances and transparency kept coming up, and residents insisted on asking questions such as: “Who decides here?”, “Who is the leader?” and “Who signs off on the checks?”. Some of the OS activists were trying to steer the discussion away

from these issues by saying things like, “There is no organization here, this is a non-hierarchical space, so there are not strict answers to that”. When the residents kept repeating their questions the activists said, “Now you have to step down and let the meeting happen” or “Your question is not genuine so it does not need a genuine answer”, and shouted at by a male activist (while some of the female OS activists discretely rolled their eyes) “We are not about authority!” (Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 1, 2013).

After the meeting I spoke to one of the most confrontational residents, a young black man who turned out to be the leader of a local youth organization. I asked him why he had questioned the OS activists. He said:

I have seen so many organizations come and go and they gain the trust of the people here and then they leave. We felt there were things that needed to be sorted out. (Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 1, 2013)

There was a certain irony to this situation. Here was a bunch of very idealistic and ideologically motivated young people devoting their energy to building a non-hierarchical emancipatory project in the aftermath of a hurricane that had struck unevenly across their city. They aimed to trigger a political awakening process and empower residents to take the lead in the long-term recovery from this storm. Yet, they stumbled upon resistance from the very same residents that they wanted to empower, a resistance so strong and energetic that it completely shut down the agenda of the meeting.

When I returned to my hotel room late that night my head was buzzing with questions. On the one hand, I was thinking about the strained relationships between the OS organizers and the residents. What is needed for political mobilization to be successful? Which challenges might be involved in privileged people’s idealistic attempts at empowering politically marginalized people? How can emancipatory projects be set up in such a way that they become strengthening for marginalized communities rather than a source of frustration? Perhaps this type of organizing, however egalitarian it might seem, is inherently hierarchical and maybe we might expect resistance toward it because of that? On the other hand, I was contemplating the timing of the meeting. We were six months after the storm, and the immediateness of the relief period was winding down. I could sense that this organizational hub was about to shift into something more long term, yet were obviously going through some growing pains. What kind of strains can be expected in the move from an immediate relief period to the post-disaster phase of long-term recovery?

This first visit to Rockaway and the observation of the Rockaway Wildfire meeting directed my attention toward a few things — or sensitizing concepts — that from there on steered my work. Firstly, what takes place on the ground is potentially very different from how formal public agencies view and publically present the situation, and if we want to understand things

about disasters and inequality we also need to look at local processes. We might even need to focus closely on micro processes within local organizations, as it is in the interactions between privileged and non-privileged groups that the key to understanding participation and empowerment lies. Secondly, we might think that non-hierarchical informal organizations are doing great work in terms of empowerment of disaster-affected communities, but there seems to be challenges at hand with regard to interactions between outside activists and affected residents. Thirdly, these challenges might be contextually connected to the particular area, and this area appeared to be marked by suspiciousness toward outsiders. And lastly, the relationship between insiders and outsiders may undergo changes in the transition from relief to recovery. From this point on, finding out more about these issues became an important priority in my life.

Gathering Data

This section provides an overview of the three data gathering techniques: fieldwork, interviews and participatory observations, as demonstrated in the table below (*Figure 3*):

Type of Technique	Mode of interaction	Type of information
Fieldwork and Field Observations (17)	Volunteer work in Rockaway. Participation in study visits, workshops, public seminars, demonstrations, and rallies.	Secondary data used to develop accurate interview guides, and contextualize the findings from respondent interviews and participatory observations.
Interviews (44)	<i>Interviews (40)</i> <i>Field conversations (3)</i> <i>Both interviews and field conversations (1)</i>	<i>Respondent information (32)</i> Data used to explore individual experiences, understandings and perceptions of the processes under study. <i>Informant information (12)</i> Data used to contextualize the organizing within OS, Rockaway Wildfire and the UPWARD coalition.
Participatory Observations (8)	Purposeful gathering of data during meetings and events with Rockaway Wildfire and the UPWARD coalition.	Primary data used to develop accurate interview guides and understand inner dynamics: interactions, meeting techniques, the facilitation of exercises, and environment of collaboration.

Figure 3: Overview empirical material.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the different types of data used. The fieldwork and the field observations consisted of volunteer work in a local organization in Rockaway, a number of study visits, and participation in workshops, public seminars and demonstrations. I used it to gather secondary data, which helped develop accurate interview guides and understand Rockaway and the recovery after the storm. With regard to the interviews, 44 persons in total were involved, either as interviewees or field contacts, or as both. I conducted more than one interview with three people, and had continuous field conversations with five persons over the years. Out of the 44 individuals, 32 provided information that was characterized as respondent information and 12 provided information that was characterized as informant information. The respondent information came from individuals who in some way were involved in or stood in relation to Occupy Sandy, Rockaway Wildfire or the UPWARD Coalition. This information was used to explore the individual's understanding of the processes and their experiences of the organization under study. The informant interviews were conducted in order to contextualize the micro processes. For example, informant information helped me understand the recovery process in general after Hurricane Sandy, the socioeconomic marginalization that preceded the storm, the various communities of Rockaway and tensions and segmentations across them, as well as the landscape of the area's community-based organizations. The participatory observations were used to gather primary data, information I used to develop accurate interview guides and understand inner dynamics such as interactions between participants, meeting techniques, exercise facilitation, and the environment of collaboration, all of which will be elaborated on in more detail in the following sections

Field work

In the fieldwork I gathered field observations, engaged in field conversations and worked as a volunteer. In so doing, I gathered what I refer to as secondary data: background information that I needed for two main things: 1) to develop accurate interview guides for the respondent interviews, and 2) contextualize the findings from respondent interviews and participatory observations.

Between 2013 and 2016, I spent in total 11 months in NYC, out of which I lived in Rockaway for about one third of the time, where I rented a room in the home of a field informant, in a partly Jewish, partly Irish and in general pretty affluent community. The rest of the time I frequently visited the area. For some stretches I made daily trips and otherwise I would go there approximately once a week. In Rockaway I rode a bike back and forth between the western more affluent areas of the peninsula to the eastern more socioeconomically challenged areas where most of my research was done. I passed my days observing and participating in community meetings, chanting with environmental justice crowds in large-scale demonstrations in the city,

spending time with informants at the beach and at nighttime parties, participating in protests outside of City Hall, and keeping track of public commentary processes on recovery issues. I also participated in many workshops and seminars organized by academic institutions and organizations on the issue of resilience, recovery and community organizing. I engaged in numerous spontaneous field conversations in shops, at the beach and at buses and subway stops throughout the course of my visits. Apart from these physical encounters, I also kept track of local news outlets and followed Facebook pages and other social media outlets. In general, spending time in the field before starting the interviews enables the analyst to explore possible approaches and perspectives, simply by talking to a range of different people. Most of the field conversations served merely to familiarize myself with the general recovery process in Rockaway. A small number of them became primary material to support some of the research results, but to the extent possible I would then triangulate the information with some other type of source. Through the fieldwork I learned more about Rockaway's political marginalization and geographical isolation from the rest of the city, which was needed in order to grasp the level of suspicion toward outsiders that marked the peninsula. I learned about the segmentations and tensions between different communities of the area, and the conflict lines that had a bearing on what took place in the micro processes I was interested in.

Field Observations That Challenged Preconceptions

Some field conversations functioned as bits of information that I needed to tweak my theoretical approaches. For example, one night I met a Latino man of my own age at a low-key party in eastern Rockaway (Field Observation Private Party, Rockaway, 2014). At that time, I was scouting for alternative designs since getting access to Rockaway Wildfire turned out to be more challenging than expected. I had a loose idea that I would trace the influx of private corporations in the wake of the storm to see whether they were making use of the storm as an opportunity to make inroads into the community, and I was also planning to have a look at potential protest groups who were against this development. The man asked me what my research was about and I said:

I'm looking into who gains from the storm, like the companies that are coming in here, developers, for example. And I'm also looking at the different protests against those companies.

His response surprised me a little when he said:

Why would anyone protest against businesses?

This encounter made me rethink the idea to explore instances of disaster capitalism and protests against it. His answer challenged my preconception

about the problems of this area (aggressive capitalists making inroads into vulnerable communities to make a buck out of the disaster). There we were, at a low-key party on the porch of a rundown bungalow in one of the most marginalized areas of the entire peninsula, surrounded by boarded up storm-devastated bungalows, unpaved streets and the occasional police car driving slowly by the house. And here was this young Latino guy who had been displaced from his home because of the flooding that the storm created, who lacked a job to support himself and his young family, and was unable to return to a decent life. Why would anyone protest businesses? Yes, why in the world would they? I realized that I had to tread more gently with regard to disaster capitalism and open my eyes to other perspectives in order to capture the complexities of this area. The Naomi Klein universe was not necessarily the one in which some of the communities of Rockaway was living in, despite the tough rhetoric used by a few of the Occupy activists who claimed to represent them.

Field Observations That Help Contextualize Primary Research Results

Another story from the fieldwork serves as a good example of how field data were used to inform the analysis. One chilly September night in 2014, I cycled to a public meeting with Community Board 14 (CB14). The hall room was located in one of the local churches. It was a spacious chamber with that typical American broadloom floor. Approximately 100 people had gathered. It was a mixed crowd – old, young, people of color, white people, Jewish people, well-dressed people in suits or more casual attire, as well as some people dressed on the verge of trashy. There was a certain air of community here. The common enemy seemed to be the NYC mayor, Bill de Blasio, based on harsh outbursts and more passive aggressive comments toward him and his administration. The agenda included a discussion on the issue of the boardwalk. During this discussion a public official from the Parks Department illustrated the animosity toward the city’s administration, remarking dryly:

Strange as it may seem, I didn't take this job to be your piñata every night.

The hot topic of the evening, however, was the city’s establishment of yet another shelter for homeless people in Rockaway. The frustration that this decision had generated among the meeting attendees ties in well with the historical self-understanding of Rockaway as a place where the city’s administration “dumped” all of the city’s social problems. “Out of sight, out of mind”, as my informants kept telling me when they wanted to explicate the history of Rockaway to me. State Assemblyman Phillip Goldfeder, representing the 23rd Assembly District in the New York State Assembly, which includes Rockaway, was there and he received a lot of applause when he gave a vigorous speech that captured the gist of the frustration:

What we need are businesses coming in and they will not while the city keeps dumping on us!

After his speech an unruly discussion broke out among the meeting participants. Wild speculations and rumors about the homeless people inhabiting the shelter were thrown around the room – they are sex offenders, pedophiles, they are panhandling and loitering and “can you believe it, a few of them actually had a barbeque under the bridge the other day!” This horrible allegation of barbecuing notwithstanding, discussions went onto other topics.

Hurricane Sandy was an integrated part of many statements, tangled into almost every topic, from the rebuilding of the boardwalk to pleas for economic support for local organizations. Before Assemblyman Goldfeder left the meeting he chatted for a moment with a few local activists that I had interviewed a couple of days before (Field Observation CB14 Meeting, Rockaway, 2014).

This description serves as a good example of how data gathering is conducted in fieldwork settings. Participating in this meeting I made a few insights that put Rockaway Wildfire’s work into context. I understood more about a central player in the organizational patchwork that was of interest for the coalition that Rockaway Wildfire was heeding: CB14. I got firsthand insights into the Board’s mode of operation and their lack of any real influence in city politics. I also understood more about the “dumping ground” sentiments I encountered in other instances and the Board’s role as a venue in which residents could vent their frustrations. I got a flavor of the political interest among regular residents of Rockaway and came to see that a vibrant citizen participatory culture existed in the area. I also observed some outright racist and classist sentiments toward Rockaway’s more marginalized groups, and finally witnessed firsthand the ties that existed between politicians and a few of the activists that I was researching at that time.

Overt or Covert Techniques

Ethnographers who attempt to reduce the social distance between them and their informants need to reflect on the extent to which people know they are being studied. Portrayal can range from overt situations where people know they are observed to covert situations where they are unaware, and other forms in between (Johnson et al. 2006 p. 131). In covert research, the researcher hides their role as a researcher, something that is considered ethically problematic. But also in overt ethnographic research, some amount of secrecy is integral (Chakravarty 2012 p. 255). In my case, fieldwork primarily involved the use of overt methods. I was open with everyone I met about the reason for my stay in the area. I sought the explicit consent of all of my interviewees and when I conducted participatory observations I presented myself to the whole group as a researcher. Participating in field conversations was entirely voluntary and I always introduced myself as a researcher.

However, some mild form of deception was also involved in a few situations where I made an effort to blend in as a regular visitor. During open community meetings with the Community Board, for example, I did not introduce myself since these meetings were sometimes attended by up to 100 people and were open for everyone. At large-scale protests there simply was no possibility of walking around introducing myself as a researcher to each and every one. I would occasionally overhear conversations on subways and buses that I only took note of without interrupting to introduce myself. However, to the extent that I actually made direct use of the data gathered in such covert encounters, I always made sure to triangulate the information through other sources. The few field conversations that ended up becoming direct data points in the analysis have been made anonymous to protect the informants. When I was interviewing public officials, corporate representatives and local politicians, I would reduce the social distance between us by dressing up slightly and trying to come across as an informed observer (in comparison to other interviews where I sometimes played dumb in order to trigger richer explanations from the interviewee). So, on a regular day I could have a scheduled interview at the NYC Planning Department close to City Hall, only to leave the building, take off the blazer jacket and put it in my bag, throw a scarf around my neck and walk a few blocks up to Wall Street to participate in an aggressive anti-capitalist march where activists were arrested en masse. Sometimes I felt like a fraud. I had to remind myself that the research questions I was interested in – and which were the reasons for this chameleon style of research – were of ethical value to the research fields of disasters and inequality.

Challenges in Access to Data

In Rockaway, widespread suspicion and distrust exist toward outsiders among many residents. Barely a day went by without someone talking about the issue of outsiders. As one respondent told me:

The storm brought about a lot of people who had never been around before. And now all of a sudden they take an interest in these kids out there. But where were they before? How come they show up now? It's because there's a lot of money to be made out of their predicament. Grants that can be sought here, lots of money to make. (Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 20)

The suspicion made my attempts at getting interviews with residents and community organizers difficult. It was also hard to get access to Rockaway Wildfire organizers. I believe the suspicion I encountered by them had several reasons. Firstly, and for good reasons, many Occupy activists had an inherent suspicion toward curious individuals who represent some form of establishment. I was once taken as a corporate spy by an activist, for example. She had been approached by several persons who she believed were from the pipeline company she was protesting. She had had individuals pos-

ing as students who claimed that they wanted to interview her about movement tactics and strategies. Naturally this made her very suspicious of me when I approached her and asked her about her work. Apart from potential corporate surveillance, some of the activists were likely under some form of police surveillance. They had legitimate reasons to be cautious (see Parker 2014 for an example of the suspicion). In addition, a certain academic fatigue was discernible. A fair share of the OS activists I approached had been interviewed before by several researchers interested in the Occupy movement. One activist used the following illustrative metaphor:

The academic world is like a black hole: they come, they take and then they leave and we don't know what's coming out of it. (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4)

In addition, an inherent suspicion toward journalists might have spilled over on me as a researcher. The organizers from OS had previously been portrayed in a bad light by a journalist who wrote an article that tacitly suggested that they were handling fundraised money in an illegitimate way, which brought about some controversy among the residents of Rockaway (West 2013). Finally, other things might explain the reluctance as well. The organizers were primarily interested in connecting with residents of Rockaway to get them on board. My presence as an outsider might have been something that merely stood in the way of them working to that goal, as I was there asking for their time and attention.

Strategies for Securing Access to Data

I had to somehow tackle these trust issues in order to secure access. Problems of access are common within ethnographic research, and one strategy to overcome them is called immersion, meaning that the researcher tries to approach the group or individuals through a range of different possible entry points (Gustafsson et al. 2016 p. 147). In order to overcome the difficulties I made use of a strategy of immersion based on volunteer work.

While biding my time waiting for a positive response from the organizers of Rockaway Wildfire, I volunteered in a sister organization called You Are Never Alone (YANA) Services, which is a community resource center in West Rockaway. YANA opened in October 2012, two weeks before the storm devastated the region. In the immediate relief period, YANA partnered with relief organizations and volunteers, and became a buzzing relief hub that provided the community with hot meals, supplies, medical and legal assistance, and volunteers to help in clean-up efforts. After the storm YANA returned to serving the originally intended audience for career and educational trainings and workshops. The director of YANA introduced me to the social and economic challenges of the area. He and his co-workers functioned as helpful inroads to a great deal of informants across a range of local community organizations, and so it was with YANA as my base that I start-

ed to conduct informant interviews with representatives from different grassroots organizations. As a volunteer at YANA I provided the staff with background information and research and helped write applications for funding. Being present at their office was very beneficial for my work since it was a place in which many persons entered and passed any given day, from local residents who were receiving help and support from the center, to representatives from other organizations and networks, who either came for meetings with the staff or rented the conference room for internal meetings, or simply stopped by to say hi and have a short chat. The office was almost constantly buzzing with people and conversations (Field Observations YANA, Rockaway, 2013-2014). The volunteer work functioned as a way of getting to know the area from the ground up because what I witnessed here were the remnants of a failed public disaster recovery. The people I met at YANA experienced disaster vulnerability in its most direct form: they lost their homes and jobs, they were experiencing medical problems from the storm (mold, injuries, psychological problems) that were not taken care of or they were unable to fend for themselves economically. As is common within ethnographic methodologies (Johnson et al. 2006 p. 127; Chakravarty 2012 p. 265), the initial stage of data collection contributed to the development of questions for the respondent interviews. It also gradually helped me become more of an insider than before. The benefits of achieving insider status are obvious: a deeper level of understanding; familiarity with the lingo, which makes the conversations and interviews run smoother; better knowledge of the relevant social actors of the field; better rapport and trust between researcher and interviewees, which might enable more honest conversations; and easier communication once the researcher has left the field (Taylor 2011 p. 6).

While volunteering at YANA I designed a plan on how to make myself useful to the persons I wanted to interview. I realized that there were a lot of transactional processes occurring between individuals, organizations and hubs in the field. The currency that everyone traded with was their personal connections. Setting up a meeting with someone for an interview was about finding a mutual self-interest, along the lines of “I do something for you so that you can do something for me”, a transaction that most often involved putting the other person in contact with someone else. Once I realized this I understood that I could not simply expect people to sit down with me without having anything to offer in return. I thus started to slowly integrate myself into this web of exchanges by networking intensively. I had to become part of the context in order to secure interviews and having connections in many different places became strategically important. This was a time-consuming endeavor and one that required a lot of self-reflection. The challenge was to navigate people’s expectations of me in order not to bias the information they shared. However, despite the potential pitfalls of such an integrated style of research it was a necessary point of departure.

During the volunteer period, I continually attempted to contact the organizers of Wildfire. After a period of what began to feel like proper stalking through emails, phone calls and direct approaches at protests and events, one of the outside activists, a core coordinator, was identified as a potential gatekeeper: an individual who seemed to exert control over access to the group as a whole. I conveyed to her that I would be willing to: 1) listen to what the organizers saw as important to explore academically, and 2) let the organizers have input on a few of the interviews' questions I was planning on asking other organizations in the area. This finally did the trick and she agreed to sit down with me. Once I secured an interview with her she steered the others in my direction, and I was able to schedule interviews with all of the core coordinators and granted permission to conduct participatory observations of meetings. This strategy also became a way of testing the practical relevance of my project. I said that I was interested in egalitarian recovery processes and issues of empowerment. I planned on exploring this issue through taking a close look at issues of insider-outsider interaction, between privileged and non-privileged groups, but I had not told her that in so many words. But when I asked her she brought up the topic of insider-outsider dynamics as one thing she would like to see researched.

Trust is a necessary foundation of successful data collection in the field. Without trust, there will likely be no access or consent and thus no data. But this simple either-or relationship has been problematized. It is not necessarily a binary choice since it is unlikely that the observer is either completely trusted or not trusted. Varying levels of trust can exist (Chakravarty 2012 p. 253). It is common within field research that the researcher is observed carefully by the informants (Chakravarty 2012 p. 257). In line with this, a sort of test period took place while I was interviewing Rockaway Wildfire coordinators and participating as an observer in open meetings. To some of the more radical ideologists among the interviewees my association with YANA may have implied that I belonged to the "charity" camp rather than the "structural change" camp, as YANA had a reputation of being charity-oriented. Therefore, I had to work a little harder to prove myself ideologically. My sympathies and politics were in fact pretty much aligned with the activists', but since I was careful not to be too intrusive it took some time for them to discover this. Many times, the field researcher's strategy is to put up a "bland and naïve" face in order to enmesh oneself seamlessly into a context (Chakravarty 2012 p. 262), which is what I initially tried to do. After a while I realized this was not the best strategy for me since the way to blend in in this type of activist context is to be frank, outspoken and radical, as other research on social movements have demonstrated (Balsiger et al in della Porta et al. 2014 p. 155). But a strong sense of being foremost an observer (not an active participant who interferes in discussions, for example) made me tread lightly. I would reveal my sympathies only when directly asked a question, I would sit quiet during group discussions and so on. Because of this it took some time to gain the confidence of the interviewees.

However, a gradually trusting relationship was built between me and the activists. My departure from general social justice lingo probably sat well with them, and I also gradually learned how to use the same words as them. Storm victims became storm survivors, reconstruction became recovery, and so on.

Although I was lucky enough to have secured access to core coordinators, there was still a group of interviewees that I had a hard time connecting with, the ones who had chosen to leave Wildfire. I knew that many of them had left because they were dissatisfied with Wildfire, and so I expected them to have a lot to say about distribution of power between residents and outsiders. They were thus of strong analytical interest to me. A contact of mine offered to help me get in touch with them. She called them while I was in the room and I overheard the conversations. A few of them explained to her that they were tired of talking about Wildfire, that they were disappointed and disillusioned with the whole thing and emotionally weary. My informant said that many of these dropouts had been working day and night after the storm, but in the end they got nothing, while the outside organizers of Rockaway Wildfire were giving stipends to themselves out of the money that was raised for storm survivors of the area. She told me:

Now, a lot of people are making a profit out of this, and they are people that are not even from here. And a lot of journalists and researchers come here and they think that Wildfire is doing this great thing when in fact that is completely wrong. (Field Conversation Respondent 15)

I did not succeed in getting access to dropouts until my second field trip, and it still required substantial emailing, calling and working through other contacts. This persistence finally paid off, however, and I secured interviews with five individuals who had been previously involved but had chosen to leave the organization.

Social Media

Besides the real-life encounters of interviews and field observations, I also followed a few social media groups and accounts. In these I found relevant input into how different Rockaway communities and activist circles reasoned with issues of importance. Since I followed processes that were playing out while studying them, it was important to track social media activity when I was away from the field. To follow Facebook pages or Twitter accounts was a good way of keeping an ear to the ground, as well as keeping myself somewhat visible to field contacts when away from the field. Moreover, the issue of whether to befriend informants on social media platforms became important. When approaching one of the organizers of Rockaway Wildfire and asking him about an interview he told me:

I'll stalk you a bit on Facebook, that's how I manage all my relations here, that's how I know who's who. (Field Conversation Respondent 3)

This raised a few questions for me. If the method I am employing is based on my personal capacity for relationship building, where do I draw the line for what I want to keep private from the people I met in the field? Is my Facebook page out of reach or should I open myself up to people there too? If I do, what happens with my critical outlook on some of the processes I witnessed? I decided on a strategy where I would not add people myself but if they added me I responded positively, as not to seem rude to anyone since that might put them off for further contacts. Apart from this I also refrained from commenting explicitly on my own research through Facebook updates and tweets while I was still writing.

Field Notes

I kept a daily field note journal while in the field, which served many different purposes. The notes included many different elements, depending on the situation I was in. I jotted down key words or phrases while I was in the field, and took note of spontaneous observations or conversations. I also used the journal as a way of keeping track of the more purposeful participatory observations I conducted, and wrote down descriptions of physical locations or interactions between people and their behavior and non-verbal communication. Apart from that I also used it for writing down emerging ideas for research questions and designs, and documented the self-reflective tenets of the fieldwork – the reactions from interviewees, my own frustrations over different things, and other emotional responses that came up during the course of my fieldwork.

Interviews

Interviews were of two different types: respondent and informant. Both types were semi-structured in character. Respondent interviews were with individuals that had something to do with OS, Rockaway Wildfire or the coalition, whereas informant interviews were made to familiarize myself with the context.

Informant Interviews

I conducted 12 informant interviews. The purpose of the informant interviews was to familiarize myself with Rockaway, the storm and its effects on vulnerable groups, and the plethora of different community organizations active in the area and their respective relations to each other. For example, I conducted two interviews with case managers at different charity organizations. I wanted to know who their clients were, what the clients needed help with and the extent to which their problems were related to the hurricane. This was a way of getting to know vulnerability in the area without directly

approaching individuals who were in the midst of managing their recovery, perhaps living on the streets having lost their homes and jobs since I deemed that to be too intrusive. I also interviewed numerous representatives from grassroots organizations in Rockaway, as well as interviews with local politicians and a number of experts and other researchers who were doing work around tangible issues, for example resilience researchers, housing and urban planning experts or Rockaway area experts.

Respondent Interviews

Once I learned more about the area, and about OS and Rockaway Wildfire ‘from the outside’ so to speak, I conducted a theoretical/purposeful sampling (Mattoni 2014 p. 27) of respondent interviewees. I was interested in a particular actor, Rockaway Wildfire. This section gives an overview of the interviews that were carried out with respondent interviewees – those who in various ways were related to Occupy Sandy, Rockaway Wildfire and the UPWARD Coalition – once access to them had been granted. These interviews, in total 32, together with the eight participatory observations of the Rockaway Wildfire meetings and events, make up the primary material of the dissertation. The interviewees were interviewed in various capacities since their roles shifted throughout the various phases, as the organization under study underwent transitions. Below is a list of the categories for each phase:

Relief Phase Categories

Category A: Non-resident OS Activist and Relief Volunteer

Category B: Non-resident Relief Volunteer

Category C: Storm-affected Resident

Category D: Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer

Organizational Formation Phase Categories

Category E: Resident and Member

Category F: Resident and Core Coordinator

Category G: Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator

Category H: Non-resident Other

Category I: Resident Other

External Collaboration and Advocacy Phase Categories

Category J: Rockaway Wildfire Organizer

Category K: Coalition Member

Category L: Resident Other

Category M: Non-resident Other

The same interviewee could be categorized as a relief volunteer in the relief phase, a core coordinator in the organizational formation phase, and a Rockaway Wildfire organizer in the third phase. Each person was assigned a number that follows them throughout the descriptions in the empirical chapters. It is important to keep in mind that interviewees are not treated as representatives of everyone that belongs to these categories. Rather, the particular positions were important information when assessing where the person came from in their experiences and perceptions of the processes under study.

The Particular Status of the Relief Chapter

Before describing the interview samples and materials for the different phases, a note on the timing of the data gathering is in place in order to increase transparency. I came to Rockaway six months after the storm, in April 2013, in the midst of the organizational formation period, and then continued to move in and out of the field until March 2016. The organizational formation and external collaboration and advocacy phases were thus studied as they unfolded. This was highly beneficial because it provided the possibility to participate as an observer in meetings, which added important information to the analysis and was an opportunity to triangulate data.

With regard to the relief phase the material was instead based on interviews and secondary sources. The sampling of interviewees was different, because at first I was interested more in long-term recovery issues than in the relief period, given my theoretical interest in ongoing structurally differentiated vulnerability. The sampling was not based on an interest in the activities of the relief phase but on the organizational formation phase. In line with this interest, I wanted to talk to all of the core coordinators of Rockaway Wildfire, residents and outsiders, and regular members that participated in the work but were not part of any decision-making bodies. I was also interested in interviewing dropouts, those who had been active but stopped going to the meetings for some reason. In addition, I wanted to speak to people who were politically aligned with the ideological messaging of OS but had chosen not to take part. Furthermore, the interview questions were set up to gather information on long-term recovery. I asked about the relief period, but the questions functioned more as a conversation starter to build rapport than strategically asked questions. The decision to include the relief phase in the analysis came later, as I started to analyze the material and realized that the phases were connected to each other through the organizing ideals. I then went back to the transcripts and saw that some of the interviewees had talked extensively about the relief phase (despite me probing about the long-term recovery work). Had the sampling of interview persons been done with the relief period in mind it is possible that the data would have looked slightly different. Perhaps there would have been a greater variability in how interviewees perceived empowerment with a larger or different sample or with more pointed interview questions. However, in addition to the interview material I made use of secondary material like official reports and different

types of media material, and these sources functioned to triangulate some of the findings from the interview material, which made the analysis more robust. Still, the conclusions regarding the relief phase are slightly more tentative than the conclusions drawn about the other two phases, where the sampling of interviewees and the interview questions were more strategically developed.

Interview Sample and Material for the Relief Phase

The data used to analyze the relief phase consisted of nine interviews, divided into four categories. There were three interviews with non-resident OS activists and relief volunteers (Category A), one interview with a non-resident relief volunteer (Category B), two interviews with storm-affected residents (Category C), and three interviews with storm-affected residents and relief volunteers (Category D). No participatory observations were included. The one field observation that was used as a direct data point was made six months after the storm and functioned – triangulated with other sources – to illustrate a particular claim that some of the established organizations were unable to accommodate the large influx of willing volunteers. This is not to say that this data point was the only relevant field knowledge I employed for general analysis in this chapter, but only that this was the one piece of information that was explicitly used as a direct data point. The fieldwork in general (field observations, volunteer work and field conversations) had several important functions in the overall analysis: it helped me contact interviewees and functioned to gather secondary data, either as bits of information I needed to develop interview guides or to contextualize the findings from interviews. Much of the fieldwork helped me to understand the ins and outs of the relief activities. However, it would not have been feasible to demonstrate each and every little piece of information as direct data points in the analysis. The direct data points that were referenced should be read as illustrations of a point. Such data points were not used as standalone indicators, but were complemented with other types of sources such as interview material or secondary sources.

Interview Sample and Material for the Organizational Formation Phase

The analysis of the organizational formation phase was based on 22 interviews, four participatory observations of Rockaway Wildfire meetings and three field conversations. The interviews were divided into five categories: Resident and Member (5), Resident and Core Coordinator (4), Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator (5), Non-resident Other (4), and Resident Other (3). Together they provided various angles on the processes under study. I got inside perspectives from the core coordinators, both from a resident perspective and an outside organizer perspective. Also included were the perspectives of Wildfire members, who were potential future candidates to be added to the core. Among the resident members were also those who had chosen to disengage from Rockaway Wildfire by the time they were

interviewed, so there was also a dropout perspective present in the material. Three of the four interviewees in the Resident Other category were people who were politically and ideologically aligned with Rockaway Wildfire but had chosen to not engage, which provided the perspective of how Rockaway Wildfire was perceived by potential members. All of these categories were important in the analysis, although I gave somewhat more attention and weight to the experiences and perceptions of those more heavily involved in Rockaway Wildfire than those who chose not to take part. Between and within these categories experiences and perceptions varied. I have tried to explicitly describe these nuances in the analysis, as well as allude to the position of the interviewee in the text and in the source referent. Since the analysis is qualitative, however, the frequency of a perception was not always the most interesting assessment to make. The occurrence of a phenomenon was itself interesting, as was the variability across participants in terms of how the phenomenon was understood and interpreted. The four participatory observations were of Wildfire's open meetings. The relationship between the interview material and the participatory observations was that they were both central to the analysis and highly dependent on each other. The interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the processes that were studied first hand in the observations. Neither the observations nor the interviews could have been standalone material. As in the analysis of the relief phase, the fieldwork was not always explicitly used as direct data points in the text, but nonetheless functioned to guide and steer the work in terms of getting access to interviewees and contextualizing the analysis of the micro processes. The fieldwork also helped analyze how the circumstances of working in this particular type of area and situation were part of what made the internal dynamics somewhat strenuous. The material in its totality goes deep into the processes described. Thus, in comparison to the analysis of the relief phase, the descriptions here provide perspectives from various angles of the same issues. The conclusions are then more complex and nuanced, and were furthermore drawn with greater confidence than in the previous chapter about relief, based as they were on a closer, first-hand reading of the processes.

Interview Sample and Material for the External Collaboration and Advocacy Phase

For the third phase, the external collaboration and advocacy phase, the interview sample was broadened to include interviews with representatives from coalition member organizations and representatives from the coalition's counterparts: the decision-makers that the coalition had set out to influence. In total, 19 persons were interviewed, who were divided into four different categories: Rockaway Wildfire Organizers (2), Coalition Members (3) Resident Others (5), and Non-resident Others (9). The main organization within the coalition was Rockaway Wildfire, initiator and coordinator of the coalition's work. Two Rockaway Wildfire organizers were interviewed, out of

which one had a leading role in steering the coalition's work. Starting with Rockaway Wildfire a snowball sampling was carried out. Through field conversations, interviews and participatory observations of meetings and events, other involved grassroots organizations were identified. I interviewed representatives for organizations that were formal members of the coalition, and organizational representatives that were still figuring out whether they should be part of the CBA work, as well as one organizational representative that had been in contact with the coalition but had chosen to stay out of the work. A representative from an expert organization that the activists had worked with, and a professor in Urban Planning at Hunter College who had been involved as an expert to the CBA process, were also interviewed, together with three analysts with relevant expertise on Rockaway, recovery after the storm or the coalition-building process Rockaway Wildfire was engaged in. I also interviewed three political activists working with other grassroots struggles in the area to listen to their views on the coalition's work. Apart from interviewing representatives from the coalition I also interviewed its counterpart – the decision-makers and other possible influencers that the coalition needed to put pressure on to get support for their demands. Therefore, I interviewed four representatives from local NGOs, four politicians who either aspired to or already represented Rockaway in the city council, State Assembly and Community Board 14 (CB14), one representative from the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), one from the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP), one from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), and a representative from the trio of private developers that was responsible for the building project. Data gathering was carried out through interviews with representatives from each of these organizations/actors, as well as through participatory observations of meetings and events organized by Rockaway Wildfire and the coalition. The analysis of this chapter moved onto a more aggregated scale after delving deep into the micro processes in the analysis of the organizational formation phase. Here, interest was on whether the coalition gained influence in the urban planning process. The coalition was thus seen to represent the interest of the residents, which was a necessary simplification in order to answer the research question in a coherent way across the three phases. Furthermore, the interviewees were seen as representing the view of their respective organizations, rather than their own subjective experiences and opinions. Although it is possible that the individual interviewees brought forth a subjective opinion rather than their organization's official stance, the overall picture from all of the interviews pointed in the same direction, which implies that conclusions could be inferred with some level of confidence.

The Interview Situation

Interview settings that allow the interviewee to talk freely are suitable for research that aims at understanding the logic of a person's beliefs and

thoughts (Marsh et al. 2002 p. 199). The format of the respondent interviews was semi-structured, which is appropriate when the goal is to explore people's perceptions and the meaning they attach to the world around them. When conducting the interviews, I had a few items that I wanted the interviews to elaborate on. However, interviewees were able to elaborate freely, change the order of the themes and come up with new ones (Berg 2001 p. 69). The interview guide was constructed to gather data on two things. Firstly, in line with the interest in a temporal dimension of the work, I was interested in understanding the narrative of the organizational formation that occurred throughout, from the immediate relief period to the recovery period. Interest was on understanding the shifts and turns of this organizational formation, and to do so I needed to pin down certain events and points in time. I posed questions such as "What was the timing of that meeting?", "When did that happen?", or "Was it before or after event X happened?" Secondly, in line with the thematic dimension, I had a number of themes that interviewees were free to talk about, and I aimed for a conversational style in which the respondents' understandings, experiences and reflections were brought out. At the time of the interviews the threefold analytical scheme of inclusion, horizontality and flexibility was not yet established, but I knew I wanted them to talk about issues of skill building, empowerment, control, influence, conflicts, and leadership. I was interested to know more about whether and how residents were encouraged, who decided on agenda setting, which were the decision-making bodies and who were part of these, how were internal conflicts handled and perceived, and what was their understanding of the diversity of the group. All of these issues later came to be included under one of the three ideals (which will be described in the section below on thematic coding). I also referenced practices observed in the participatory observations of meetings, where interviewees were asked to explain their views on certain techniques, topic discussions or conflict moments.

Since I knew that this was an organization with some internal controversies, I wanted interviewees to talk about this. But my perceptions stemmed mainly from that first encounter with Rockaway Wildfire, and it was not clear to me whether that conflictual meeting was an anomaly in the history of the hub. To avoid posing leading questions, I therefore treaded softly with regard to any internal conflicts in the interviews. In every interview I saved the sensitive issues for the end of the conversation, so as not to make the interviewee uncomfortable and risk a premature shut down. Such a strategy also enabled the interviewee to start elaborating on sensitive topics independently of questions about them, which I believe diminished potential biases. This discrete probing on my side also had another benefit. Discrete probing is better than pushing too hard for information, as that might make people refrain from speaking their minds. Insisting too frankly can trigger negative rumors about the researcher and shut down access to other interviewees (Chakravarty 2012 p. 265). To avoid being shut out, I started interviewing persons who were more peripheral to the organization, and thus

were expected to be less involved in ongoing conflicts or part in any tension. This way I could conduct a few interviews where everything was positive and the conversations could flow freely in an unstrained and easy manner. This was a strategic choice. My assumption was that these persons would then talk about the interview as a friendly encounter and thus sell it to others I wished to interview. It also enabled me to move closer and closer to the tensions in the group, so that I could understand the turn of events before I talked to those who were involved in them.

When I interviewed dropouts and potential members I asked open-ended questions about their views on Wildfire. If they had left I asked them why and if they pointed to things that had to do with Rockaway Wildfire (as opposed to idiosyncratic reasons such as getting a new job or moving away from Rockaway) I asked them to explain what kinds of situations they experienced that made them decide to leave. If they had come in contact with Rockaway Wildfire and if they seemed compelled by the politics of the group but had chosen not to become part of the group, I asked them to talk about why they had chosen to do so. To stay clear of any misguided criticism from dropouts, I also asked the core coordinators about their views on why they thought people left and how they understood the criticism that was directed toward the hub.

In the interviews with decision-makers I tried to gauge the level of influence that the coalition had in the urban planning process. In order to assess this I first explored what the interests of each of these actors were to see whether any competing interests on their behalf existed in comparison to the coalition's demands. I figured that if there were competing interests, but the representative had a positive view on the coalition, it would have been an indication of some level of influence on the coalition's behalf. However, I did not mention the coalition until the very end of the interview, but merely asked questions about the urban planning process in general and the interest of the organization in particular. This was to see whether the interviewee would mention the coalition without being asked about it since this would have been a good indication of the coalition's visibility.

Balancing the Ethics of Respondent Interviewing

There are problematic aspects of doing research based on interview material. The relationship between the researcher (subject) and the interviewee (object of study) is imbued with problematic aspects of power. The superiority of my position as an analyst is that I have a theoretical frame to draw on in deciding the questions and full control over the interpretation of the answers, even if my interpretations contradict the understanding of the interviewee. Another aspect is that the interviewer talks to many other interviewees and thus might know a lot of things about the interviewee that they are unaware

of.⁷ Since I interviewed people both within and outside of Rockaway Wildfire, people that were positive and negative toward the processes, I had several different perspectives available to me simultaneously. This is a delicate power position to hold and one that required both self-reflection and a few strategies to create a non-exploitative interview. I thus decided on a few norms that I tried to implement throughout the course of my work:

Treat the interviewee as a co-producer of knowledge. I aimed for a situation in which the interviewee and I co-produced an understanding of a situation or issue. Figuratively, I tried to stand next to the interviewee for a moment and create a situation in which we together looked out on the world and tried to make sense of it. This was successful in terms of getting people to open up and share their views and perspectives, as far as I could tell.

Aim for a non-judgmental perspective. I listened to each and every one of my interviewees, and in the moment of the interview I never questioned their statements although they often disagreed with each other or contradicted each other's accounts. I listened to their ideas of organizing and their critique against processes and other people's behavior, and I expressed my sympathy and compassion for potential frustrations or anger. I think this made for a good interview, where the interviewees felt that I truly listened to them, that I took them seriously and tried to really understand them.

Offer a nuanced analysis. Given the varying views and perspectives of the interviewees, I aimed as much as possible to offer an analysis that was nuanced and that enabled the complexity of the interview material to be visible.

Offer anonymity. Because some of the issues of interest were potentially contentious, I made all interviews anonymous. This was mainly with regard to the micro processes under study in the chapter about organizational formation (Chapter 6). In the chapter about relief (Chapter 5) or the chapter about external collaboration (Chapter 7), the processes under study were not as sensitive and were not explored with the same analytical depth. But since the same individuals reoccur in several of the phases, it was best to make all interview data points anonymous. This includes also the decision-makers in the chapter about external collaboration, although these individuals are easily recognized, given that one knows a little something about Rockaway. These interviewees, however, gave their consent to being named, so I do not see this as a problem. Further, since almost all of the other interviewees knew each other, I informed them about the possibility that they might recognize each other in the text despite the anonymity. They all agreed to talk to me based on that premise.

⁷ However, certain aspects balance the potential superiority of the researcher. As a researcher coming from another country and another context, there were a myriad of social codes that I did not understand, things that happened that I had no knowledge of and possible preconceptions around foreign female researchers that I knew little of. Some of these things became clearer during the course of my fieldwork, but many things remained mysterious.

Offer transparency with regard to sensitive quotes. Apart from anonymity, another method of establishing trust in interviews that covered contentious issues was to offer the interviewees the possibility to look at all transcripts of quotes before publication. This was a strategy to ease the relationship to those interviewees who seemed suspicious toward me and my work. This decision was hence made on a case-by-case basis and was not offered to everybody.

Seek consent with regard to sensitive quotes. There were also cases where I felt obliged to ask the interviewee whether they would be comfortable with being quoted on a particular subject, for example if they were talking freely about something that I knew could imply trouble for them if the other organizers saw it in a research report. This was made on a case-by-case basis, contingent on my understanding of the situation and the conflicts under study.

Careful sharing of results. I deliberately chose not to present my research results to anyone involved in any organization in Rockaway during the time I was still working on it. This was partly because I did not want to contribute to any misguided rumors about Rockaway Wildfire. My analysis is complex and nuanced, but in the hands of people with the intention to hurt Rockaway Wildfire it could easily be misinterpreted as nothing but a harsh critique.⁸ Partly it was also because the prospect of presenting tentative results, when the analysis was not finished, seemed non-responsible.

Participatory Observations

The third data gathering technique was the participatory observations. I use participant observation as a term for describing my engagements in particular meetings and workshops, those had a particular analytical interest to me, and in which I actively gathered what I refer to as primary data. In the participatory observations my focus was on Rockaway Wildfire meetings and events. I was interested in exploring the inner dynamics of the organization under study. The focus of the participatory observations was on the micro processes: the ins and outs of the meeting techniques, the facilitation of exercises, and the environment of collaboration and/or conflict.

Eight participatory observations were carried out of open meetings and other types of events like information sessions or fundraising parties. I make a distinction between fieldwork and participant observation. This distinction is not always made in the literature, where every instance of an observation in the field is considered participant observation (Kubik 2009 p. 28). I make this distinction because although I conducted numerous field observations of events, meetings and demonstrations, the methodological rigor of the partic-

⁸ I believe my analysis is thoroughly critical but it is much more than that. I have gone to great lengths to nuance my critique and refrain from drawing simplistic conclusions based on my empirical findings. I believe that Rockaway Wildfire had the potential of doing something remarkable, and to some extent they did, even if they, as my analysis show, did not reach all the way.

ipatory observations was greater than in the field observations. The field observations are part of the secondary material, or the material that I used to contextualize the primary material, of which the participatory observations are part.

The participatory observations served three main purposes. Firstly, they enabled me to develop better interview guides. Through them I enhanced my understanding of the type of practices that were in play, and I could trace power dynamics, tension and conflicts between participants. Secondly, they enabled an understanding of the social status of the interviewees in relation to the group as a whole. This made it easier for me to gauge their answers with more nuance. If, for example, I observed strained interactions between interviewees in the meetings, it was easier to identify silent frustrations and gently probe them on such issues (to the extent it seemed relevant for the analysis). Thirdly, observations made the interviews easier since through participating in meetings I built an initial relationship to the persons I would later interview, so that it was easier to establish rapport in the interview.

The participatory observations were closely connected to the respondent interviews since parallel to conducting interviews with core coordinators I made participatory observations of Rockaway Wildfire's open meetings. Participant observation often allows the observer to identify overt and covert actions. Much can be learned from the observation of routine behaviors. With increasing awareness of new behaviors and events, the researcher can detect new questions that appear salient. Predesigned questionnaires are often unable to capture such evolving insights (Balsiger et al in della Porta et al. 2014 p. 145; Chakravarty 2012 p. 265). The researcher thus becomes more attuned to pick up on sensitive topics like non-verbal ways of communicating, detecting false-truths, identifying emotional behavior – all phenomenon that can influence the understanding of the research problem (Taylor 2011 p. 11). By doing so the researcher also taps into how power is embedded in interactions and relationships, and how such dynamics potentially move along socioeconomic or other social differences between group members (Balsiger et al in della Porta et al. 2014 p. 148). One important aspect of participatory observations is that they allow the researcher to gauge the potential discrepancy between what is said and what is done by comparing communicated ideologies with lived experiences of active members (Balsiger et al in della Porta et al. 2014 p. 150). Thanks to triangulation between respondent interviews and participatory observations, this dissertation shows such discrepancies between stated ideology and operating practices within the group under study.

Analyzing Data

Since I believed that it was fruitful to explore empowerment in post-disaster processes along the continuum of relief to recovery, the gathered material

was coded along two dimensions: thematically and temporally. This section provides an overview of the temporal versus the thematic coding of the gathered material. The temporal coding was pretty straightforward, while the thematic coding was more complex since it included an inductive development of the three ideals.

Temporal Coding

This thesis studies a process along the continuum of relief to recovery, based on an expectation that distinct phases may have a bearing on influence for vulnerable groups. Given the empirical and analytical interest in different post-disaster phases, one of the tasks in coding the material was to construct a chronological narrative. I mainly made use of the interview material from the respondent interviews to do so. As described above, interest was on understanding the shifts and turns of the phases over time. Once I had all the interviews I coded the transcribed material into a chronological narrative where I pinned down certain events and points in time. The relief period included the first three months immediately after the disaster in which the OS network worked intensively with relief activities, followed by an approximately one-year process in which Rockaway Wildfire was formed, followed by a partly overlapping period of external collaboration and advocacy period (*see Figure 2 p. 31*).

Thematic Coding

The three organizing ideals were developed through a partly inductive approach in which I moved between theoretical abstractions and empirical inquiry (Chakravarty 2012 p. 268; Mattoni 2014 p. 28). The exploration was necessarily inductive in style, allowing for emerging themes and concepts to be developed in conjunction with whatever was identified as important in the field (Mattoni 2014 p. 24; Meadow 2013 p. 466). The empirical study of the phenomenon hence took place simultaneously as the search for the most ample theoretical understanding. This was a reciprocal cycle that allowed for concepts to be discovered in accordance with the empirical reality that evolved before my eyes (Ljungkvist 2014 p. 70; della Porta et al. 2014; p. 153; Bucerius 2013 p. 693). As I got to know the area of Rockaway better through interviews and observations, while I simultaneously read up on a number of relevant theoretical fields, the three organizing ideals slowly emerged. This theoretical distillation became more established as I got to know OS and Rockaway Wildfire closer. I was reading up on previous research about OWS, I conducted interviews with people both within and outside Rockaway Wildfire, and participated as an observer in meetings. Through an iterative process of coding and simultaneously consuming emancipatory literature and DRR literature, similar ideals of egalitarian organizing were found within these theoretical fields. In this way the analysis

demonstrates how the ideological roots of the Occupy movement are connected to ideas surfacing in these literatures. Important to note, however, is that the labelling was done by me, in close encounters with what I saw were similar clusters of ideas across the two literatures and in the ideology of Occupy.

On the way toward this theoretical distillation, the gathered material was coded and recoded a few times. Coding is an important step to analytical knowledge building within qualitative and partly inductive studies, as it is here that the analyst moves between the empirical material and up the “abstraction ladder”. The coding followed a common order of stages, although these stages were not always in chronological order but sometimes overlapped, and sometimes I redid the whole coding scheme from scratch. The stages were open, axial and selected coding (Mattoni 2014 p. 30). Starting out with the open coding after having transcribed the interviews and notes from the participatory observations, I ordered the material into portions and labelled these portions, staying pretty close to the wording of the interviewees. In the second stage, the axial coding, I looked at codes that seemed to be related to each other, codes that could be merged into one, and codes that occurred more frequently than others. As an example of how the stages of coding looked, at one point I was reading literature about organizational ownership and realized that part of the conceptualization of organizational ownership was applicable in my case. In the selected coding, I further realized that it was possible to tweak the whole notion of ownership as an ideal of horizontality in conjunction with other ideas present in the material and in the two literatures. This way the level of abstraction increased with each cycle of coding.

The two fields of research that I merged here rarely speak to each other. The distillation of these ideals brings them together and demonstrates similar streams of thought within them. This inductive work thus marries together two fields that have heretofore been separated. In addition, it also makes the case less chaotic. Investigating micro processes of social justice forums within larger social movements is a topic in which data are potentially difficult to collect and not readily comparable. Every social movement is an organically growing mess with a swarm of actors and diffusion of ideas (Meyer et al. 2010 p. 10). OS and Rockaway Wildfire is a complex research subject for many of the same reasons it is an interesting case: its fluid membership structure, shared leadership, ambiguous organizational identity, accommodation of a range of interests, and the fact that all of this went through organic changes in the years of observation. Therefore, the thematic analysis brings order to a process of organizing that from the outset seemed very messy.

Analytical Depth Across the Three Phases

The level of analysis differs between the three phases. The aim of this dissertation is to explore the internal organization of emancipatory projects and

how they may enhance empowerment of vulnerable groups. The same research questions have been posed to all three phases, but are answered on different levels of analysis in the respective phase. The relief phase has been studied partially from the perspective of the whole of NYC since OS was a city-wide network, yet most of the interviewees were active in Rockaway, so the examples are mainly from work done in the area. The organizational formation phase focuses on the micro processes of Rockaway Wildfire. The external collaboration and advocacy phase moves onto a more aggregated scale, looking at the external collaboration with other grassroots organizations in the area, as well as dialogue attempts with local politicians and other decision-makers in the urban planning process. The three organizing ideals are integrated parts of the work in all three phases. In the first two phases, however, these ideals are meant to empower the residents in relation to outside organizers, whereas in the external collaboration and advocacy phase the ideals are used by Rockaway Wildfire organizers to structure the work done in the coalition.

In the relief and organizational formation phases, I was interested in exploring the relationship between residents and outside activists to see whether residents gained influence. In the last chapter, interest was on whether the coalition as a whole gained influence in the urban planning process. This aggregation is a simplification, but functions as a way to follow the interest of the vulnerable group all the way from mobilization in the relief phase, to formation of interest in the organizational formation phase, to potential fruition (as actual political change) in the external collaboration and advocacy phase. The difference in analytical depth across the phases is visualized in Figure 4:

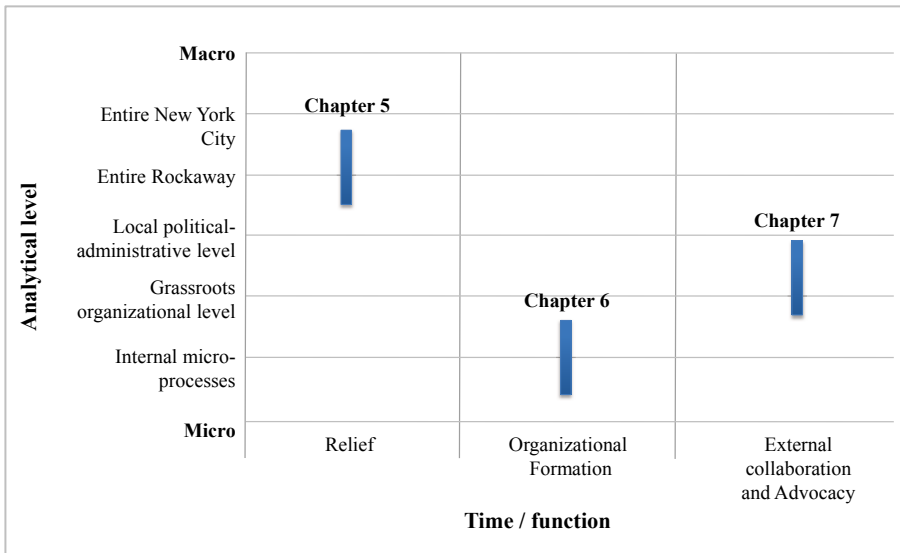


Figure 4: Analytical Depth per Chapter

4. Setting the Stage: The Case of Hurricane Sandy, Rockaway and Occupy Sandy

This chapter links the case selection discussion, teased out in previous chapters, and the empirical case under study. The chapter demonstrates how the case is well suited for exploring empowerment of vulnerable groups in post-disaster processes, as it is neatly located in the nexus between disaster management and social justice organizing. The chapter also functions to contextualize the micro processes since it provides the reader with a better understanding of the particularities of the area, the disaster and the actor under study. The chapter first provides an overview of the geographical and political area that is Rockaway, and takes a look at the issue of socially differentiated vulnerability in relation to the storm. It then situates OS, Rockaway Wildfire and the UPWARD coalition in the wider Occupy movement out of which they emerged. Many of the characteristics of the OS relief and recovery work stems from the ideological roots and tactical strategies of the wider Occupy network and are thus better understood in light of the wider movement. The chapter then provides a chronological narrative of the practical work undertaken by OS activists and Rockaway residents after the storm, and shows how it stretches over three successive periods, from the relief period to a period of organizational formation and finally one of external collaboration and advocacy work. The chapter also demonstrates the three organizing ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality, as they were understood by activists. Putting these ideals into practice was seen by the activists as important vehicles for empowering the residents.

Rockaway and Hurricane Sandy

Parts of Rockaway functioned as a popular summer resort in the early 1900s, crowded with bungalows and hotels, but by mid-century, the seasonal nature of the area waned (City of New York 2008). The Rockaway peninsula is currently an area largely marked by decades of political neglect. With Rockaway's beaches and bungalows, its distinctive small town feeling, coupled with the relative closeness to a vibrant metropolitan city center, the peninsula could be a paradise. Yet, it is far from it. There are affluent neighborhoods and beautiful beachfront properties, yes. But large parts of the peninsula, especially on the eastern side, are marked by socioeconomic marginaliza-

tion.⁹ Soaring unemployment, high percentages of people enrolled in social welfare programs, a beach line scattered with poorly maintained high-rise public housing and high levels of criminality¹⁰ create a situation of socioeconomic marginalization across many communities of Rockaway. When Hurricane Sandy hit the peninsula in October 2012 – and did so with tremendous force – these underlying problems intertwined with all of the acute predicaments of an area that was instantly rattled to its core.

During the first half of the 20th century, Rockaway was a place in which a small but cohesive population lived; mainly middle- and lower-middle class neighborhoods of Irish and Jewish communities. After World War II the peninsula went through changes – the population grew and ethnic, racial and class stratification became more pronounced. The isolation of the peninsula made it a suitable space for relocation of the city’s poorest. Municipal authorities thus directed marginalized communities to Rockaway. Underprivileged families were sent to Rockaway where they lived in public housing projects that were poorly maintained. A large number of group homes for released mental patients and nursing homes for the elderly were built in the 1950s and 60s (Kaplan et al. 2003 p. 3). The term “dumping” was frequently used by field contacts to describe this process of relocation of vulnerable segments of the New York population (Kaplan et al. 2003 p. 3; Interviews and field conversations 2013-2016). This idea of a dumping zone is in line with a general trend in NYC, where focus is on the vibrant city center and outer areas are left to deteriorate. Urban redevelopment programs all over the city have relocated large numbers of poor minority families to peripheral areas of the city (Kaplan et al. 2003 p. 6).

In 2010, the Rockaway per capita income was \$21,172, which is \$5,000 less than in Queens and \$40,000 less than in Manhattan (American Planning Association 2013 p. 4). As of 2009, the poverty rate was 20.09%, which is higher than both city- and borough-wide rates (Furman Center 2015). The

⁹ Socioeconomic marginalization is a mixed bag of ongoing processes that together produce structural inequality between social groups. Racial discrimination limits housing options for people of color, which confines them to neighborhoods that white or more affluent people shy away from. Property values often decline as property owners fail to keep up their buildings. New investments are then hard to attract, which creates concentrations of poverty. In times of economic turmoil, lay-off policies often disadvantage low-paid workers, creating concentrations of unemployment. Schools, fire protection, policing, and garbage removal are often less prioritized in areas such as these, partly because politicians and public agencies are more responsive to affluent neighborhoods. These concentrations of poverty and unemployment together with spatial and social isolation result in situations where black and Latino children are poorly educated, live in dilapidated circumstances and have few prospects for employment (Young 2000 p. 97; Tierney 2014 p. 144). Rockaway, primarily the neighborhoods on the eastern side of the peninsula, is an illustration of all of these trends.

¹⁰ Important to note here is Sygmunt Bauman’s call for an understanding of the social roots of criminality. The root causes for high levels of criminality in socioeconomically marginalized areas lie in the fast shrinking life chances available to low-income people, and the absence for young people to escape poverty in socially and legally assured ways. This in turn is the result of economic policies that extend far beyond the control of the regular low-income person (Bauman 2011 p. 4).

2010 Census outlined a median household income of \$38,275, where one third earned less than \$30,000 per year (United States Census Bureau Fact-Finder 2015). However, Rockaway is a diverse peninsula with high variability in terms of income levels across different communities and neighborhoods. In contrast to the more affluent communities to its west, the eastern part of the peninsula is home to a population whose median household income is lower. Rockaway houses one quarter of Queens County's New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) population, (despite being home to less than 6% of the borough's total population), together with a large number of Single Room Occupancy Buildings, Section 8 apartments and subsidized housing developments. Out of the 44,325 housing units in Rockaway, a majority are renter-occupied (Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p. 18).

Access to good education is lacking in the area. As of 2008, approximately every fifth person in Rockaway had no high school diploma and only 22.24% had obtained a Bachelor's degree. Unemployment rates exceed national averages by 7.2%, and its residents receive over twice the borough-wide rate with regard to public assistance programs (Furman Center 2015). Much of the local economy is seasonal, centering on the summer months when there is a large influx of beachgoers, leaving few opportunities for year-round local employment (Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p. 35). The lack of local jobs means that many people spend much time traveling in and out of other parts of the city. However, transportation to and from the peninsula is a challenge of its own. The commute to Manhattan is between an hour and a half and two hours in each direction. Food access is another issue. Locally owned shops are increasingly replaced by franchises or chain stores. The few supermarkets that exist are often times too expensive for many people, leaving many in the hands of fast food chains for nutritional needs. The number of pharmacies and healthcare facilities are low. Social services in Rockaway are largely absent, and crime and substance abuse rates have steadily increased. School dropouts, infectious diseases and HIV/AIDS are also problems that mark this area (Kaplan et al. 2003 p. 4).

Racial Composition of Rockaway

As of 2010, approximately 112,000 residents lived in Rockaway, out of which approximately 40% was African American, followed by 34% white, 21% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 3% other races. Western neighborhoods are primarily white, whereas African American and Latino/Hispanic groups reside mostly on the eastern portion of the peninsula (Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p. 14). Segregating housing policies and racially skewed urban planning have made parts of the area better off, especially for the Irish and Jewish communities (Kaplan et al. 2003 p. 5; Kowitz 2015).

The eastern side of the peninsula has a higher percentage of minorities and children, compared to the peninsula in general: African Americans account for roughly 65% of the population, followed by Hispanics at roughly

25%, and remaining percentages are made up of whites, Asian and other. Minority communities have lower levels of educational attainments, lower annual median household incomes and thus lower tax revenue bases. Unemployment is higher on the Eastern sides than elsewhere in Rockaway, and among employed residents, most work low-wage service jobs. More than one fourth in this area were born in foreign countries, and over half do not have U.S. citizenship (Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p. 15-17). The high concentration of high-rise public housing in Rockaway is striking the further east you go and the percentage of buildings that contain 20 units or more increases. These units are moreover smaller than the Rockaway average (Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p. 18). Among both homeowners and renters there are many households who spend over 30% of their monthly income on housing costs. Going east this figure is comparably higher, with 60% of renters spending over 30% of their income on housing costs (Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p. 18). Foreclosure rates in this area are high too, with roughly every tenth household in foreclosure, as of 2012 (Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p. 19). Rockaway is further marked by conditions of fragmentation and isolation. Social capital (Putnam 1993) in Rockaway is low, and intergroup connections across communities are not always the strongest. The social fabric is fragile.

Socially Differentiated Vulnerability of Hurricane Sandy

Hurricane Sandy struck the North American East Coast in October 2012 and had devastating effects, especially in NYC, with severe floods, long-term electric power cuts and torn apart coastlines. Hurricane Sandy was a rare storm that happened to hit at high tide. Its strong winds amplified storm surges and waves, downed trees and caused debris to fly around (Rosenzweig et al. 2014 p. 398). Forty-three people died due to the storm, thousands became homeless and millions stayed without power for weeks (NASA 2012; Sharp 2012; Chakrabarti 2013). The storm surge reached around 300,000 homes along the New York and New Jersey coastline, and in NYC alone the storm was estimated to have cost approximately \$19 billion USD (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 23). There was an extensive power outage that left close to two million people without power for several weeks. Seven subway lines were closed due to flooding and tunnels under the East River had to close as well (Rosenzweig et al. 2014 p. 398). Among those worst affected by Hurricane Sandy were low-income households, tenants in public housing and immigrant communities (Enterprise 2013 p. 7; deMuse 2013; Adams Sheets 2013; Haygood 2013; Make the Road New York 2012; Krauskopf et al. 2013 p. 7). Evacuation of vulnerable residents from high-risk areas was incomplete, often due to language problems and ill-advised ways of communicating with residents in many high-rise apartment buildings (Rosenzweig et al. 2014 p. 340).

The Effects of the Storm in Rockaway

Unemployment and lack of education, geographic isolation, inadequate transportation, and lack of essential services were major obstacles that Rockaway's poorer populations faced long before the storm. The storm, however, exacerbated these existing problems, or as sociologist Max Liboiron pointed out in a presentation at the Superstorm Research Lab:

It's not over. The beginning stretched to way before the storm. The storm was a punctuation mark at a much larger crisis. These places did not have clean water before this. These places did not have access to health care. There is no over. There is no restoration to a place that was already ground zero before the storm even hit. (Liboiron 2013)

Rockaway was severely hit by the hurricane. The peninsula is a barrier island to NYC, with a varied ecology of sand dune barriers that is susceptible to storm surges (Joseph 2013). People were displaced to shelters and schools closed down. A large number of houses on the peninsula were severely flooded or destroyed altogether. Seven Rockaway residents died (Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p. 11). The wooden boardwalk, popular among residents and visitors to the area, was destroyed, gas stations were closed, cell phone service fluctuated heavily, and the local newspaper shut down (The Wave 2013). Sanitation sewage and fecal sludge mixed with Sandy debris and resulted in toxic waste in the immediate aftermath of the storm (Joseph 2013). The storm caused major transportation issues since it demolished parts of the subway track serving the only subway service to the peninsula (American Planning Association 2013 p. 6). A temporary ferry service to Lower Manhattan was established but service ended in October 2014, despite fervent opposition from local resident advocacy groups (Field Observation Demonstration for Prolonging Ferry Rides to Rockaway, Rockaway and Manhattan, 2014). Businesses were shut down in the wake of the storm, which resulted in difficulties for residents to find goods and services, while causing local shop owners to lose valuable revenue (American Planning Association 2013 p. 7). Local companies laid off staff or closed in the wake of Hurricane Sandy (Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p. 35; Gay 2014). A total number of 402 NYCHA buildings, with over 35,000 units, out of which many were located in the Rockaway peninsula, were damaged (Furman Center 2013 p. 4). Residents of these buildings were left without electricity and heat due to flooding of basements in which electrical and heating systems were placed. One and a half years after the storm, NYCHA residents were still living with mold infestation and unfinished repairs (Colangelo 2014). The 178,000 units of affordable rental housing of the city faced similar challenges (Furman Center 2013 p. 5). Housing-related problems were noted also in areas where repairs and rebuilding had taken place. Problems were several: mold grew underneath hastily replaced flooring and damaged homes that went into foreclosure, as displaced owners resided

elsewhere and struggled to pay rent for their new place (Koslov et al. 2013). Although the reconstruction of homes and businesses could have been an employment source to local residents seeking work, many lacked the required licenses to take the jobs (Field observations YANA, Rockaway, 2013-2014).

The aftermath of the storm sparked an immense amount of activity throughout the states of New York and New Jersey: numerous political rebuilding programs and reports were formed (Office of Governor Cuomo 2013; SIRR 2013; Rebuild by Design 2013a); the political discourse went through a shift as the 2013 NYC mayoral election candidates competed to be seen as champions of storm protection and vulnerability reduction (McGeehan et al. 2013); and scholars from different disciplines started to do intense research about everything from voter's behaviors and use of social media during the disaster to risk assessment based on differently measured wind fields (Debbage 2013; Zarzar 2013; Arend 2013). Various funds and loans to affected families, individuals and businesses were activated. FEMA had three programs that sought to support individuals and households, as well as state and local governments impacted. There was also a small-business disaster loan and a community development block grant (FEMA 2013). Build it Back, a NYC city program, offered eligible homeowners funding for rebuilding or the option to sell their properties to the city or the state (NYC Build it Back 2014). Apart from this, there was the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and the CDBGs that the city set in motion with the aim to help low-income communities recover (Jones 2013). However, some programmatic failures were noted. Many low-income New Yorkers were left without the possibility to seek federal aid (Healey 2015). For example, as FEMA did not count undocumented immigrants in its needs assessment, access to funds for this group was restrained (Damiani 2013). Further, FEMA's recovery programs were directed to single-family homes, whereas 90% of those affected by Sandy lived in multifamily homes. Many of the renters that sought FEMA assistance had extremely low-incomes and had a difficult time finding affordable housing elsewhere. But homeowners also faced serious difficulties, especially the ones who were threatened by foreclosure prior to the storm (Furman Center 2013 p. 8). Moreover, many reports show that the number of approved applications was very low in comparison to the total number of applicants with regard to many of these funds (Koslov 2013). Con Edison, the electrical company serving NYC, was criticized for a proposed raise of rates by five percent to help pay for storm preparedness, something that would have a detrimental effect on low-income New Yorkers with small margins for increased household costs (Giambusso 2015).

On a longer timescale, the risks associated with rising sea levels and climate change might result in declining housing prices, which might spur even more foreclosures in Rockaway and throughout the larger city. The reconfiguration of the FEMA flood maps will also impact homeowners and busi-

nesses, as stricter building codes for properties within flood zones could make construction more expensive (Magill 2015; Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p 20). Dissidents fear that only middle-class and high-income households will have the resources needed to elevate their homes to the standards required by federal regulation. Affordable housing for renters might decrease in numbers since reconstruction demands require landowners to raise the rents. Given the ongoing trends of privatization in NYC, public housing residents face increased risks of becoming homeless, especially in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, which opened new opportunities for developers to move in, rebuild and then raise the rents. This might push out low-income renters (Gupta 2013). One example of this is a burnt out lot in Rockaway Park, where low-income communities of color lived before the storm, mostly undocumented immigrants, who were displaced by a storm-induced fire that burnt down the entire block. No records of where the previous tenants went after the storm have been found. The lot has now been bought by a private developer who went on record fervently promising that no “subsidized tenants” will be allowed to move in there once the housing units are built (The Rockaway Times 2015).

Situating Occupy Sandy in the Wider Occupy Movement

This section situates OS, and its successor Rockaway Wildfire, in the larger Occupy movement. It also demonstrates how Occupy activists understood the three organizing ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality ideologically.

The Occupy movement was a global phenomenon that began in 2011, with different bursts of protests and encampments across the globe that could all be characterized as falling under the umbrella of Occupy. In NYC, London, throughout the Middle East, as well as in South America, South Africa, Australia, and Japan, masses came together to protest through occupying public spaces for varying amounts of time. The North American pocket of the movement could be conceptualized as belonging to an anti-authoritarian current in the contemporary U.S. left. This anti-authoritarian current is explicitly positioned against two adjacent forms of organizing: non-profits who are found to be too integrated into the corporate structure, and centralized party organizations that are seen as too hierarchical (Dixon 2012 p. 33). A few examples of comparable actors, organizations, campaigns, and movements within this current are No One Is Illegal, No Border Network, The Mobilization for Climate Justice, INCITE! Women of Color against Violence, and a range of other community-based racial justice groups, anti-poverty groups, feminist organizations, labor justice groups, environmental justice groups, and radical LGBT groups (Dixon 2012 p. 34). The Occupy

movement bears traces of several ideologies such as socialism, Marxism and anarchism. With local variations, the movement largely emerged as a resistance to the inequalities of capitalism at a time when what was seen as horrendously unfair bank bailouts were juxtaposed against rising poverty at an individual level in many countries. Occupiers around the world were making use of spatial strategies of disruption such as camping in unpermitted places. In doing so the Occupy camps acknowledged the “spatial dimensions of exclusion and inequality by forcing society to recognize that capitalist accumulation happens in certain places and that these places can be named, located and objected to” (Pickerill et al. 2012 p. 280). In NYC, Occupiers took over Zuccotti Park, on September 17, 2011, in an attempt to shine light on the effects of growing inequality and the disproportionate influence of corporate power (Juris 2012 p. 435). Occupy made use of the slogan “We are the 99%”, which came to be a very powerful communication device (Pickerill et al. 2012 p. 280). The slogan reflected the prevalent frustration that so few seem to hold all the power, while the vast majority lacks an equal say in social, economic, financial, political, and ecological processes (Juris et al. 2012 p. 434). The use of the terms “occupy” and “occupiers” were also symbolic because activists saw the need to reclaim space from corporate greed or bureaucratic, discriminatory regulations around the use of public spaces like parks or squares (Pickerill et al. 2012 p. 280).

The different Occupy sites brought together a mix of indebted college graduates, young professionals, laid-off blue-collar workers, elderly people, and homeless people. However, while Occupiers rallied against external systems of power, their own logic of majoritarian populism contributed to a difficulty in addressing internal differences and inequalities. The concept of the 99% was “widely recognized as a powerful semantic coup that frames the Occupy movement as a majoritarian challenge to the disproportionate political and economic influence of an elite few” (Juris et al. 2012 p. 436). However, it also made internal differentiation more difficult to identify and address, as the concept effectively obscured other types of power relations than class (Juris et al. 2012 p. 434). There was a significant lack of representation of people of color, especially those from poor and working-class communities (Juris et al. 2012 p. 436). And so, although Occupy activists were constantly negotiating and contesting their places, identities and social positions within these complex systems of power (not only class) (Juris et al. 2012 p. 435), there were also accusations of exclusion based on race or gender, as was shown, for example, in reports of sexual harassment and intimidation that made women feel unsafe and unwelcome in camps (Pickerill et al. 2012 p. 282). Structural external forces were at play here as well. Contemporary social justice movements in the U.S., especially those that are of an informal, fast paced character, tend to be composed mainly of privileged individuals, people with the economic, social and cultural resources needed to operate within them. There has been a historical divide between these types of movements – which have attracted mainly white and middle-class

activists – and the more formal, communitarian and often church-based, grassroots organizing that have attracted people of color (Juris et al. 2012 p. 3436).

The movement's internet-based diffusion was a prominent feature. Most of the Occupy collective action was mediated through a range of online social media and open source software practices. Facebook, Twitter and blogs functioned as communication engines for the often very technically and media savvy Occupiers. In combination with more traditional forms of mobilization, this communicational infrastructure lent itself to connecting hundreds of thousands of supporters and share millions of posts (Pickerill et al. 2012 p. 284). This social media infrastructure further allowed the movement to engage with large audiences outside the filtering of the mass media. Occupiers' interactions with the surrounding society were sometimes harsh, especially with law enforcement agencies. Accusations of unnecessary repression were many: in Oakland, police were involved in a near fatal assault, and in other places camps were aggressively cleared with references to "public safety" or the need to maintain public order (Pickerill et al. 2012 p. 285). An integral part of many Occupy tactical choices was the refusal to make explicit demands. Making demands was seen as something that might spur co-optation by political parties or create a situation in which Occupy legitimized and recognized the state as an agent capable of implementing these demands. Instead of making demands, activists simply attempted to create alternatives, and so they built tent communities with kitchens, bathrooms, libraries, first-aid posts, information centers, sleeping areas, and educational space (Pickerill et al. 2012 p. 283). In the parks, occupiers enacted an alternative, "attempting to build, in miniature, the kind of society they wanted to live in" (Schein 2012 p. 336). An influential practice within the anti-authoritarian current that Occupy is part of is the explicit linkages between visionary campaigning and practical solidarity work. In Canada, for example, No One Is Illegal-Vancouver works simultaneously with direct support of migrants facing deportation and campaign work geared toward change of Canadian immigration laws and regulations (Dixon 2012 p. 45). In line with this, the Occupy movement carries on in new forms and has morphed into various types of local protest groups such as Occupy Congress (McAuliff 2012), Occupy Our Homes (Occupy Our Homes) or pleas for merging environmental justice with social justice more closely within the wider Occupy movement (Athanasίου 2012). A continuous reinvention is happening. The OS branch of the wider Occupy movement can be seen as an instance of the idea of combining practical solidarity work and larger visionary struggles for justice.

A Chronological Narrative From Relief to Recovery

The Relief Phase

This section provides a description of the work undertaken in the relief period, both by activists and volunteers within the OS network and residents of Rockaway. The work came about as an alternative to the work done by formal actors, based on a critique against what activists and residents saw as a faulting institutional response from the city. The perceptions of an institutional response that was biased and flawed triggered people to take matters in their own hands.

Gaps in the Institutional Response to Hurricane Sandy

In the wake of Hurricane Sandy criticism was directed at first responding agencies for failing to provide residents in outskirt neighborhoods of the city with adequate relief support in the wake of the hurricane (Solidarity NYC 2013; Fox News Latino 2012; Killoran 2012; McCambridge 2012). The city received its fair share of criticism, for example for its failure to develop adequate emergency plans for disabled residents (Weiser 2014). NYC OEM was responsible for coordinating the different city agencies, yet was sidelined by the mayor's office, resulting in a haphazard operation that failed in some aspects, mainly with regard to evacuations of public housing residents (Liboiron et al. 2013). The so-called Regional Catastrophic Planning Team, which was supposed to bring together emergency managers from other states in the region, also remained inactivated (Liboiron et al. 2013). FEMA, which is set up to support state and local governments' recovery from disasters, is guided by the National Response Framework and National Disaster Recovery Framework. Therefore, feeding, sheltering and assisting individuals with functional needs are among the tasks that responding agencies are responsible for (FEMA 2013). FEMA received criticism for failing to deliver necessities to affected communities. An audit found that its system for distributing supplies like food, water, blankets, and generators was flawed (O'Neil 2014). The federal government did not approve an emergency measure granting federal money for victims of Sandy until January 2013, and so meanwhile human services and non-profits stepped in to fill the gap in the relief efforts (Krauskopf et al. 2013 p. 2). The Red Cross, who is mandated by the federal government to implement relief work in times of disasters (Congressional Charter of The American National Red Cross 2007) also received criticism for its relief efforts, and for being mostly interested in putting itself forward as a successful agency in the eyes of the public. For instance, vehicles were directed to public press conferences instead of storm-affected areas (Elliott 2014).

In Rockaway, volunteers and residents demonstrated frustration and anger toward city authorities and other organizations for failing to provide the pen-

insula with sufficient relief (Rauh 2012; Cotner 2012). One relief worker volunteer in Rockaway offered the following testimony:

When I was reading NYC's Community Development Block Grant Disaster Relief plan, I was amazed. It read like a fantasy novel about a perfectly executed disaster response. In that gripping piece of fiction, massive portable streetlights lights were dispatched immediately, City workers were on every corner, and Bloomberg made sure information about mold was accessible to affected residents as early as October 28 (online of course, which is a great way to inform those at risk of losing power). In the real-life version, we saw things a little differently. In Rockaway Park, my first home in the Rockaway relief efforts, most residents I spoke to felt completely abandoned by their City officials. There was no power, there were no generators, there were no pumps for clearing out flooded homes, and there was no gas. (Bennett 2013)

The isolation that ensued as a result of the power outages in the wake of the storm is something that a few of the residents interviewed talked about:

There was no communication, which I think was one of the major failures of the government and the City agencies. Because people didn't know what was going on. We didn't have any phones, we didn't have any computers, we didn't have any connections to media at all, so everything was word of mouth and rumors were spread. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7)

Some of the interviewees and field contacts in Rockaway spoke about what they perceived as either misdirected or outright racist responses from blue light authorities, first responders and parts of the public (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 12; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4; Interview with Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 20). NYPD and FDNY went around Rockaway to put out local fires. According to one interviewee, however, many of these were street bonfires initiated by residents who needed a place to get warm since they lacked heating due to power outages. These bonfires also functioned as important meeting places for residents who were otherwise isolated without access to electricity (meaning they could not charge their phones or access the Internet) (Interview Storm-affected Resident 8). Other perceptions of a biased response were interviewees' comments about Beach 116th Street. The interviewees point to a symbolic border between east and west Rockaway that moves along Beach 116th Street. To the west of Beach 116th Street, neighborhoods are predominantly comprised of middle-class homeowners, whereas income levels and life opportunities decrease sharply on the eastern side of 116th Street, home to mostly low-income communities of color. A few volunteers active within the OS network suspected that many relief organizations had orders not to go east of 116th street (Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 20; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 12; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18).

Another person interviewed stated instead that the Red Cross did go east of 116th Street, but brought police escort. NYPD personnel used loudspeakers to encourage people to come out on the street and accept help from the Red Cross. According to the person interviewed, in predominantly black areas long plagued by police brutality and heavily critiqued NYPD stop and frisk methods, with serious distrust issues toward the police department as a result, this was a failed strategy (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18).

Emergence of a Grassroots Response

Just hours after the storm had made landfall, OWS activists got in touch on Facebook and Twitter, and other social media sites. As an answer to the perceived gaps in the institutional response in Rockaway and across the city, they started to talk about possible ways to help, reach out to storm-affected people and those willing to lend a helping hand. The activists started to call the initiative OS. One of the first Facebook posts from OS read:

If you see a need in your community, work to fill it. We will do everything we can to support your efforts! Find like-minded folks, band together, and pool your resources. Start with finding a donation drop off location. Then find a local certified kitchen that will donate their space. Ideal if both are located in the same building. Go door to door. Meet your neighbors. Reach out to local churches, schools, community centers, and businesses. If we can do it, you can too! All Power to the People! Rock on, NYC. (Occupy Sandy 2012)

OS activists already had an extensive communication network in place through various social media sites that they used during the Zuccotti Park protests in 2011, and made use of this existing, yet at the time dormant, communication infrastructure to transmit information in a fast and timely manner. Referencing the Zuccotti Park protests, one Occupy organizer outlined:

We were prepared, because we had a year of freaking training, of organizing, mobilizing. Living outside, you know. Of being able to bring it together, from a little, and do a lot. (Occupy Sandy: Mutual Aid not Charity 2014)

One activist talked about how previous organizing within the OWS movement meant that activists knew each other and that the network consisted of people that “you’d already been in jail with, lot of people that you trusted. And also, we know what we’re good at, we know who the computer people are, who can make websites, and blogs and like, we know who are good at analyzing stuff or collecting numbers. And we know the people who are good on the ground or who likes to be on the ground” (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4).

In the following months, OWS members rolled out an extensive relief operation, mobilized large amounts of volunteers (both storm-affected and

others), and resources and created a network-based bottom-up relief effort. OS activists used social media extensively and after a week roughly 700 volunteers had been put to work and around 20,000 meals were served daily. At its peak the network managed to accommodate approximately 60,000 volunteers (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 31). Activists and volunteers within the network distributed direct aid (food, water, warmth), they provided medical care and legal aid, helped with mold remediation and rebuilding, provided psychological help, and were continuously canvassing to assess the needs of the communities they operated in (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 35). The network also put up free stores, where storm-affected residents could pick up assets needed (Occupy Sandy: Mutual Aid not Charity 2014). All of this was sustained with the help of private donations. In only the first six months, OS managed to raise \$1,377,433.57 USD (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 36).

In the reverberations of the storm throughout the city, networks of first responders sprang up around facilities that had survived functionally from the effects of Sandy. These facilities – for instance local churches and warehouses – served as hubs for relief and coordination through the efforts of local residents (Williams 2014 p. 1). As elsewhere in the city, residents in Rockaway acted as important first responders in their neighborhoods immediately after the storm. They stepped up to check on their neighbors, donate supplies and aid in getting resources out to people in need. One such example was a Rockaway resident whose house was flooded and who moved her family to their church for six weeks after the storm:

We felt totally abandoned at first. No one was here. We were isolated here on our own. Nothing was open, there were no gas, we cooked everything we ate and fed each other. We had to find a way to help the people best we could. There was no electricity for months. People were using head lamps so that we could see. Communication was hard too because we could only charge our phones in the car or through outlets that some people charged five dollars to use. (Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 6)

Once the interviewee and her family had settled at the church, she initiated a small distribution center from the church. After a first few days of isolation, she contacted some OS activists who wanted to support their efforts. The activists teamed up with local first responder initiatives and offered support to local community leaders. Ongoing local efforts were thus fortified, their activities and reach amplified, and new hubs emerged with residents taking on central roles (Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 16; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18; Interview with Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 20; Interview with Storm-affected Resident 7).

The Organizational Formation Phase

This section describes the work that followed once the immediate relief period came to an end. Occupy activists saw it as important to continue to push for social justice in the wake of the storm, and used the momentum they had in the relief period, as well as the relations with storm-affected people they developed, to form various long-term social justice hubs across the city. One of these hubs was Rockaway Wildfire, in Rockaway. In the following, a description of the formation of and work undertaken by this group is provided.

Transitioning From Relief to Recovery

As the immediate relief needs after Hurricane Sandy started to decrease, alliances of community groups, labor unions, faith-based organizations, and environmentalists came together to demand a just and sustainable rebuilding so that the “tens of billions of dollars do not end up in the hands of the same people that created those injustices” (Liboiron 2013). Attention was now increasingly given to people in poorer areas, low-income households and tenants in public housing, as well as immigrant communities, all of whom had a difficult time returning to a decent life (Enterprise 2013 p. 7; deMuse 2013; Adams Sheets 2013; Haygood 2013; Make the Road New York 2012; Krauskopf et al. 2013 p. 7). Spokespersons from a range of alliances and interest groups were asserting that the storm exposed deep inequalities based on income, race, housing, and immigration status (Rohde 2012; Align 2013; Solidarity NYC 2013; Rebuild by Design, 2013b; Murphy 2011; Jaffe 2013). For example, Alliance for a Just Rebuilding pushed for the creation of a database to track public expenditure of funds in connection with recovery efforts in order to increase transparency (Field Observation City Hall Rally, Manhattan, 2013).

Against this backdrop, the wider OS network extended its work beyond the relief phase to deal with long-term issues of social justice in relation to the storm. Organizers in the network identified a number of long-term recovery projects to continue the work into the future once the relief phase was over, and they used the momentum that they built during the relief phase to do so. Across the city OS activists set up various long-term recovery hubs. In these hubs, they advocated a just recovery process where storm survivors from marginalized groups were to be empowered and long-term political mobilization around issues of social justice would be dealt with. After having gone through the phase of direct problem solving in the immediate wake of the disaster, a process of deliberation took place in which people started to discuss why the disaster happened and where responsibility should be directed for its effects.

Wildfire – A National Political Education Project is Started in Rockaway

One of these long-term OS projects was a grassroots community group in Rockaway that called themselves Wildfire. Originally the group was part of a larger national project, called the Wildfire Project, which was an organization that supported and trained grassroots groups across the U.S. to mobilize locally around social justice issues. The training program aimed to sensitize people to issues of power imbalances and train them to become leaders and organizers in local grassroots struggles. The group was initiated by a number of activists associated with the larger OWS network. They approached OS activists in Rockaway who had collaborated with residents in the area, and asked them to invite residents to this training program. The idea behind the training model was to have experienced political organizers enter communities, educate residents to organize effectively and after an initial period pull out to let community members do the rest of the organizing independently. In line with this, Wildfire first started out as a three-month political training period.

The Temporary Training Project Becomes an Established Group

During the first three months, the Wildfire training sessions consisted of different exercises and group discussions around organizing. The goal was to trigger a process of political awareness among the participants around issues of racism, sexism, classism, and how all of these issues related to political participation in the recovery process. One of the OS activists described the first three months as a period of raising awareness after the immediate effects of the storm had rung out, in which the participants started to critically assess what happened in their community, why responsible government agencies did not fulfill their responsibility, and how all of this was related to class and race stratifications of the wider society. Most of the residents talked about their experiences from this training period as positive. Going through it, they were able to get political training around issues that they perhaps had thought about but never had the chance to reflect deeper on:

I was telling myself that if I read a lot of books, if I educated myself to what was going on around me, I'll be able to empower myself and then I would take the lead on the things that I wanted to do. But as I went on I realized that there was more to it. I started seeing that there were pieces of the puzzle that weren't written in the books. But when I met the people in Wildfire I was able to identify the missing parts that I didn't have. It provided direction of what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go. They provided small tools for me to actually do that. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 5)

The trainers' original idea was to pull out after three months and leave the rest of the work to the residents. As the three months passed, however, the intended exit from the Wildfire organizers turned out to be less straightfor-

ward than the initiators had imagined. Some of the OS activists had built relationships with community members and felt that they wanted to stay on for more long-term work. A few of the activists continued to work with the residents instead of leaving and together they created a more stable group. Thus, from the political discussions and skill building of these first months, a long-term group was established with the aim to identify and work for collective priorities for the community. The group stuck with the name Wildfire, but added Rockaway to the name to distinguish themselves from the national Wildfire Project. This is when Rockaway Wildfire became its own independent entity, autonomous from the national Wildfire Project.

Rockaway Wildfire and the Working Groups

Through dialogue exercises, the group formed ideas around the kind of change that the residents wanted to see in their community after the storm. A few smaller working groups with more concrete focus gradually grew out of these initial discussions. For example, there was one working group that focused on building environmentally sustainable community projects, one that planned protests against the NYPD stop and frisk methods, one that focused on creating a worker's cooperative, and one land use group that saw the threat of a disaster-induced gentrification process as an important risk to focus on in the long-term recovery phase. Eventually the land use group came to be the only prioritized group in Rockaway Wildfire.

The External Collaboration and Advocacy Phase

This section describes how Rockaway Wildfire, after a period of organizational formation, started to collaborate with other grassroots organizations in Rockaway in order to form a grassroots coalition. The stated goal of the coalition was to build a basis to influence a process of urban planning and development by putting pressure on formal decision-makers in this process. The coalition drafted a CBA with the ambition was to put pressure on developers to assure social benefits such as affordable housing, local jobs and social services.

Urban Planning in the Wake of Hurricane Sandy

In the wake of Hurricane Sandy, a process of urban development took place in Rockaway. A discussion around the needs of the Rockaway peninsula was rejuvenated after the hurricane. The storm triggered a revisit to earlier plans for a piece of land called Arverne East (Ellefson 2014). This development was of interest to Rockaway Wildfire, which started to build a coalition of grassroots organizations in the area. The aim was to collectively put pressure on developers to take the needs of Rockaway's poorest into account when planning for this new housing area. Arverne East was a place marked by decades of political inertia. An 80-acre beachfront property that sits between Beach 56th Street and Beach 32nd Street in the eastern part of the peninsula,

this idle space of land, heavily littered and dumped on, was once part of a popular summer resort in the early 1900s (City of New York 2008). Despite its beautiful fronting on the Atlantic Ocean, this area was nothing but an “underutilized vacant property...where incentives are needed in order to induce the correction of these substandard, insanitary and blighting conditions”, as it was described by the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) who owned the land (City of New York 22 January 2014). The eeriness of Arverne East is a well-fitting symbol for the larger narrative of the Rockaway peninsula, an area marked by long-term political neglect. But in the wake of Hurricane Sandy a discussion around the needs of the Rockaway peninsula was rejuvenated and the storm triggered a revisit to the plans for Arverne East (Ellefson 2014).

In light of these plans, Rockaway Wildfire started to build toward a coalition of grassroots organizations – the UPWARD coalition – with the aim to create a CBA. A CBA is a private agreement between developers and community coalitions. In regular development processes without CBA’s, three sets of actors are involved: the public sector (local government), the private sector (the developers) and the community sector (residents and the associations and organizations they are part of). Any potential benefits for the community are directly negotiated between the developer and the public sector (local governments). Community groups lack direct influence, but a CBA, if successfully advocated, may change this dynamic of the planning process since it introduces a direct connection between the community and the private sector, a relationship in which the community can put pressure on the developers to adhere to their demands. The process of reaching a CBA starts with the formation of a broad coalition of grassroots stakeholders, be they civic associations, NGOs or other types of community-based organizations. Tied to the coalition are also often guest experts – planners, city attorneys or consultants from NGOs – who provide technical details. The coalition should then develop a common vision for the development area and come up with a list of benefits for the community that they wish to see included in a CBA (Baxamusa 2008 p. 270). Coming together in a coalition enables groups to share information, show strength in numbers and coordinate their advocacy in order to put collective pressure on developers to sign the agreement (Baxamusa 2008 p. 264; Salkin et al. 2008 p. 295). A broadly inclusive coalition that manages to accommodate a range of community agendas into a united vision is an important step toward that goal (Hathaway et al. 1993 p. 160). A CBA may include multiple issues around various kinds of common goods such as economic, social and environmental demands (Baxamusa 2008 p. 263). If successfully negotiated, a CBA can enforce legal protection for low-income individuals by taking land off a speculative market and control land use decisions through community ownership. In such processes, low-income communities benefit from development as opposed to development where no CBA is part of the process.

The UPWARD coalition thus loosely gathered local grassroots organizations and outside advocacy groups. The main organization within the coalition was Rockaway Wildfire, whose organizers served as initiators and coordinators of the coalition work. Some of the other grassroots organizations were formally part of the coalition, whereas others were figuring out whether they should be part of the CBA work or not. An expert organization that the activists had worked with, as well as a group of urban planners at Hunter College who had been involved as experts to the CBA process, were also part of the coalition. The draft CBA included the following statement:

Superstorm Sandy destroyed much of the housing for lower income and working families in the Rockaways, that has not been replaced. Much of what will be rebuilt will be unaffordable for current residents, and many more displaced members of our community continue to be unable to return home. [...] Very few Rockaway residents can afford to buy a home at the current NYC market rates. The rising prices of homes in NYC are rapidly pricing people out of many of the neighborhoods that they call home, and further constraining options for low-income families and individuals who are already struggling financially. We believe that an opportunity exists to ensure fair and accessible ownership of quality homes in our community, for our community. (CBA 2015)

The three main tenets of the draft CBA were issues of housing (deeply affordable), issues of jobs (demands for minimum wages and that jobs should go to local residents primarily) and green technology/resilience (CBA 2014). Toward this goal, a number of activities were carried out. Initially Rockaway Wildfire organizers canvassed the communities of Rockaway and held information sessions to find out what residents and organizations wanted to include in a CBA (Silberblatt 2014; Ellefson 2014).

A Period of Climate March Preparations

Although the CBA and coalition building was supposed to be Rockaway Wildfire's main task, for a few months during 2014, the organizers instead mobilized around issues of climate change and environmental justice. A parallel working process was taking place alongside the CBA organizing – preparations for the large People's Climate March that happened in September and gathered roughly 300,000 demonstrators in NYC. Rockaway Wildfire became deeply involved in these preparations and mustered up support for the march in storm-affected communities (of color, mostly) in Rockaway. In conjunction to the march, Rockaway Wildfire organized different types of events, such as fundraising parties and information and networking events (Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 1, 2014; Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 2, 2014). The mobilization for the march was a deviation from the CBA work, and the organizing around Arverne East was kept to a minimum during the months leading up to the big march in September.

Conflicts and Breakdown

The coalition suffered serious problems that eventually led to a breakdown. Over the course of the three years the coalition of grassroots organizations gradually fell apart. Internal tensions within Rockaway Wildfire resulted in a reorganization of the group's structure, as well as a large number of drop-outs, a shrinking organization and, later, a coalition that broke down. But the breakdown was also due to factors other than internal conflicts within Rockaway Wildfire. Firstly, conflicts ensued between representatives from some of the organizations active within the coalition and the open meetings became tense with infighting. There were also suspicions from coalition organizers that a local decision-maker interfered and sabotaged the coalition's work. In the wake of these conflicts, key organizers left Rockaway Wildfire, meetings became scarce, and residents lost interest in the coalition and the CBA.

The Three Organizing Ideals as Understood by Activists

The three organizing ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality are all aspects of the framework of mutual aid that was integral to OS's relief work. The ideological roots for these ideals, as they were understood by the activists, will be covered here.

Mutual aid stems from anarchical political philosophy, and implies horizontal organizing, decentralized authority, lack of regulatory requirements, very few controls on operations, and almost complete autonomy for members of the network to act freely and spontaneously (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 34). Mutual aid is intended to make storm-affected people active parts in relief operations rather than passive recipients of aid. It represents a reciprocal exchange of resources, based on voluntary services, in which there is no strict line between helper and helped. Typical for mutual aid groups is that members are free to join, activities are voluntary, they are often non-bureaucratic and non-hierarchical, member-led and member-organized. Shared leadership and cooperative decision-making are typically fundamental characteristics of mutual aid (Turner 2005).

Inclusion

In response to issues of inequality, Occupy activists saw it as important to include disaster-affected people in relief and recovery work. An OS organizer who introduced new volunteers said the following in a training session:

You are not the protagonist of this story, they are. You are the supporting cast, helping hand. They know what they need, and you have been helping with that. And they are grateful of that, but it isn't charity. (Occupy Sandy: Mutual Aid not Charity 2014)

Inclusion of storm-affected people was seen as important in order to allow for them to become active partners in relief work rather than passive recipients of aid. Inclusion as an organizing ideal also meant that not only storm-affected people but basically anyone interested in lending a hand was welcome to do so, without any barriers for participation. Inclusion was seen as important in the relief work, but also in the successive recovery work. Building a broad base of community residents and grassroots community organizers from other local organizations was seen as a central feature of the work.

Flexibility

There's a lot of power in that position of being able to dictate the future. (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4)

This excerpt from one of the Occupy interviewees points to the underlying rationale for why the Occupy movement was characterized by a refusal of organizational structure or in other words flexibility. According to many activists, deciding what any organization or project should focus on in their work or dictating the future equals power. Instead, there ought to be flexibility with regard to the agenda so that initiating activists do not enter with predetermined ideas on what and how the work should be done. The following quote illustrates the thinking behind this approach, as described by an OS activist comparing the OS network with the approach by official organizations:

One of the major distinctions between the State and Occupy, or between FEMA, the Red Cross and other official organizations and Occupy, is that the State seems to have a cookie-cutter approach to what's needed in communities of disaster, and it's not always the case. But they come down from above and drop the pellets and leave. "Here's your stuff. Now, survive." What we've done on the other hand, with the concept of mutual aid in mind, is to go out in those communities, talk to people, knock on people's doors, talk to people in the streets, at stores, at barbecue pits where they serve free food and ask them what they need. (Occupy Sandy: Mutual Aid not Charity 2014)

Flexibility was seen as an important organizing ideal, as it allowed for storm-affected people to shape activities and agenda setting according to what they saw fit, in the relief work and in the successive recovery period.

Horizontality

Many OS organizers were skeptical toward charity-based relief approaches, which they saw as diminishing for the people who receive the aid because it reproduces the power imbalances that exist between helper and helped. Instead OS activists aimed for a horizontally-based network, in which storm-

affected people could partake on equal terms. This was seen as the opposite of what they perceived as ineffective – not to mention morally questionable – top-down structures of traditional organizations. An OS organizer stated:

Mutual aid is not about giving something from the top down, it's not about expecting anything in return. It's not about being better than those who are in need. (Occupy Sandy: Mutual Aid not Charity 2014)

One of the organizers talked about how the horizontal structure functioned as a way of avoiding victimization, and how this was something that singled out OS in comparison to other types of relief entities:

Our goal is not to exist like this organization that's always gonna be there to like save you. That's what other relief organizations are based on, victimizing. "You're the victim. And we're necessary. And we want to be necessary so we're gonna make ourselves necessary." It's like a competition thing. (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4)

In line with the ideal of horizontality, an important feature of the Occupy movement was the shared leadership model. It is a model of decentralized leadership meant to nurture individual activist's skills and at the same time prevent domination by a few. The ideal of horizontality was seen as important by OS activists and was meant to prevent a situation in which any one individual was granted too much control. Another important rationale for horizontality was the goal to empower residents to take on leadership roles. One core coordinator outlined it as such:

If you give a person too much power what happens is that that person becomes power-hungry and they may begin to make decisions that are not, that's not conducive to the group. They become too empowered. We've seen it happen...So we try to keep the power balanced, we try not to let anyone person be too powerful in the group. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 5).

Compensatory Horizontality as Understood by Activists

The ideal of horizontality also implies that power imbalances that exist in the outside world are challenged in the internal working orders in order to make room for otherwise oppressed groups of people to thrive. In line with this idea, the activists' rationale for why horizontality was needed was that there are no guarantees that, for example, male or white persons will not dominate the way they do in the rest of society, even in social justice movements. One outside organizer expressed his view that since racism is structural it is also pervasive, because it is impossible to "get out of your racist brain":

There's a hierarchy, you can't completely erase the world we live in, there's a hierarchy within our organization. We have different skills, we have different privileges, and we come from different backgrounds. (Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3).

5. Thematic Analysis: The Relief Phase

Occupy Sandy had no bureaucracy, no regulations to follow, no pre-defined mission, charter, or strategic plan. There was just relief. (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p 1)

The above quote is from a report on Occupy Sandy's relief work, which this chapter focuses on. The chapter describes how activists collaborated with storm-affected people in new and existing relief hubs, and how they amplified ongoing relief efforts and strengthened local leadership along the way. It demonstrates how the strife toward a realization of the three ideals was manifested in concrete work in the relief phase.

In brief, the chapter demonstrates how by putting the ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality to practice, OS activists transferred control from themselves as initiators of the relief efforts to storm-affected residents. The process through which this happened seems to have lent residents influence over ends and means, or in other words over which activities should be carried out and how the work should be organized, something that was perceived as empowering for residents, as expressed in interviews with both residents and activists.

Inclusion

The ideal of inclusion that OS activists strived for in the relief phase was that anyone who wanted to take part should be able to do so freely. In line with this, OS was a network with no barriers for participation. Everyone who wanted to take part was welcome, from storm-affected people to others who wanted to lend a helping hand. In this way, OS included and put to work a large number of volunteers – at its peak the network accommodated an estimated 60,000 volunteers across NYC) (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 31). At first it was mostly activists affiliated with OWS who showed up. But when established organizations like the Red Cross had to turn down the large amounts of spontaneous volunteers, OS became the go-to network for many willing volunteers who were not previously affiliated with Occupy (Field Observation Red Cross Head Quarters Study Visit, Manhattan, 2013; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18; Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 31; Analect Films 2013). One OS activists talked about how she was looking for a place to volunteer for a full week after the storm,

without any luck. Her story is a good illustration of inclusion, but it also points to how the ideals of flexibility and horizontality were translated into practice. The interviewee was medically trained and wanted to help in some type of relief work, but no organization responded to her contact attempts. So when she found out through Facebook that OS was accepting volunteers she went to one of the Brooklyn hubs to offer her help, where she was immediately sent to an apartment complex with supplies. She expected someone to meet her there and give her instructions, but found out that she was alone. So she started to knock on doors and quickly realized that there were many people in the house who had not received enough medical attention. She started to make a list of all the needs of the people in the house. She covered one floor of the building at a time, which took many hours, but she never reached the top floor because so many people had issues. Later that day, when she reported back to the OS organizers at the Brooklyn site, they said, “It looks like you want to get more involved?” After this day she became increasingly engaged in the organizing, which eventually led her to Rockaway, a place she kept returning to on a daily basis for many months (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18). Her story is a practical instance of all three ideals at once. She was immediately included without any barriers to participation, she was then sent out on a mission for which she had to use her own decision-making skills and capabilities to solve the problem in an improvised way, and when she communicated with the OS organizers she was encouraged to continue to take the lead.

Apart from large amounts of incoming volunteers from all kinds of social groups and segments, OS activists invited in and built relationships with storm-affected people in marginalized communities. They engaged closely with low-income people, undocumented immigrants, NYCHA residents, and homeless people – populations who often shy away from official organizations (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 38).

But inclusion in practice also meant that practically anyone who was willing to collaborate with Occupy volunteers was seen as part of the network. The YANA relief hub (described below under the heading of flexibility) is an example of this. Everyone who wished to take part in the work in this hub was welcome to do so, from Rockaway residents to volunteers from other parts of the city, as well as representatives from official organizations. Several official organizations, such as FEMA and the Department of Health, had individual staffers that collaborated informally with the group of OS volunteers active at the YANA hub (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 12; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4; Interview with Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 20). The broad inclusion that characterized the relief period was combined with an ambition to organize the work through a flexible and horizontal approach, wherein volunteers were able to go to work doing what they felt compelled to do and assume

leadership over the task at hand if they desired. These things will be covered in the following sections.

Flexibility

The activists wanted to organize the relief work in line with the ideal of flexibility, meaning they aimed to make room for improvised solutions to problems, as well as keep the work open for volunteers – among them many storm-affected residents – to take active part in shaping the agenda, or in other words decide on which activities should be carried out. In practice, this meant that everyone who wanted to help were able to swiftly go to work doing what they felt needed to be done, often based on some skill they had. It also meant that anyone who identified a problem and had a suggestion for how that problem could be solved had the autonomy to immediately implement that solution.

When storm-affected people were involved and could work autonomously, problems that needed solving were quickly identified and innovative solutions emerged. To be malleable enough to go where people are, rather than operating out of set locations and predetermined plans, and further to include storm-affected people in the conversation about what the needs of the situations were, was seen as an effective approach in directing the right kind of resources to where they needed to be. This was in comparison to approaches by more bureaucratically organized agencies and organizations, which were perceived as faulty in their needs assessment.

The ambition to put flexibility into practice was manifested in the extensive use of social media by activists and volunteers. Social media was used as participants saw fit, without any restrictions, to attract and mobilize volunteers to identify community needs across the city, share information and fundraise money for relief efforts. Technologically competent volunteers set up Facebook and Twitter accounts, managed a newly established WePay account for donations, and managed the OS webpage. Three weeks after the storm 15 volunteers were operating Facebook (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 30). The intense presence throughout social media sites was mirrored by the work on the ground. OS had a presence in the streets in storm-affected neighborhoods that were largely left to their own, put up spontaneous relief hubs and medical clinics across the city, channeled donations in innovative ways, and was malleable enough to go where help was needed (Eco Watch 2012; Liboiron 2013; Feuer 2012; OccuWorld 2012).

Flexibility as an ideal was also practically manifested in the swift introduction of new volunteers, as opposed to the more rigid vetting and training recruitment procedures of established organizations. The whole process from registration to orientation to active work took on average 45 minutes, meaning that no time was wasted in putting resources to use (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 33).

Many of the volunteers were white, middle-class, educated, yet unemployed people in their 20s and 30s. Since OS was a network in which everyone could go to work doing what they did best, they found a place where their competencies were valued and put to use. Web designers worked on websites, doctors volunteered in spontaneously established medical centers and lawyers helped with FEMA applications (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 31). For instance, one OS organizer described how she, as a person with cooking capabilities, tried to find a space where she could help with cooking. She navigated social media to find out where her capabilities were needed the most:

My response to everything is food. Like my answer is if there's something wrong I will feed you. So I thought I'd find a kitchen, find someplace where I could make food for people who had lost their homes or whatever. And so OS had cooking opportunities and that's where I signed up or I liked it on Facebook also to find out more about what was going on. (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 12)

Moreover, the spontaneously emerging color coding system that arose organically was an instance of the wiggle room for unplanned strategies that came with the ambition to be flexible. Everyone and everything (e.g., vehicles) connected with the OS network was marked by the color yellow. Volunteers associated with OS started to tie yellow ribbons onto their cars or wear yellow armbands in order to identify each other in the sometimes messy gatherings of people, cars and donations. This functioned as a signal system of trust. One of the OS organizers described it as such:

If you had a yellow armband, and you saw a car that had a yellow armband, then you know you're on the same thing, you're from the same community. Even if you don't know each other, it's cool, you can stop them and they can give you a ride. So I thought that was important. People start trusting brands and symbols. (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4)

Several activities emerged spontaneously in the OS network, as the needs of storm-affected people shifted slightly with time. At first, volunteers provided basic supplies like hot food, water and warmth through blankets and clothes. But specialized capabilities evolved pretty quickly: medical teams were formed to canvass for dead bodies and distribute prescriptions; construction teams were formed that removed water, debris and mold from homes, and renovated them afterward; housing teams emerged that connected survivors with host families; and legal teams started to provide legal advice on insurance issues, for example. The kitchen team continued to provide meals, the communications team managed social media outlets, and the incubation team decided on plans for recovery projects and managed finances (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 35). One practical instance of the ideal of flexibility was the wedding registry that arose as a response to problems of mis-

matching between needs and donations. Some hubs received large amounts of donated supplies that were not needed, and vice versa items that were needed were not donated. As a response to this predicament and with the autonomy they had to immediately go to work, OS activists set up an online space for donations using wedding registries on Amazon.com. Here, storm-affected people could list items that reflected their actual needs, which guaranteed that the right items were donated and delivered to the right locations. People who wanted to donate were then able to purchase supplies like batteries, dehumidifiers, space heaters, generators, and hygiene products. A month after the storm, OS had received more than \$700,000 USD worth of supplies (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p. 64).

An individual story of how the ideal of flexibility was manifested in practice was how one volunteer came to be affiliated with the OS network. A few days after the storm had hit, he took his bike and rode out to Rockaway. Based on the needs he identified when talking to people on the ground he initiated a small hot meal operation with the help of his extended family. For days on end, they cooked and he delivered by bike. In the spirit of flexibility, this volunteer then went from providing hot meals to working with home repairs. He ended up quitting his job to devote his time to helping people renovate their homes and for a whole year he continued to do daily trips to Rockaway. He was also a social point of contact for many isolated, elderly people who lost their homes, and provided them with much needed psychosocial support for which he had no prior training. In the following quote he describes how devastated many people's homes were, a year after the storm, and how he tried to support them:

Some of them are so vulnerable, elderly and women, no family members left, they are by their own. They've never seen this kind of devastating disasters in their lives. What they can do is just hug you and cry. It is not easy. I've seen people hang themselves after Sandy. I've seen families frozen to death, in the early time of Sandy, because they had no heat. Husband died, frozen to death, they were married for 46 years. Wife couldn't take it, she cried and she cried, and then she died too. [...] And they talk to me and they tell me they don't want to live anymore. They tell me, "If I'm not here tomorrow, its ok, it's not because you couldn't help me, I am thankful for your time and help." And so I've got to run to them and talk to them, and sit with them for hours and hours. (Interview Non-resident Relief Volunteer 19)

Many other OS volunteers also provided important psychosocial support, something that often emerged organically:

There were a lot of hugs. I've never done more hugs in my life than I did after Hurricane Sandy. I hugged like a thousand times a day. But no one even thinks about that. You know, like FEMA and the Red Cross they don't think about that as recovery. They care about numbers and fucking data sheets. (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4)

During the relief phase, OS activists continuously scanned the city for ongoing relief initiatives and offered their support to local community leaders. In line with the ideal of flexibility, OS volunteers had the autonomy to fortify existing hubs based on independent needs assessments, and soon OS hubs popped up across the city's neighborhoods: Fort Greene, Park Slope, Williamsburg, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Rockaway (MacFarquhar 2012). Typically, local religious institutions or shop owners donated space and OS activists joined in to direct resources (donations, services, volunteers) to those who needed it (Homeland Security Studies 2013).

In Rockaway, as elsewhere in the city, activists teamed up with local first responders in relief hubs from Beach 116th Street to Far Rockaway. Ongoing local efforts were strengthened, their activities and reach amplified, and new hubs popped up wherein residents became central figures who took active parts in shaping the work according to the needs of the situations (Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 16; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4; Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18; Interview with Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 20; Interview with Storm-affected Resident 7).

Apart from amplifying ongoing relief operations, existing organizational centers were retrofitted into relief hubs, as another instance of the organic evolution of activities in line with the ideal of flexibility. The story of YANA is illustrative here. YANA was a community service center located in Rockaway Park that opened in October 2012. Its director was a local resident with a mission to bring employment opportunities, with an emphasis on green sustainable technologies, to the socioeconomically marginalized communities of Rockaway Park (Field Observations YANA, Rockaway, 2013-2014). When the storm hit, only two weeks after YANA had opened, the floods completely destroyed the small office spaces. However, when activists teamed up with the director, the community service center re-emerged as a relief hub. Soon the office spaces together with an affiliated space a couple of blocks down, became a buzzing relief central that provided hot meals, supplies, legal assistance, and allocated incoming volunteers to cleanup efforts throughout the peninsula. Outside of the YANA office, Greenpeace activists put up a solar panel truck called the Rolling Sunlight that provided much needed electricity. Residents lined up to charge their phones. Simultaneously OS volunteers gutted and started to renovate the offices. Out of YANA, several other relief hubs came into existence, as OS volunteers identified needs and possible local partners across the peninsula (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 12).

Volunteers also created completely new hubs as they saw fit. One example is the improvised medical clinic that OS organizers opened in a fur shop on Beach 113th Street in Rockaway. Medical needs were great among many residents, as the peninsula's hospital and many pharmacies had closed. In a peninsula with a large percentage of mentally ill (for example war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder), not being able to file prescriptions or get

a hold of medicine can become a big problem fast. One of the interviewed OS organizers explained how he realized that there was a dire need for a medical aid clinic, after having talked to many residents with severe medical needs. He looked across the street, saw an abandoned fur shop and thought, “There, that’s where we’ll do it!” He put a group of volunteers to work on setting the space up and called a few medically trained anarchists he knew. Some of the big NYC hospitals were closed due to the storm, so doctors and nurses were looking for places to volunteer since they could not access their regular jobs. The anarchists responded to the call and came out the next day. A day after the need was first identified, the medical clinic was up and running (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4). And so, among old furs hanging from the ceiling, volunteer doctors and nurses filled prescriptions and tended to residents’ medical needs. However, since there was a lack of open pharmacies, people had a difficult time finding a place to get their hands on the prescribed medicine. In response to this problem, one volunteer took his motorcycle and rode up and down the peninsula, to and from the only open pharmacy. The other volunteers called him the “little pharmaceutical god” (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 12).

Horizontality

In addition to the ideals of inclusion and flexibility, OS activists also aimed to organize work through the ideal of horizontality, meaning that they wanted leadership to be shared among many, including storm-affected residents themselves. The activists also wanted to make sure that social differences between everyone involved in the network were addressed and compensated for.

In line with the anti-authoritarian thinking that underpins the idea of horizontality, OS worked through a shared leadership model in which whoever felt compelled to take on a leadership role was able to do so. Based on interviews with residents and activists, it seems that the ideal was translated into practice (Interview Non-resident OS Activist and Relief Volunteer 4; Interview Non-resident OS Activist and Relief Volunteer 18; Field Conversation Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 20; Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 9; Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 6; Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 16). The role allocation developed organically; some people took on leadership roles and some were content with implementing other people’s decisions. In this way, there were many local leaders who simultaneously took on various responsibilities, and they would communicate with each other to talk about current activities and needs. This was a way of communicating that differed greatly from vertical communication patterns of more hierarchi-

cally organized organizations, where orders flow from the top down. One of the interviewees described it in the following way:

It was what I call horizontal coordination. We were all coordinated, we would check in. It wasn't a question of "Can I do this?", but it was like, "I wanna do this, just to let you know". And then everybody did that and it was just growing out like a web. That was way faster than the Red Cross or FEMA, because they had to ask for so much permission and permits and legal papers and all that shit. (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4)

According to a few interviewees, it seems that apart from the issue of shared leadership, putting the ideal of horizontality into practice also activated individuals from particularly vulnerable segments. Otherwise very vulnerable individuals were given space to take part in relief efforts based on their ability, instead of being at best a passive recipient of aid and at worst completely on their own, according to some interviewees' individual experiences. One OS volunteer described what was happening in Rockaway, outlining:

It's a crazy disaster zone; it looks like New Orleans looked after Hurricane Katrina, but people there are amazing. And being part of that is incredible. The people from that neighborhood, most of them, that have stepped up and are now organizers, and directing traffic, and running security, and going door-to-door canvassing, looking for elderly that need help, those people never did something like that before. (Dwayne 2013)

One OS activist told the story of how in one of the relief hubs in Rockaway he was teaming up with a crew of young men who used to sell drugs on a daily basis in the neighborhood. When the storm hit, however, they shifted their activities and their knowledge about the area and its inhabitants to instead engage in the relief efforts (Interview Non-Resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4). Another OS volunteer noted that the storm brought about a strengthening of otherwise marginalized community residents. Although many people were hurt and suffered from damaged houses, lack of heat, food and medicines, even the most vulnerable individuals made efforts to help out, she said. From her viewpoint, it seemed like some individuals with mental illness or substance abuse problems, for a while in the immediate aftermath of the storm, were able to step up and take on responsibilities. She talked about one man who suffered from alcoholism, who sobered up after the storm, helped in directing traffic. The interviewee thought this was remarkable and attributed it to the whole feeling of togetherness and community that the storm and the organizing efforts had created (Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18).

Summary of Chapter

This chapter explored whether and to what extent the ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality were translated into practice in the relief phase, and looked at the empirical manifestations of these ideals. It also explored the extent to which the process of translating these ideals into practice lent storm-affected residents influence over ends and means. The tentative conclusion is that storm-affected residents of Rockaway, as a result of the attempts at putting inclusion, flexibility and horizontality into practice, were strengthened in their roles as local leaders, and they were active participants in shaping both the ends and means of the relief efforts.

It seems that initiating outsiders of the OS network included, encouraged and supported volunteers to take responsibility and make independent decisions. Among the volunteers who were included within the network were many storm-affected people, among them Rockaway residents.

Volunteers who wanted to help were allowed to do so without barriers, and were able to swiftly go to work doing what they were good at or what they saw fit depending on the situation. Anyone who identified a problem and suggested how that problem could be solved had the autonomy to immediately implement their solution. When storm-affected people were involved and could go to work autonomously, problems were swiftly identified and innovative solutions emerged. In line with this flexible characteristic of the relief efforts, local relief hubs emerged in improvised ways.

This process of mobilization seems to have been strengthening for residents in several ways. There were many examples of how, instead of being at best a passive recipient of aid and at worst completely on their own, storm-affected people were invited to partake on equal terms in the relief efforts. Community residents who were already active first responders in their communities were reinforced in their capacities as local leaders, and the relief hubs they were manning were amplified through the connection to OS resources of volunteers, services and donations. Allocation of roles developed organically, as those residents who felt comfortable taking on leadership roles were able to do so with support from outside activists. These local leaders controlled more resources and functioned as important nodes of connections within the OS network, as well as between the network and other residents. There were also examples of how particularly vulnerable individuals were able to partake actively in the relief work in line with the ideal of horizontality.

The ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality as they played out in practice in the relief phase meant that storm-affected residents were welcome to join in on the efforts, the level of bureaucracy and planning was at zero, and whoever felt compelled to take on leadership roles were able to do so. To answer the research questions, this chapter has demonstrated how, through the practical implementation of the three organizing ideals, residents seem to have gained influence over both ends and means, or in other words

over the kinds of activities that the network should engage in and the manner in which these activities should be implemented. The conclusion thus is that the work carried out in the relief phase resulted in empowerment.

6. Thematic Analysis: The Organizational Formation Phase

This is just the beginning of helping communities recreate themselves in the way that they really want to. And Occupy can bring resources in and that's what we are doing. (Dwayne 2013)

As the above quote alludes to, this chapter centers on the change that took place in the OS network when the immediate relief period turned into a period of long-term recovery. In this phase, activists and volunteers shifted focus from acute problem solving to long-term political organizing. The work centered on issues of social justice, with a special focus on strengthening marginalized communities who had borne the brunt of Hurricane Sandy's havoc. The period was characterized by fundamentally political questions of how to combat social and economic injustices in the wake of a storm that had struck unevenly across NYC. This chapter provides a close thematic analysis of the organizational formation of Rockaway Wildfire, which was one instance of a citywide struggle for increased social justice after the storm. This chapter demonstrates how the ambition to translate the ideals of inclusion, horizontality and flexibility into practice were practically manifested in this phase. In summary, the chapter demonstrates how outside activists attempted to gradually transfer control from themselves to the residents by encouraging residents to take on leadership roles and by letting them take part in agenda setting and organizational formation. Indeed, a few residents gained increasing influence over ends and means and were thus empowered, as the outside activists strived to implement the ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality in practice. However, by studying the process through which this happened up close, and listening to residents, outside activists and dropouts' views and experiences of this process, it seemed this empowerment was conditioned by aligning to an agenda, one that was predetermined by the outside activists, yet this agenda was hidden behind rhetoric of open agendas and shared leadership.

Inclusion

The organizers of Rockaway Wildfire held the ideal of inclusion high and aimed for a broad inclusion of all interested residents, especially storm-affected communities, into their group. Rockaway – an area marked by tension across different communities – is a place in which community-based organizations were believed to have a hard time finding common ground. There is historically, and today, more or less explicit tensions between the more affluent, white communities on the western half of the peninsula and the poorer communities of color that inhabit the eastern side (Interview Queens Public Transit Committee Representative 25; Interview with Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning 26; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 4; Interview with Resident and Representative of Community Organization 20; Interview with Non-resident OS Activist 18). One of the resident interviewees asserted that because Rockaway is such a divided community, with economic and racial divisions, there is “a lot of rumoring, scapegoating, gossiping, negative things that happen where people don’t want to work together, and it can be very hard to build consensus” (Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 11). Many interviewees and field contacts, however, brought up the notion that the storm closed some enduring gaps between the communities. People came together simply because they needed to help each other out. They witnessed an increase in community engagement and that people in general became more civically active after the storm (Interview Queens Public Transit Committee Representative 25; Interview New York State Assemblyman Representing Rockaway District 28; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8), or as one resident described it:

These were always rather insulated communities, people kept to themselves. But the shared trauma of the storm brought people together. And also, people from all over kept pouring in afterward to help out. People from all races and religions, working beside you doing the shitty job of gutting out your house or what have you. It is pretty hard to stay closed to other people when they help you out like that. So the storm opened people up to each other. (Field Conversation Respondent 44)

Wildfire sought to present itself as an important arena for welcoming these newly activated people into a forum in which issues of inequality were addressed. It portrayed itself as an actor that could bridge community divisions (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7).

It all started with facilitators from the national Wildfire Project who approached OS activists in Rockaway and asked them to put together a group of residents for a three-month training period. The activists in turn focused on Rockaway residents who had been collaborating with them in the relief work and had shown some kind of initiative or leadership. One activist ex-

plained how they invited residents who were “badass” in some aspect, who had either worked really hard during the relief period or who had in some way showed an attitude, the ones “who didn’t just take it” (Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 4).

One resident described how she was invited to Wildfire by an Occupy organizer. She said that before the storm she had no interest in political activism. However, she developed an interest in it, partly due to the relationship she built with OS organizers in the relief phase and partly due to her own hard work in the relief phase. When the activist she had befriended asked her if she wanted to join, she became curious:

Before that point I was actually not that interested in anything politically, but it was presented in a way that was...it was friendly. It wasn’t really as aggressive as I would have imagined political activism to be. And so normally I would stay away from political entanglements, but I was intrigued because of the way it was presented. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 6)

In the initial period, the radical messaging of the group seems to have attracted residents who wanted to make sense of the storm from a political point of view. One resident interviewee talked about why she was drawn to Wildfire and mentioned the fact that it was explicitly talking about social disparities that predated the storm, as exemplified in this quote:

As much as Sandy is an issue there’s so many issues here that have been here for a long time. And now Sandy has sort of shown a light on it. But those need to be addressed too. If we talk about recovery, we need to talk about real recovery. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7)

The same interviewee also talked about the feeling of turmoil that the storm stirred up among people, which tied into the wish to continue the work toward social and political change:

There was so much upheaval that I knew that big changes are coming and I wanted to sort of be a part of those changes, you know, have some say in that. And I think a lot of people felt that way. I think a lot of people became much more civically engaged after Sandy. And also just you started to communicate with your neighbors and community members more. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7)

One of the first actions that Wildfire engaged in was a strategic disruption of a city supported project called NYC Special Initiative for Rebuilding and Resiliency (SIRR) (SIRR 2012). SIRR was a city-initiated formal process that presented a coordinated series of workshops in especially vulnerable neighborhoods in which 320 community-based organizations and businesses took part. SIRR had the stated aim to engage citizens in the transformative plans of rebuilding NYC in a resilient way. The Wildfire organizers were critical of the SIRR process, which they perceived as a cynical attempt at

appearing to be listening to community voices and thereby gaining traction for urban planning solutions that were in the making, pre-Sandy. They decided to go to the Rockaway meeting, spread out in the working groups and then disrupt the discussions by calling attention to the misguided way in which the city was handling the recovery after the storm. Residents who attended the meeting became aware that Wildfire had set up camp in Rockaway. One resident, who had gone to the meeting, described how she experienced the Wildfire action:

It was evident that there were a lot of people there who were organized, who had planned for this meeting and knew that they came with a specific message that they wanted to get across to the powers that be in the room. And I thought that was interesting. ... I didn't know that they were Wildfire really or even part of a group, but they were at all the different tables. And then some of the people who got up to speak spoke very elegantly like resident x [another resident and member of Wildfire], she got up at the microphone toward the end, and she just blew me away. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7)

Toward the end of the SIRR meeting, the interviewee was handed a flier from one of the Wildfire organizers with information about the next Wildfire meeting. She asked a friend to come with her. At her first meeting, she was attracted to the format and talked about how different it was. She thought that people were listening carefully to each other, that the facilitated exercises were creative in style, and that the discussions were an opportunity to delve deeper into the kind of changes that the community wanted to see in the wake of the storm. Another important feature of Wildfire was that they provided childcare, and since she was a mother, this enabled her to come to the meetings more easily. She later came to be one of the core coordinators of the group.

Due to the efforts at staying inclusive, Wildfire became a group in which participants and core coordinators worked across a range of social positions. Residents, both storm-affected and not storm-affected from communities of color (primarily black but also Puerto Rican and Latin American communities,) were represented, as well as a few individuals from more affluent white communities (some Jewish, some Irish). Among the outside activists a majority was white, Jewish and young, but there were also a few persons of color represented. Many of the interviewees (both residents and outside organizers) thought of the diversity of the group as a strength both internally and externally. It was seen as internally beneficial because the various social positions that the members inhabited were complementary to each other. Residents from the eastern, less affluent end of the peninsula were seen as knowledgeable based on their "understanding of the hood", from the outside organizers' perspectives (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3). To know "how people think" in these different segments of the communities of Rockaway was seen as a valuable tool (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7). And residents in

turn pointed to how the organizing experiences of the outside organizers were helpful for the group. Most of the coordinators also thought of this diversity in terms of how it was a positive factor for the external work of Rockaway Wildfire. It enabled the group to reach out to larger parts of the peninsula, as they were a group that in its own configuration spanned a lot of the social divides of the area.

The inclusionary style of Rockaway Wildfire however also created some tensions. Some of the organizers saw it as problematic to be an open forum that included everyone who wanted to join. The fact that Rockaway Wildfire was so inclusive meant that people with different political values than the organizers or with similar political values but different preferred strategies for change entered the hub. This in turn created tensions, and eventually led to shrinking members and an organization that gradually broke down. This issue will be further explored later, as it needs to be understood in conjunction with the other two ideals, which will be covered in the next sections.

Flexibility

In the recovery phase, the Rockaway Wildfire organizers aimed to continue with the flexible approach of the relief phase. The ideal of flexibility meant that outside organizers wanted agenda setting to be in the hands of the residents, and they wanted to create an organizational milieu with room for improvisation and innovation. This section describes some of the concrete manifestations of this strife toward flexibility. Firstly, a description of the fluidity of the meeting format is provided as an example of the wiggle room for innovation that organizers wanted to create. Then follows a description of how the formation of the organization's structure played out, and lastly is an outline of the process of agenda setting. Outside initiators of Rockaway Wildfire aimed for a flexible approach in terms of organizational formation and agenda setting in order to let these things be decided upon by the residents. But, as this section will demonstrate, there were indications that these attempts partly failed.

Meeting Format

Meeting formats were illustrative instances of flexibility because they were creative in style and had an overall fluidity about them. People came and went, exercises shifted into discussions, no exact timeframes were kept, and occasionally meetings would result in no tangible results whatsoever. This was a source of positive remarks from residents and organizers, but also criticism from some who were frustrated with the lack of structure and the often very long meetings.

The meetings often consisted of exercises, such as role playing, facilitated by one or several of the core coordinators (Participatory Observation Rockaway Meetings 2, 3, 4, 2013). Participants were gathered in a circle around

the floor where the exercise took place. Often food was served in the beginning of the meetings so that participants showed up and mingled for awhile over food. An ally (an affiliated Occupy activist or supporter of Rockaway Wildfire) would set up a table in the back with crayons and papers, and help with childcare for those meeting participants who needed it. A few children would gather around the table, but more often they would just run around the meeting room playing. At some point a core coordinator would ask everyone to take a seat in the circle, and a facilitator would present the ground rules. The coordinator would acknowledge any potential differences in background, conversational style and opinions across participants, and ask everyone to be mindful of this and show respect to each other. Occupy activists from the OWS network had developed a social signal system that the coordinator would present. Whenever a participant heard a statement that they agreed with they would discretely tap their fingers together to show support. And whenever a participant felt that a statement was in some way offensive they would say “ouch” to signal this. One resident describes the meeting format and how she experienced as such:

I like the circle because a lot of times when we go to meetings there are tables. But I like the circle because it is more conducive to contribution, and ideas and generating conversations. I like the role playing, you know, when you go in pairs and then you go up and you role play, because you get to know everybody individually. And even though I've only been a few times, I feel like I'm making friends. And before, I'd just go to my apartment. But since Sandy I've made new friends. So you know, I'd see activist x and she goes, “Ooh, let me give you a hug”. You know. So the level of acceptance and the welcoming is really nice. And I feel more confident in speaking up. Even day one I felt confident. I don't know, I can't tell you why but from day one I felt confident in speaking up and asking questions and finding out more and more. (Interview Resident and Member 15)

The meetings sometimes lacked tangible results. Not every meeting had a clear purpose, and three interviewees talked about how they would leave meetings without a sense of what they actually had resulted in (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 5; Interview Non-Resident and Core Coordinator 4). But, as the below quote alludes to, this was not always seen as a bad thing; it was also interpreted as a form of community building:

It felt like a really safe space to build community there. And a lot of talks about what our individual politics are, what strategies the individuals in the room preferred, do people want to engage with the elected officials, do people just want to be outside of that ... In the beginning it just felt like there was a lot of discussions ... we didn't leave every meeting with like a plan, like, okay, we had this meeting and now we're going to do this. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7)

The interviews expressed different opinions about the fact that the meetings could be insubstantial in terms of end results. One person noted that the constant role playing, exercising, and open-ended discussions around political issues strengthened the group and resulted in increased feelings of trust and mutual recognition among participants:

The participants are also able to identify the other people that are dealing with the same issues that they're dealing with. So it creates group empowerment. It lets them know that look, we feel the same way too and you're not alone. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 5)

Some interviewees, both residents and outside organizers, complained that the meetings were too long, especially for residents who were also dealing with getting back on track with their personal lives after the storm (Interview Resident and Member 1; Interview Resident and Member 17; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 4; Interview Resident and Member 9). One resident talked about how the format of the meetings was silly or unstructured in a way that she thought created frustration among seriously committed residents (Interview Resident and Member 9). Another resident expressed concerns that the educational methods were non-transparent and that residents had no control over how they were implemented (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8). Three of the residents perceived of the outside organizers as being inexperienced in terms of community organizing (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 9; Interview Resident and Member 10), and depicted them as "straight out of college" persons who wanted to gain real-life experience by organizing the communities of Rockaway:

Something that I can say about WF is that they are very amateur. It's the first thing that they're actually doing, things that they've read in books, they went to a seminar last week and they're just acting on these things. (Interview Resident and Member 10)

Organizational Formation

This section will look at the flexibility that organizers strived for in establishing what kind of organization Rockaway Wildfire should be. Occasionally the ideal of flexibility here resulted in confusion among residents around Rockaway Wildfire's organizational status.

The process of forming a stable group with a steady presence in Rockaway was an organic and fluid process. Initially Wildfire started out as a three-month training project that emerged out of the larger OS network. This was intended to be temporary, and the initiators were supposed to pull out after the training period ended. The intended exit from the organizers, however, turned out to be less straightforward than imagined. Some of the activists built relationships with community members and felt that they wanted to stay on for more long-term work. Toward the end of the three-month period,

a few of the project initiators left while others stayed on to form a long-term group that included both residents and outside organizers. The group stuck with the name Wildfire, but started to call themselves Rockaway Wildfire instead to distinguish themselves from the national Wildfire Project.

The confusion around the identity of the group continued even after this point. There were various perspectives on what kind of long-term group Rockaway Wildfire ought to be, across the resident/activist divide and among the outside activists. The malleable organizational formation created some confusion among residents (Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 1; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 2; Interview Resident and Member 10). Four residents expressed mistrust toward the organizational status of Rockaway Wildfire. They articulated a fear that it was merely one of many non-profit organizations that entered the area and would capitalize on the misfortunes of the community, and leave without having contributed to social change. This fear tied into a broader sentiment of distrust toward outsiders, among both activists and residents, inside and outside of Rockaway Wildfire in the wake of Hurricane Sandy (Interview Resident and Member 14; Interview Non-resident OS Activist 12; Interview Resident and Member 9; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3). One of the residents said that he felt that the activists had led community members to believe that they were there to do temporary training only, whereas in reality they wanted to establish themselves in the area as a long-term group. The interviewee thought this was misleading (Interview Resident and Member 10). Three of the organizers expressed that the confusion around organizational status could explain resident's suspicion toward Rockaway Wildfire, as well as the large number of dropouts in the first year of the group's existence (Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 1; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 2).

A related issue wherein tensions emerged was the financial status of Rockaway Wildfire, which also underwent a transition. A few of the residents interviewed conveyed suspicion of how the outside organizers of Rockaway Wildfire handled financial resources (Interview Non-resident OS Activist 27; Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 11; Field Conversations Resident and Member 9; Field Conversations Resident and Member 14). During the relief phase OS organizers had been doing unpaid volunteer work but OS had raised a large amount of money during the relief phase (Homeland Security Studies 2013 p 36). When the immediate needs after the storm had been met, the remaining money was supposed to sustain a few of the long-term hubs that were set up by stipends to the coordinators in these hubs. This allocation of funds was decided through a collective decision-making process in the so-called OS Spokes Council in which representatives from all of the OS long-term recovery groups from across NYC and New Jersey met regularly (OS Spokes Council 2014; Interview Resident and Member 20; Interview Non-resident OS Activist 18).

The OS Spokes Council consisted of 13 project hubs, out of which 5 were located in Rockaway: Rockaway Wildfire, The Cross Rockaway Incubation Team (CRIT), Restore the Rock, YANA, and Respond and Rebuild (Interview Non-resident OS Activist 1). Rockaway Wildfire managed to secure monthly stipends for their work, with an external fiscal sponsor who oversaw the transactions. However, this change in funding situation was not clearly communicated to member residents. A local news article also stirred up controversy around the issue of resources, implying that activists had enriched themselves rather than passing fundraised money onto the affected communities (West 2013). In line with this sentiment, some interviewees (residents and activists from other OS hubs) were critical because in their view, the outsider organizers of Rockaway Wildfire had raised money for the benefits of the communities, yet used most of it to stipend themselves rather than letting the money go to community residents (Interview Non-resident OS Activist 27; Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 11; Interview Resident and Member 9; Interview Resident and Member 14). Others were concerned that they did not know enough about where the money was coming from, who was in charge of it and how it was allocated (Interview Resident and Member 17; Interview Resident and Member 10; Interview Non-resident OS Activist 12). One resident talked about how being a volunteer connotes unpaid work and how it was unclear whether the organizers of Rockaway Wildfire were volunteers or funded (Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 11).

The outside organizers were aware that much of the criticism was for issues of resources. They understood that some of the critical residents saw them as outsiders who were organizing in Rockaway for the money's sake. One of the organizers, however, stated that this criticism was not legitimate because the stipends the organizers received were very small, and they were entitled to these stipends because they had worked so hard as volunteers in the relief phase (Interview Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3).

One critical resident thought it was unfair to make people believe that they could change the circumstances of their lives without offering them any resources to do so, as illustrated below:

So what you have are people of color who have been excited about the meetings at Wildfire to think about certain ideas that they may have not thought about or that they may have not felt support around. Like they may have been thinking about these things already but they didn't have like a bunch of people egging them onto think about it, and applauding them to think about it, and telling them that these are good things and they can happen, giving people the impression that these things can happen. But there's something wrong with giving people the impression that they have the actual political power to make these changes in their own lives, when they don't. They don't have the opportunities, they don't have the funding, they don't have the support. And then getting funding in their name to then continue to incite them ... I mean essentially, these people are get-

ting paid now, whether they admit it or not, they're being paid through OS as coordinators to stir up people in Rockaway. And people in Rockaway are getting excited to do things, but they're not getting the money, they're not being funded. (Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 11)

The Process of Agenda Setting

The above section gave an overview over the formation process in which Rockaway Wildfire came into being, and the resulting confusion around issues of organizational and financial status that came about as organizers aimed for a flexible approach. Parallel to this formation process was one of agenda setting. This section offers a description of this process through which Rockaway Wildfire decided on the ends, or in other words which goals the organization ought to focus their efforts on. It shows how the agenda was gradually crystalized toward one issue, namely the CBA work. In summary, the section demonstrates that the initiators aimed for a flexible agenda-setting process, wherein residents would take active part in coming up with ideas. From the outset it did seem as if they succeeded. When digging a little deeper, however, there were indications from observations and interviews that an underhand agenda existed among a few of the outside activists, who then pushed this through, all the while using a rhetoric of openness of letting residents decide.

During the first three months of the hub's history, the group devoted time to forming and constructing ideas around the kind of change residents wanted to see in their community after the storm. A few smaller working groups with more concrete focus gradually grew out of these initial discussions. There was one working group that focused on how to build environmentally sustainable community projects such as community gardens, one that planned protests against the NYPD stop and frisk tactics, one that focused on creating a worker's cooperative, and one land use group. Gradually the land use working group was the one that received the most attention, and after approximately six months this group had become the main activity in the hub. Its members were investigating city plans for vacant land in Rockaway, making inquiries with land attorneys and looking into regulations around possibilities for community input in development plans. Bit by bit the other working groups were phased out or became part of other organizational spheres outside of Rockaway Wildfire, and resources from these extinct working groups were directed toward the land use group, as described by one of the core coordinators:

The other groups sort of didn't have the same amount of support. They didn't take as much action or trying to accomplish something tangible. And so we dropped the working groups and we decided since we were such a small group, instead of dividing ourselves and focus on all of these different things, we would just take the strongest campaign of the people that were there most often, and we would support that campaign instead. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 6)

After a while one of the residents took more and more responsibility in the land use working group. One of the OS activists explained how the resident's devotion to the work around land use was a motivation for allocating all of the hub's resources to this group. This resident's commitment was a symbol of community-led campaign planning, according to this activist. And so once the outside organizers saw that there was a resident with the necessary commitment, they fully supported her and encouraged her to take the lead. The resident suggested that Rockaway Wildfire form a CBA campaign, which eventually happened. The resident explained that the experience changed her views on her own capacities, both in terms of better organizing skills but also in terms of substantial knowledge about urban planning issues (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7). Here, it seems that outside organizers' ambition to put flexibility into practice resulted in influence, at least for this particular resident, who became an active part in shaping the ends — the overall agenda of the organization. But there were indications that this is a superficial understanding of what actually took place. Some dissidents were critical of the outsiders' rhetoric around this purportedly flexible agenda setting. They believed that in reality the outsiders came with an agenda that they pushed through (Interview Resident and Member 17; Interview Resident and Member 9; Interview Resident and Member 14; Interview Resident and Member 16). One resident stated the following with regard to this issue:

If you didn't see things in the same way as they did that was a problem. And people from Rockaway don't see things the same way as some of them and they are pushing certain issues. They have their agenda that is different from what the residents here want to see. (Interview Resident and Member 16)

A remark made by one of the outside activists is illustrative with regard to this point:

I think all of us had a sense that land use should really be the thing. But we were like, "So what do you want to work on?" But I knew it was going to happen. I was thinking, "We'll just say it's working groups and land use will eventually become the thing, the land use will come out of it". (Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 1)

Horizontality

This section describes how the outside activists strived to translate the ideal of horizontality into practice, meaning that they wanted anyone who felt compelled to take on leadership roles to do so, and they strived to compensate for inequality between participants through meeting techniques. Firstly, a description is provided of the compensatory techniques, followed by a description of the shared leadership model.

Compensating For Preexisting Social Hierarchies

The work toward an ideal of horizontality was manifested in a number of organizing techniques that were meant to compensate for social hierarchies between participants in terms of race or gender. Originally the Wildfire Project had demographic restrictions in place with regard to who could become a trainer. The aim was to decrease the number of white male trainers in favor of women of color, who were otherwise believed to be underrepresented as facilitators. One of the interviewees was a woman of color (a non-resident of Rockaway) who was asked to become a trainer due to the demographic restrictions that Rockaway Wildfire initially had in place. She explained her perspective on this:

The other reason for them to bring me onboard was that they were a group of mostly white folks who came together to organize black and Latino people in a community that they didn't know. And it's a little complicated because although it felt a little tokenizing, I also realized that there's value in me coming in doing this process. I'm a person of color with a working class background. You know, that happens a lot in organizing, that white organizers bring in people of color like that. And it can be complicated, but at the same time it's needed. But it's not an easy question. (Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 13)

Another example was that outside organizers made sure that childcare was provided during meetings, which was to increase representation from parents, particularly mothers, who might otherwise not be able to participate. At the meetings outside organizers further made use of so-called progressive stacks, meaning that individuals from non-privileged groups were granted extra speaking time in rounds. The group also engaged in more ongoing strategies to compensate for the outside world's social hierarchies. They would, for example, police each other (meaning that they called each other out when they thought that someone from a privileged group was not checking their privileges) or they would sensitize themselves to how they interacted with others. This is exemplified by the below description from one of the white male outside organizers describing how he tried to think about his own privilege when co-facilitating with a female person of color:

I can be, like, ok, now I know, I'm going to think about my body language a little bit more, and I'm going to think about the fact that she's got a good bit more experience so I'm going to just play off her a bunch. I get to see, think about who's talking. (Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3)

One resident described a positive view with regard to these compensatory meeting techniques:

I really enjoyed being in a place where it is acknowledged that everyone there has something valuable to offer, and no one is considered less than the other person because they don't have as much schooling or because they don't make as much money. Everybody's background and everyone's experience is useful in

some way or another. And in other environments I just don't see that as much. And I feel like I'm in this place where I actually have influence with people. If I say something there's value in what I say. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 6)

Residents' Views on Compensatory Techniques

The push for the ideal of horizontality meant that activists tried to make sure that residents – especially those who represented oppressed communities – were encouraged to speak up. People of color and/or women were encouraged to do so, and white people and/or men either self-regulated or were explicitly asked to step back by the outside organizers. A few residents were uncomfortable with these techniques (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 6; Resident and Core Coordinator 8; Non-Resident and Core Coordinator 4). One interviewee, a white man and Rockaway resident, expressed that the techniques triggered a feeling of distance between residents and organizers:

It's usually a position of class and race shame, when they want other people to be guilty in a higher position, but they don't realize that that's not gonna create equality, that's gonna pit people against each other, because people are gonna see other people in the room like higher up on the scale than them. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8).

He pointed to how the compensatory techniques, well-intentioned as they were, hindered equality between members of the group. He was critical of how they pinned members of the group into social categories instead of seeing them as individuals. He thought that the compensatory techniques implied that residents were seen as less resilient and strong than they in fact were. The same interviewee expressed stark feelings of having been treated unjustly due to the methods in place. He felt that it had affected his maneuverability in the group, as he had been asked repeatedly in progressive stacks to step back. He was upset with the fact that the male persons of color were not asked to step back to the same extent. His view was that the compensatory methods did nothing more than breed “the kind of classism and racism and inter-hatred that was the disaster before the disaster occurred and it only exaggerates the thing, it makes it worse” (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8).

One of the residents, a black woman, explained her views on the issue of horizontal techniques to compensate for inequalities:

I know a couple of people in our team that are very aware of economic difference and racial difference, and they're very conscious about inadvertent sexism, they're really aware of it. Way more aware than I have ever planned or intended to be. And for me it's never been much of a concern. I mean I recognize that it is there, that there are definitely educational differences. And there're definitely income differences too, but at the end of the day I really just feel that if we're working toward one goal I'm willing to be forgiving of differences and not really

pay attention to them if they're not getting in the way. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 6)

One of the outside activists expressed his view on the compensatory techniques. In the following excerpt, he refers to a situation in which he and the other outside organizers were getting pushback from residents on their use of these techniques:

They actually called us back. They were like, "What do you mean making this distinction? You can't be different from us. You have to be like us". The residents saw how hard some of us were working, they saw us work in the community all the time, so they trusted us. They were like, "You all are doing crazy work for free, you guys are amazing". A lot of times they had a lot of love. And they were like, "You have to be part of us, you can't just distance yourself". (Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 4)

Social Hierarchies Beyond Race and Gender

The focus of the horizontal techniques was on gender and race as the primary identity distinctions. Social position in terms of these distinctions was thus something that was supposed to be compensated for with help of the techniques. However, another dividing line resurfaced in interviews: whether or not a person was affected by the storm. The distinction was not included in the compensatory techniques that focused on race and gender, although some of the residents claimed that this had strong bearing on the issue of influence within the group. For example, some interviewees, both residents and outside organizers, complained that the meetings were too long, especially for residents who were dealing with getting back on track with their personal lives after the storm (Interview Resident and Member 16; Interview Resident and Member 17; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 4; Interview Resident and Member 9). One resident expressed the view that the privilege of having a nice warm home to return to was not taken into account in the compensatory techniques:

I don't think they could understand what it is to be able to go home to a nice place, and then they have this here and it's this work that they do. They just don't get that I have not, for one minute, left the peninsula. Let's put it this way. If I'm going anywhere it's because I'm working on finding relief to the disaster. I haven't taken a vacation from the situation, not once. ... I have not left the situation. I've had no break. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8)

Summing up the section on compensatory techniques, although the group originally employed a few organizational techniques that were meant to compensate for social hierarchies, these were gradually challenged by residents. As time passed, the meeting techniques changed and the compensatory techniques were gradually phased out.

Horizontality and the Shared Leadership Model

In addition to the compensatory techniques, horizontality as an ideal was also manifested in the push for a shared leadership model in which residents were gradually granted leadership positions in the decision-making bodies of the organization. The three main bodies were the core coordinators group, the Occupy Sandy Spokes Council in which Rockaway Wildfire was one of many different organizations, and the land use working group that took the lead in the subsequent CBA campaign. In the following two sections the shared leadership of Rockaway Wildfire will be described. The first part provides an overview over whether and how outside organizers gradually let residents take leadership roles in the different subgroups that became important decision-making sites. The second part explores how residents and activists understood the shared leadership model and the process of gradually granting leadership roles to residents.

The Core Coordinators Group

After approximately six months of organizational formation Rockaway Wildfire stabilized into a structure in which a core group of approximately 10 coordinators were sustained by stipends from the fundraised OS money, and everyone else were seen as members. The core group of coordinators was the main decision-making body of the hub. Out of the members there were a few who were considered by the coordinators as “emerging leaders”, or as potential individuals that could be added to the core as long as they showed commitment to the group over a period of some time. Residents were thus gradually added to this group until it consisted of half residents and half OS activists. It seems that out of the residents who were added to the core group of facilitators, everyone except one person had a positive experience of being encouraged and strengthened. In the interviews, they talked about how their experiences of organizing within Rockaway Wildfire taught them new skills and strengthened them to take on leadership roles (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 5; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 6; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7). For example, one resident who became a core coordinator explained how she was inspired to take political action in a new way:

I feel the responsibility to be the change that I want to see in the world. I feel the responsibility to say that if I don't like how things are working, I'm going to change it. And I feel like, I want to do it. Let me change it, let me do it. Let me prove that it can be done! And before, I wasn't really that committed to saying that if I don't like it then let's change it. Before I would say if I don't like it then that's just the way it is. But now I feel like no! I want to change it. Whatever it is. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 6)

Yet, the process by which residents were added merits further attention. The decision to add new people lay mainly in the hands of the OS outsiders, not

the residents. It was the activists who originally invited people in, and who continuously looked for certain qualities in residents who they deemed suitable to be added to the core. Formally, however, the final decision to bring someone onboard was a collective one made by the core coordinators group. Some of the interviewees, mainly the dropout residents, believed that the outsiders were selective in terms of who they encouraged as leaders and were being careful not to add “troublemakers” to the core group (Interview Resident and Member 9; Interview Resident and Member 16; Interview Resident and Member 17; Interview Resident and Member 10). One resident who wanted to be added to the core group described her experiences of having to push her way in. She felt that she ought to be part of the core group since “it is my community, my neighborhood” but was not invited in. She described the process as frustrating, feeling as if she was treated differently than other residents:

The process sometimes felt like in school, where the teachers had their favorite pets among the students and some of the students were just seen as troublemakers – I felt like that’s how they saw me, as a troublemaker. (Interview Resident and Member 9)

The interviewee had challenged the organizers around the organizational identity of Rockaway Wildfire. She believed that she was kept away from the core because she was too critical. She later chose to leave Rockaway Wildfire entirely. Other residents who had been among the more vocal critics expressed that once they had voiced their concerns they were being either ignored or subtly silenced by the outside organizers (Interview Resident and Member 9; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8; Interview Resident and Member 14). One of the dropout residents said that since all of the outside organizers knew each other already, she avoided voicing her criticism even in private one-on-one conversations because she was afraid that they would talk about her behind her back and then she would be “iced out” for being critical (Interview Resident and Member 14). Based on this it seems that residents who were non-obstructive, those who did not challenge the OS activists’ views and perspectives on what kind of organization Rockaway Wildfire ought to be, were the ones accepted into the core group of coordinators (Interview Resident and Member 14; Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 11; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7), whereas the residents who challenged these views were subtly and gradually left outside of the decision-making bodies, and after a while most of them chose to leave the group altogether.

The Occupy Sandy Spokes Council

Another decision-making body was the Occupy Sandy Spokes Council, which was comprised of representatives from the various hubs across NYC

who got together on a regular basis and decided on allocation of funds. Although the decisions in the Spokes Council did not steer the work of Rockaway Wildfire, it was a forum in which representatives negotiated over funding with representatives from other projects. To the extent that the other representatives found the goals of Rockaway Wildfire worthwhile, money would be allocated to the hub. The Spokes Council was thus an important place in which the activities and overall direction of Rockaway Wildfire were being framed. One resident was indeed functioning as a Rockaway Wildfire representative at times but most often it was OS activists who attended as the Rockaway Wildfire representative. One of the drop-out residents expressed frustration with the way Rockaway Wildfire was represented in the Occupy Spokes Council. She happened to end up in one of the Spokes Council meetings by chance since she was involved in another group that was part of the decision-making body, and at one point she was sent to one of its meetings as a substitute representative. At the meeting she discovered that some strategically important decisions with regard to Rockaway Wildfire were made there. Before this she had no knowledge that the Spokes Council existed. She described her surprise when she realized that key decisions about Rockaway Wildfire were made by the Spokes Council without this being communicated to the residents of the group (Interview Resident and Member 9).

Some of the residents were critical of the issue of shared leadership. Firstly, due to the shared leadership structure, some felt that it was difficult to discern who was in charge, which in turn compromised accountability. “Who is responsible, if no one is in charge?” was a critique directed toward Rockaway Wildfire (Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 1, 2013). Others instead were saying that the shared leadership model was superficial only. They felt that there were in fact individual leaders in place (Interview Resident and Member 16; Interview Resident and Member 10; Interview Resident and Member 17). Some residents thought that the outside organizers were making decisions behind the residents’ backs, in settings that were closed to them, while they were simultaneously presenting the emancipatory project as one of shared leadership and non-hierarchy in which decisions were made collectively (Interview Resident and Member 17; Interview Resident and Member 9). This suspicion is illustrated in the following quote from one resident:

[Outside organizers] keep going with this backdoor consensus, where all these people all know each other and they communicate with each other because they’ve been under duress in a park or they are able to fit into that because they have a common generally politically correct attitude. That’s what many of us can’t put our finger on. They’re all familiar with each other and they check in with one another and then when they decide to check in with some of us, they create a backdoor consensus. So when I want to put something on the agenda, I’ll say, “I’m putting this on the agenda today”, they all go and they talk to one another and then they already have a formulated opinion, outside of my discus-

sion with them in the general meeting. (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8)

Based on interviews with outside organizers, it seems the core coordinators initially had separate meetings outside of Rockaway, but stopped having them some time into the organizational formation period (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 4).

The organizers understood that part of the criticism toward them as outside organizers had to do with the shared leadership model. One of the OS activists saw the critique as an indicator of a general resistance to horizontal organizational structures. The interviewee believed that people in general are unfamiliar with shared leadership and are easily confused by it. The interviewee, however, also pointed out that the resident's belief that there indeed was a leader in place had a ring of truth to it:

There's a hierarchy, you can't avoid it. So people ... they're almost right and wrong at the same time, when they come in and they're saying, "We don't really believe you, because we think that there's a secret leader, you're just lying". And also there's ... actually we see activist 1 and she's a fucking leader and we all know it. (Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3)

Based on both interviews and observations it seems that activist 1 was a de facto leader in this supposedly non-hierarchical hub. She was constantly referred to by other core coordinators as the one who knew the organization best and who had control over long-term planning. She was described as the person who planned most of the meetings and as the person who had the most organizing experience in the group. She was also the one who facilitated most of the observed meeting exercises (Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meetings 1, 2, 3, 4, 2013). Moreover, she is the person that was quoted in the section about agenda setting, explaining that land issues was the preferred agenda for the group, although she and the other outside activists made it seem like it was up to the residents. She was also the gatekeeper (as described in Chapter 3) who granted access to the group for interviews and participatory observations.

The Feeling of Being Patronized

Some of the dissidents expressed a feeling of being patronized by outside organizers' attempts at educating them and encouraging them to become leaders. Firstly, as touched on above, the fact that the organizers had their eyes on certain residents and not others with regard to encouraging emerging leaders felt unfair to some of the residents who had the ambition to become part of the core group of coordinators (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8; Interview Resident and Member 9). Yet, also the ones who were singled out as emerging leaders experienced feelings of being patronized:

One of the organizers encouraged me to be the leader of the group. He had been watching me, measuring me. He might as well have been wearing a lab coat. We were in an organizing petri dish. (Interview Resident and Member 17)

One of the dissidents thought that this had to do with the organizers' sense of entitlement:

They're claiming to be bottom-up but they're really top-down in reality. I think it just comes with a sense of entitlement that some of the organizers have; they just think they know best. (Interview Non-resident OS Activist 12)

Further, some also felt that it was patronizing to assume that the residents needed political education and empowerment (Interview Resident and Member 17; Interview Resident and Member 9; Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8), as illustrated below:

These mostly white kids put on a documentary about the Black Panthers in an effort to give us a "political education". This was done, mind you, in the middle of a predominantly black neighborhood. ... I think that the Occupy organizers erred in this respect, assuming people needed their "training". It was really condescending. I did not feel strengthened or empowered, in hindsight. I think we were used. (Interview Resident and Member 17)

Other dissidents were less harsh in their critique. They figured that the outside organizers had good intentions, although they failed to make reality of their intentions. The following quote from one of the residents is illustrative of this:

I think that these folks come in with good intentions, but they have this idea of, I've just come out of college and I just finished reading this book, and I'm gonna implement these things, and I'm gonna you know, empower these people! And then they come and the folks are like, "We're feeling pretty empowered already, you know. You have resources, you have a network. How can we use that to build ourselves? It's really not that we're feeling so weak, it's more like we know exactly what we want to do, we know exactly what the issues are in our community, we've been living here for the past , folks in this community,... 40 years, 20 years". For me eight years. We're pretty clear. We know. (Interview Resident and Member 9)

Conflicts and Organizational Restructuring

The tensions around leadership, organizational identity and finances eventually amounted to explicit conflicts within Rockaway Wildfire and resulted in a reorganization of the structure of the hub, as well as large a number of dropouts and a shrinking organization. This last section gives an overview of how this process played out.

Explicit conflicts ensued between a few of the residents and some of the outside organizers during an open meeting (Participatory Observation Rock-

away Wildfire Meeting 1, 2013). One meeting agenda item was titled ‘How do we structure ourselves to become transformational organizers?’, and was facilitated by one of the OS activists. Interrupting her introduction one of the residents, a black man, asked:

When you say we, who do you mean? Who are we?

These questions kept reappearing during the rest of her presentation. She was interrupted again and again by residents with questions such as “Who are we?”, “Who decides here?”, “Who is the leader?”, “Who signs off on the checks?” When the residents asked who is in charge she answered:

There is no organization here. This is a non-hierarchical space, so there are not strict answers to that. Now you have to step down and let the meeting happen.

During the rest of the four-hour meeting, the discussion around organizational identity, financing and leadership kept repeating itself with more and more aggressive tones from both sides. The residents insisted on knowing the answers to their questions before anything else was discussed. Toward the end of the meeting one male resident stood up and harshly exclaimed:

Don’t invite people in if you don’t want to hear them out! Verbally and socially, we’re not even in the same time zone as you! So don’t speak about we when you mean me!

One of the confronting residents was interviewed later and explained why she had obstructed the meeting:

I sort of went outside the agenda for the meeting and started to ask questions like What do you want to do here, really? What kind of group or organization do you want to be? A non-profit or an organization or what? What is it that you want? And the response I got was that they said we haven’t decided yet because we want to figure out what the needs of the community are first and we’re not there yet. And I thought that was just ridiculous. I mean, everyone can figure out what the needs of our community are. The storm flashed it all out. (Interview Resident and Member 9)

Four of the organizers claimed that Rockaway Wildfire was a threat to local powers, which in turn would explain the resistance from the obstructing residents. According to this view, the dissidents belonged to segments of the community that exerted a certain amount of power that they did not want to see challenged by incoming outsiders who aimed to ‘empower the powerless’. According to this view, the dissidents were people who had not been previously active within the hub, but that showed up to one or two meetings just to create a ruckus and sabotage the meetings. Thus, according to these outside organizers, the criticism that came from these dissidents was not

genuine, but rather an attempt to undermine the organization (Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 1; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 2; Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3). However, according to one of the core coordinators, notably a resident herself, some of the particular questions that came up were legitimate and should be taken seriously, but the way in which they were asked and the timing in terms of voicing them were inappropriate and was merely attempts at sabotage (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7).

The conflicts and tensions that started to brew in the hub, revealed most clearly at the conflictual meeting described above, triggered a fundamental organizational change. Before the conflict meeting, the design of Rockaway Wildfire was pretty simple; there were open community meetings, to which everyone who was interested was invited and in which they discussed all matters. Shortly after this tense meeting the core group of organizers (by this time consisting of both residents and outsiders) had a spontaneous get together to discuss what had taken place. They were upset and needed a safe place to ventilate. During this meeting they decided to make a few changes in their organizational structure to prevent the same kind of conflicts from happening in the future. From now on they were going to have open meetings every other week and closed coordinators meetings on the off week, at a different location. They started to make distinctions between internal issues that only the coordinators ought to discuss and issues that were suitable for open discussions among everyone who was interested. Two of the interviewees expressed doubts towards this closing of the organizational structure, fluctuating between the importance of being transparent on the one hand and the need to be able to talk openly among “like-minded” people (the coordinators) on the other hand:

Because we knew we had to keep things transparent, and include people and not ice people out if they wanted to be part of it. But we also knew that we couldn't just let some rogue person come in and just destroy everything we had been working on (Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7).

Some of the dissidents continued to attend meetings and voice their concerns publically. Others engaged in more subtle forms of resistance, such as sabotaging meetings or spreading rumors about the organization. Most of the residents who made use of these strategies for voicing their resistance however later chose to leave the organization altogether. Rockaway Wildfire, who initially had a steady 50-60 people attending the open meetings, now shrank substantially in numbers. A few of the drop-outs left without ever voicing their concerns to the organizers of Rockaway Wildfire. Some of them engaged in back-talk afterwards, bashing Rockaway Wildfire in conversations with other residents and community activists. Some residents felt they no longer wanted to be associated with the group. Rockaway Wildfire thus gained somewhat of a bad reputation around Rockaway, according to

these interviewees, who explained that it was no longer helpful for community organizers to be seen as part of the organization (Field Conversations Resident and Member 14; Interview Resident and Member 9). Another resident stated that members of Rockaway Wildfire had made themselves “irrelevant as an actor” in Rockaway, because organizers did not handle criticism in a constructive way (Interview Resident and Member 10). There were a number of interviewees who saw themselves as politically aligned with Rockaway Wildfire yet chose not to engage with the group due to their perceptions of Rockaway Wildfire as a non-transparent organization in which outside organizers did not keep their feelings of entitlement in check (Interview Non-resident OS Activist 18; Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 11; Interview Non-resident OS Activist 27; Interview Non-resident OS Activist 12). A small number of dissidents however chose to stay on in Rockaway Wildfire, either as coordinators or members. One of the reasons stated for staying was the possibility of receiving a stipend, which came with the role of core coordinator. Another critical member expressed a certain wish to stay on to keep guard:

The fact that they are not that fluent with the political local community level, you could just tell that it may do a greater disservice than service to the community. So I’m just there, standing guard to the community (Interview Resident and Member 10).

Summary of Chapter

This chapter explored whether and the extent to which the ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality were translated into practice in the organizational formation phase, and looked at the empirical manifestations of these ideals. It also explored the extent to which the process of translating these ideals into practice lent residents influence over ends and means. With regard to the ideal of inclusion, the chapter demonstrated that openness to newcomers, in conjunction with the creative meeting format and the welcoming attitude that the OS initiators exhibited, ensured that inclusion was implemented in practice rather than being a mere ideal only. This resulted in a group with a broad representation of different people, which was perceived as an asset since it made the group’s work relevant to several communities and helped attract new members from across the social divides of the Rockaway peninsula.

The ideal of flexibility was manifested in the organic process of organizational formation that took place within Rockaway Wildfire. Both outside organizers and dissidents agreed that the initial confusion around organizational identity – as a result of the flexible organizational formation – was detrimental to the hub’s ability to attract new members and keep old ones. Another instance of the push for the ideal of flexibility was outside activists’

goal to let residents be active partners in agenda setting, in other words in shaping the ends of the organization. This was based on the ideological belief that residents were the ones who knew their particular problems best. But it seems like the ideal of flexibility was only partly translated into practice. There were indications that the agenda was less open-ended than what the outside activists let on, although they made it seem like the issue of what to focus on was open for dialogue.

The ideal of horizontality implied that those residents who wanted to become leaders ought to have the opportunity to do so. Residents who were added to the core coordinators group expressed gratitude with having found a forum that was welcoming, friendly and open-minded, and in which they found a way to form and express political ideas, hone their organizing skills, and become local leaders in their community. But at the same time there were indications that the core decision-making bodies of this emancipatory project were not open to residents who did not share the initiators' perspectives on ends and means. By closely studying the process by which residents came to be leaders, it seems that residents' influence over the ends was conditioned on alignment with ideas of the outside organizers. The initiators had control over which residents were granted access to decision-making bodies of the organization and gradually brought along residents who shared their views. The residents who pushed their own agendas or in other ways challenged the outsiders were not welcome to form part of the core decision-making bodies, and were thus excluded from influencing ends and means. Residents further expressed that they occasionally felt patronized by the outside organizers attempts at empowering them, educating them politically and encouraging them to become leaders, stating that they did not need that kind of training because they had an analysis in place already. What they needed were the resources and networks that the outsiders could provide them with.

Furthermore, the push for shared leadership, in order to translate the ideal of horizontality into practice, was compromised. It seemed that the organization had actual leaders in place among the outside activists, who in turn had certain ideas around ends and means that were pushed through. This resulted in pushback from residents, who claimed that there were in fact leaders in place. This claim was also partially sustained by outside organizers. A hierarchy between participants thus simmered under the surface but was obscured behind rhetoric around shared leadership. What we find here is the existence of individuals who exercised leadership, but did so in an organization that did not explicitly admit individual leadership. This is related to the ideal of inclusion, and outsider organizers' attempt to create an emancipatory project that was open for anyone interested. In this inclusionary setting where everyone who showed an interest was welcome, core coordinators lacked control over who entered. This meant that individuals entered who sometimes had conflicting views and perspectives around organizing, which resulted in tensions. But since the project was formally open to everyone the

only available strategy for the organizers was to subtly, with the words of the interviewees, “ice out” individuals who had different views. The only available recruitment strategy to decision-making positions was a subtle one in which outside initiators encouraged preferred emerging leaders among the residents, whereas the unwanted ones – those with other ideas and agendas – were gradually left out.

A few residents directed harsh criticism toward what they saw as flawed inner dynamics within Rockaway Wildfire. A last point of contention was related to the outside activists’ use of compensatory techniques, which was met with some resistance from residents. Firstly, it seems the use of these techniques triggered feelings of distance between residents and organizers, and led to unwarranted homogenization of individuals in the group. Secondly, the particular inequalities that were explicit in these compensatory techniques were not the only ones at play. Attention was predominantly given to race and gender differentiations. But the ones affected by the storm lacked the capacity to make their voices heard in the same effective ways as people not affected by the storm, something that the compensatory horizontality of Rockaway Wildfire missed.

Critical residents made use of different strategies to resist, either they stayed on and kept their criticisms to themselves because they needed the stipends or they wanted to stand guard for their community. Or they left without ever voicing their concerns. Another strategy was to intentionally sabotage open meetings in order to claim answers to questions about financial and organizational status of the hub, while another was to spread rumors about Rockaway Wildfire in the wider community. However, despite the decreasing numbers of Rockaway Wildfire members, the CBA campaign and the coalition building continued. This will be described in the next chapter.

7. Thematic Analysis: The External Collaboration and Advocacy Phase

I stopped going to the meetings with the coalition. And I had been really devoted, it was such an important thing, you know, I took time to go there at seven at night. But I stopped going, it was just too much fighting all the time. (Coalition Member 20)

In this section the gaze shifts from the internal dynamics of Rockaway Wildfire to the external processes that the organization was engaged in. The chapter has two main parts. The first section explores the collaborative work involved in building a coalition. Descriptions are provided on how Rockaway Wildfire invited other grassroots organizations to the coalition and how collaboration across member organizations played out. Rockaway Wildfire served as initiator and coordinator of the coalition work. The other actors within the coalition were grassroots organizations based in the area. Some of these were formally part of the coalition, some were still figuring out whether they should become members, and others had been in contact with the coalition but had chosen to stay out of the work. An expert organization that the activists had worked with, as well as a group of urban planners at Hunter College who had been involved as experts to the CBA process, were also part of the coalition. The three organizing ideals function to structure this first part of the chapter since Rockaway Wildfire aimed to steer the work with help of the same ideals. Its organizers strived toward broad inclusion of other grassroots organizations, an open-ended agenda-setting process with wiggle room for improvisation, and horizontal relations between involved organizations.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the coalition's influence in the urban planning project. Focus is on whether the coalition was acknowledged by the decision-making actors in the urban planning process and whether they got their demands through. These decision-making actors were public agencies who oversaw and regulated the planning, and private sector actors (i.e., the developers).

In the second part of this chapter, descriptions are at a more aggregated level of analysis compared to the previous two thematic chapters. For reasons of simplicity, the coalition is here assumed to represent the interests of the residents. Interest is on interactions between the coalition as a whole and decision-making actors in the urban planning process. This chapter is differ-

ent from the previous two chapters in which interactions between outside activists and residents were explored. Here, focus instead lies on the relations between the coalition as a whole and decision-makers (the private and public actors involved in the urban planning process), and whether the coalition gained influence in this process.

The chapter demonstrates how Rockaway Wildfire, as the initiator of the coalition, attempted to include a broad range of other grassroots organizations, in order to put pressure on developers and local politicians to take their demands into account. This was not achieved. Due to conflicting interests across the associations in Rockaway, it was not possible to reach consensus on the demands. Moreover, previous internal conflicts within Rockaway Wildfire had given the organization somewhat of a bad name, which made it hard to attract new coalition members. And conversely, findings from interviews carried out with developers, representatives from public agencies and local politicians point to a rather moderate level of influence for the coalition in the urban planning project. Interviewees either had never heard of the coalition or if they knew about it seemed not to perceive of it as an actor that they needed to relate to. Thus, the coalition's and thereby the residents' influence over the ends and means of the urban planning process was limited.

Inclusion

The Rockaway Wildfire organizers aimed to create a coalition that was open to anyone who wanted to take part in it. Rockaway Wildfire strived toward a broad inclusion of other grassroots organizations who were invited into the coalition. The bimonthly open meetings were open to all who were curious about what the group was working with. The forum was also open for other types of actors such as activists and organizers from other boroughs, CBA experts, and various types of collaborations occurred. One example was a joint project with a group of graduate students from Hunter College who helped Rockaway Wildfire and the coalition with research and raising awareness around participatory urban planning.

Rockaway Wildfire held open meetings for community residents and others interested in its work on a regular basis, once or twice a month. In line with the ideal of inclusion, open meetings were often used to train participants in how to reach out to others in order to onboard them with the coalition. The organizers stressed the importance of broad participation from community members because "other voices and perspectives are needed around the table" (Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 4, 2013). Participants were encouraged, for example, to strike up conversations with other residents in Rockaway and were trained – through practical exercises and role play – to overcome differences and find mutual ground or they were asked to talk to a listed number of representatives as homework for the next meeting (Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 4,

2013; Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 1, 2014). Bit by bit Rockaway Wildfire and the coalition developed a draft CBA. Organizers canvassed neighborhoods on the eastern side of the Peninsula to find out what residents wanted to see included, and held open meetings in which the main tenets of the draft agreement were teased out in dialogue exercises. The sharing of ideas between meetings happened in the form of an editable Google document that was circulated among anyone interested. The three main tenets in the draft CBA were housing, jobs and green technology. Rockaway Wildfire and the coalition wanted to make sure that the developers would build deeply affordable housing, that storefronts be leased only to companies willing to employ local residents and pay minimum wages, and that protection against future storms would be included in the design.

Differences of opinions of the demands were noticeable across organizations and associations, mainly with regard to the issue of housing. This impeded broad inclusion into the coalition. Across community organizations and associations of Rockaway, interests differed in terms of what was envisioned for Arverne East. Deeply affordable housing was not everybody's wish. The general stance of CB14¹¹ was that it wished to see market rate housing that would attract people with disposable incomes, which in turn would spur economic development. Rockaway had dedicated more than its fair share of land to affordable and subsidized units, according to CB14, and so the board was advocating for single-family, market-rate development (Silberblatt 2014; Rockaway Waterfront Alliance 2013 p. 40). Whether to build housing at all was another dividing issue. The Rockaway Waterfront Alliance, a community organization in Rockaway, advocated strongly against housing, suggesting instead that parks and services for the community be built in the area. The representative stated in an interview that the coalition contributed to fragmentation of the community when they advocated so strongly in favor of housing:

I'm not opposed to the CBA but I take no part. It is not what the community needs right now. The CBA right now is dividing the community rather than unifying it, and it is destructive to the community to fight about percentages of affordable. They're barking at the wrong tree at the wrong time. The CBA right now is discussing housing, when what the area needs is not housing at all. They need facilities such as community centers, schools, storefronts, parklands, maybe a YMCA. (Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 32)

¹¹ NYC is divided into 59 administrative districts, each served by a community board. Community boards are local representative bodies that advocate for NYC residents and communities. They do not have any administrative rights, but can present requests, of community needs, to the city's administration. Rockaway is represented by CB14 of the borough of Queens. The board is the first stage at which land use matters are formally reviewed in accordance with the city's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP).

Due to different standpoints across different segments of Rockaway, the coalition was not able to accommodate all interests and did not grow in numbers in. But differences in opinions were not the only explanations for why the coalition did not grow. Rockaway Wildfire's legacy as an emergent organization in the area was closely connected to the lack of success it had in building a broadly inclusive coalition. It was a challenge for Rockaway Wildfire to build trust among the residents and organizations that they wished to include. As previous chapters have alluded to, skepticism toward outsiders was abundant in Rockaway, and since Rockaway Wildfire started out as an organization made up of outsiders from the OS network, the organizers had an uphill battle to include other organizations successfully. Rumors and what some interviewees call "chatter" were rife among community-based organizations and civically active residents in Rockaway. As previous thematic chapters have demonstrated, the history of how Rockaway Wildfire came about is a mixed bag of success and failure. Its reputation in the area as a genuinely engaged actor was hampered by internal conflicts within the organization. As was explored in the previous chapter, the organizational formation was marked, in part, by moments of conflict between outside organizers and Rockaway residents. The experiences of members who left due to these conflicts found their ways into conversations about Rockaway Wildfire across the peninsula, something that compromised the organization's attractiveness and impeded inclusion into the UPWARD coalition (Interview Occupy Spokes Council Representative 27; Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 11; Interview Coalition Member 10; Interview Coalition Member 31; Interview Resident and Ex-member of Rockaway Wildfire 14; Interview Ex-member of Rockaway Wildfire 17). In brief, what we find is that perspectives differed among Rockaway's civically active groups and individuals. The contradictory positions that existed within different community spheres and associations, as well as a previous history of conflicts and tensions, speak to Rockaway Wildfire's somewhat compromised ability to build a broadly inclusive coalition.

Flexibility

The Rockaway Wildfire organizers wanted to organize the coalition work in line with the ideal of flexibility, meaning that they wanted to have room for improvisation and innovation, and they strived to keep the agenda setting open for residents to inform which items ought to be included in the draft CBA. However, as the previous section about inclusion alluded to, since interests differed strongly across various segments of the peninsula, it was impossible to accommodate all standpoints in the items. Another manifestation of the ambition to organize the work in line with the ideal of flexibility was the Climate March preparations – a parallel process that was taking place alongside the CBA organizing. During the months leading up to the

march, Rockaway Wildfire organizers stopped the dialogue process and the drafting of the CBA. Instead, they mobilized around issues of climate change and environmental justice in order to stir up traction for the upcoming march. Rockaway Wildfire organizers became deeply involved in preparations and mustered up support for the march in storm-affected communities in Rockaway. The Climate March was seen by Occupy organizers as an opportunity to shift the climate change narrative from an elitist movement to one in which real people with lived experiences of the effects of climate change (such as floods and storms) are at the forefront (Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 3, 2014). In conjunction to the march Rockaway Wildfire organized different sorts of events such as fundraising parties and information and networking events (Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 1, 2014; Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 2, 2014). The mobilization for the march was a deviation from the CBA work. Among coalition members, opinions differed on whether this was misguided or not. An interviewee representing a coalition member organization was critical:

As a non-profit you go astray and follow the grant money, so Wildfire has been doing a lot of climate change things, they plugged into that whole discourse and there's a lot of money in that field. So they've been doing that, they've gone astray. (Interview Coalition Member 10)

However, the lead organizer of the coalition's work and core coordinator in Rockaway Wildfire defended the refocus, stating that although it was a deviation from the CBA work, it led to an important expansion of the coalition's network of allies, members and supporters. She further thought that the Rockaway Wildfire organizers managed to increase their knowledge on how to integrate issues of climate justice into the CBA. Apart from those gains, she claimed that the climate march preparations was a much needed break from the type of meeting-oriented work that characterized the work around the CBA. It enabled the coalition members to mobilize in more creative ways (Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 7). So, even if the Climate March preparations were a break from the planned activities of the coalition's work, it illustrated how the ideal of flexibility may look in practice since it was something that was called on by the needs of the moment, despite previous plans.

Horizontality

Rockaway Wildfire organizers aimed for relations between coalition members to be in line with the ideal of horizontality. The idea was to organize coalition members in trusting relationships, and with no one organization in charge of any of the other organizations. Despite this ambition, however,

traces of distrust were identified between coalition organizations in two ways. Firstly, there was a history of competition between community-based organizations, especially among the ones who were active in the relief efforts after the hurricane. Many of the local OS hubs, for example, were competing over the same funds and thus had to negotiate hard over resources, which created animosity among a few groups (Interview Occupy Spokes Council Representative 27; Interview Coalition Member 20). Secondly, trust between coalition organizations was affected by the different organizational logics of the different member organizations. The coalition organizations were different types of entities, with different structures and logics. Rockaway Wildfire was a non-hierarchical organization, whereas several of the other coalition organizations were hierarchically structured. Traces of mutual skepticism across this divide were identified. On one side, Rockaway Wildfire organizers saw it as fundamentally important that a community-based organization provides everyone with an equal voice and that decision-making is collective and leadership is shared, internally. Members of Rockaway Wildfire perceived hierarchical organizational logics as illegitimate (Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 3; Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 7). On the other hand, as the previous chapter demonstrated, Rockaway Wildfire had a slightly bad reputation among some civically engaged, vocal residents of Rockaway. According to allegations, Rockaway Wildfire was in fact a hierarchical organization that tried to come across as a non-hierarchical one (Coalition Member 20; Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 4; Non-resident Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 7; Resident and Ex-member Rockaway Wildfire 16).

In previous phases, a shared leadership model had been a manifestation of the push for horizontality, but this changed in the external collaboration and advocacy phase. Rockaway Wildfire, as initiators of the coalition's work, took the lead, organized and planned for meetings, wrote the draft agreement and was in contact with decision-makers. Its lead organizer saw no other organization as capable of stepping up to lead, and envisioned that Rockaway Wildfire would continue to facilitate the meetings and take care of logistics (Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 7). Although the ideal of horizontality was partly abandoned in this phase, the leadership practice was still horizontally oriented. The Rockaway Wildfire organizer actively sought to include a range of perspectives and organizations into the coalition, and all organizers were open to changes in the draft CBA based on what came out of canvassing and open meetings (Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 7).

Among the coalition members there were varying views on Rockaway Wildfire's role as the lead organization of the coalition. Representatives from other coalition member organizations expressed positive and negative views on Rockaway Wildfire taking this role, as well as around the issue of whether there should be one lead organization or a shared leadership. Some saw it as natural that Rockaway Wildfire, as initiator of the process and with

the resources they had, took charge and called the shots (Interview Coalition Member 31). But there were tensions around this issue since there were representatives from other organizations who were looking to take the lead themselves. They expressed that it was not Rockaway Wildfire’s “place to lead it”, as it was an organization initiated by outsiders and not by residents (Interview Coalition Member 10). These were ongoing discussions within and across coalition members in which the leadership of the coalition was questioned. In this way, Rockaway Wildfire’s leadership was partially unstable and issues of legitimacy and representation were a challenge.

The Coalition’s Influence in the Urban Planning Process

This section looks at the level of influence that the coalition had in the urban planning process. It provides an outline of each of the actors interviewed, and describes the actor’s role in the urban planning process, the interest or policy standpoint that the actor itself had in this process and how it related to the interests of the coalition, and the way the actor perceived the coalition.

City and State Administrative Levels

Three actors were interviewed who together represent the citywide and state administrative level: the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), NYC Department of Planning, and NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). The coalition’s interests regarding housing were largely aligned with the city administration’s interests, in that the city also wanted to see affordable housing built. The de Blasio administration had promised greater affordability throughout the city. However, this alignment of interest cannot be attributed to any advocacy on the coalition’s part. The de Blasio administration was striving to be seen as a challenger of rising inequalities and had a special focus on issues of affordable housing (Interview New York City Department of City Planning Representative 24; see also City of New York 2014). Sites like Arverne East represented a rare opportunity for the city to realize its promises around affordable housing. In line with this, the city put requirements of affordable housing on the developers of Arverne East in exchange for transferring the land. Yet, despite these efforts by the administration to decrease housing inequality, the affordability criteria of the Arverne East residential units would have prevented most local residents from moving in. Even the income-restricted rentals would have had monthly payments twice times the median monthly rent for CB14 (Silberblatt 2014).

The interviewee representing HPD expressed concern for the eastern communities of Rockaway, and talked about the city’s failure to deliver with regard to Arverne East historically. He stated that the affordability level was an issue that needed to be worked out in negotiations between the city and the developers. Notably, he did not mention the need for any community

input in such negotiations. He also expressed concerns of whether a mix of income levels would spur economic development or cause displacement due to gentrification, and stated that there was uncertainty around which outcome was most likely. But in any case, he claimed that the Arverne East development was an important part of the NYC rebuilding of the coastline post Sandy (Interview Housing and Preservation Department Representative 22). The same sentiment was expressed by the interviewed representative from the NYSDEC, who claimed that NYC had a “strong desire to use Arverne East as a proofing ground that they can develop responsibly along the waterfronts” (Interview NYSDEC Representative 23). With regard to any potential influence that the coalition had over these issues, the representative from the NYC Department of Planning stated that he knew about the coalition and the draft CBA, but had no perception of where the negotiations would land (Interview New York City Department of City Planning Representative 24). The interviewee from HPD stated that he was aware of the coalition but since “they just came on the scene“, he was unsure about the level support they would be able to build in the community (Interview Housing and Preservation Department Representative 22). The NYSDEC representative had never heard of the coalition (Interview NYSDEC Representative 23).

The Developers

The interest of the trio of developers could be straightforwardly summarized. They were looking to make a profit from developing the land. That did not mean they planned on ignoring community input all together, but their stance was that they would not agree to anything that would compromise projected revenues. The developers ideally wanted to sell every housing unit at a market rate price but were aware that this was impossible. However, this restriction had nothing to do with any pressure from the coalition, but everything to do with the requirements put on the land by the city’s administration through HPD (Interview Private Developer Representative 21).

When asked about the coalition and their demands, the representative for the developers explained that he and the other developers had sat down with Rockaway Wildfire a couple of times. He said that some of their goals were good but others were unachievable. Of three items in the draft CBA (affordable housing, green technology and local jobs to minimum wages) he noted that the developers were open to meeting these demands but only as long as the district’s councilman would come up with the money for meeting them. With regard to the CBA, the representative further stated that the trio of developers would not sign a draft that included a “lot of regulations that will dis-attract businesses”. He also noted that the developers would not be able to ignore community input because that would “get us into trouble” (Interview Private Developer Representative 21). Out of the three items in the CBA draft (housing, jobs and green technology), it seemed the biggest obstacle for a negotiated CBA was the job issue. The developer representative stated the following about Rockaway Wildfire:

Wildfire as a group is kind of like Occupy Wall Street. You know they belong to that kind of group who wants McDonald's workers to be better paid and so on. But we can't have that kind of regulation in one isolated area because the business will go elsewhere where the labor is cheaper. While we also want to create jobs we cannot do it in a way that is going to scare away businesses. We are with them on the need to create jobs for the community and create community spaces. We sat with them for a couple of hours, and they're organizing and it's great. But we're a capitalist society and we have to do what works. (Interview Private Developer Representative 21)

Another interviewee, an expert advisor to the UPWARD Coalition, noted that the developers could ignore the coalition's demands since they only needed formal approval from the city and CB14. Yet, if the developers would actually sign a CBA, the interviewee was optimistic that they would stick to the promises due to pressure from the city's administration and a will to be seen as trustworthy:

If you sign a CBA and then break it, the city will not work with you next time. Developers will not try to break it. They're not going to be transparent with how much money they're making, but they're going to deliver because they are working with the city. Reputation is a big deal when working with government and with the banks. Nobody wants law suits and bad reputation. So they're going to get their own lawyers and make sure that the CBA is going in a direction that suits them. (Interview Expert Organization Representative 37)

Local Political Representatives

The City Councilman of the 31st Council District, which encompasses Arverne East and the surrounding neighborhoods, was an important potential ally for the coalition. As the local representative of the community, the Councilman could make or break a deal with the developers. To the extent that he saw the coalition as representing his constituency, he would support their demands. Initially, the Councilman was supportive of the coalition, according to interviewees and news outlet sources (Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 7; Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 5; see also Colangelo2013). He was quoted as saying that he was “pushing the city — and prodding developers — to move ahead with plans to build affordable housing and retail on a portion of the dormant 80-acre site in Rockaway” (Colangelo2014). However, the support of the Councilman did not sit well with everyone within the coalition, who believed that he was corrupt to the level that it would be difficult to hold him accountable if the developers did not follow through on the agreement (Interview Coalition Member 31). But he was the only ally within the political system that the coalition could depend on for leverage. The developers would not want to see the whole process go through official planning process once again, something that the Councilman could have pushed for if he became unhappy with the negotiations between the developer and his constituents. The coalition hence needed to be strong in numbers in order to put pressure on the councilman so that he

in turn could push the developers. One activist within the coalition described it as such:

The developers are positive to our demands, but before they agree to honor any deal they want to see what kind of numbers we can muster up. If they don't see broad support they're not going to do it, even if they could. (Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 5)

Not long before the breakdown of the coalition, the Councilman withdrew his support for the coalition. According to two of the Rockaway Wildfire organizers, he also actively sabotaged coalition meetings by sending in troublemakers that disrupted the drafting of the CBA. Whether the Councilman in fact sabotaged the coalition or not, the somewhat fragile alliance with him broke down completely simply because organizers were under the impression that he did so. And since he was an important player and one that the coalition needed on their side, this conflict implied decreased levels of influence for the coalition.

The Design Firm

One actor that had some potential clout with regard to the plans for Arverne East was Swedish architecture firm White, who won the design competition that developed the blueprints for the site. The firm had been vocal on issues of affordability and stated that “displacing the community in the name of revitalizing an area is a disservice to those who currently call Arverne East home” (Colangelo2013). The coalition’s lead organizer met with a representative from White on a few occasions and the two spoke fondly of each other in the interviews (Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 7: Interview Representative of Architect Firm 39). Rockaway Wildfire organizers were positive to many of the items in White’s design plan and were pushing for the developers to make use of the plan (Participatory observation 2014). However, the developers were less keen on following through on White’s design and eventually hired new architects to redo the plan (Interview Private Developer Representative 21). Since the coalition had an interest in realizing White’s blueprints, this was a defeat for the coalition.

The Local Community Board

As described above, CB 14 had an interest in market rate housing being developed in order for the area to attract businesses. This was in direct contrast to the demands for deeply affordable housing that the coalition wanted to see. The interviewed representative from CB14 said he knew about Rockaway Wildfire but had never heard of the coalition. His perception of the organization was that they were “concerned with fairness”. However, he claimed that they needed to work in closer conjunction with CB14 and not distance themselves (Interview Resident and Representative of Community Board 30).

Summary of Chapter

This chapter provided a thematic analysis of the external work of Rockaway Wildfire. It explored whether and the extent to which the ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality were translated into practice in the collaborative practices between coalition members, and looked at the empirical manifestations of these ideals. The chapter has also provided an assessment of the level of influence that the coalition had with decision-makers in the urban planning process under study.

The chapter demonstrated that Rockaway Wildfire, as the initiator of the coalition, aimed to form a grassroots coalition that would be able to put pressure on decision-makers to take into account their demands. Organizers needed to include a broad range of other grassroots organizations, but this did not happen. Due to conflicting interests across the associations in Rockaway, it was not possible to reach consensus with regard to demands, which meant that those organizations that disagreed with the general direction that the coalition was moving in chose not to engage. Moreover, previous internal conflicts within Rockaway Wildfire had given the organization somewhat of a bad name, which made it hard to attract coalition members. With regard to the ideal of flexibility, it was practically manifested in the Climate March preparations – a process that took place alongside the CBA organizing, and partly crowded out the coalition's work for a few months' time. The findings further suggest that with regard to the ambition to create horizontal relations between coalition members, previous competition between the organizations resulted in issues of distrust at later stages. It also brought forward the idea that mutual trust across organizations that have very different organizational logics can be difficult in practice. These collaborative problems, and the ensuing difficulty in building a broad coalition, might have something to do with the almost non-existent level of influence over ends and means that the coalition enjoyed in Arverne East's urban planning process. It seems some of the involved actors were aware of what the coalition was working on, and some of them were in favor of seeing the coalition demands realized. But others did not seem to perceive of the coalition as an actor that they needed to relate to. Among those actors whose support was crucial for the coalition there was a lack of knowledge that the coalition existed or the actor had partially opposing interests that made engaging in dialogue with the coalition uninteresting. All of this indicates a very limited influence over ends and means in this urban planning process for the coalition and thus for the residents that the coalition represented.

8. Conclusions: Findings and Implications

Vulnerability differs structurally across social groups and this is connected to ongoing economic, social and political marginalization – yet very few studies focus on how such marginalization can be politically challenged. In this thesis, a particular perspective on vulnerability reduction has been put forward, one that has been largely absent from disaster research. Although previous research on social vulnerability has done a good job in teasing out the underlying structures that function to distribute risk unequally (Wisner et al. 2004; Wisner 2012; Tierney 2014; Bankoff et al. 2004; Peacock et al. 1997; Enarsson et al. 1998, Jones et al. 2009; Fothergill et al. 1999; Fothergill et al. 2004; Aptekar 1990), insufficient attention has been paid to how underlying power structures can be challenged and altered (Luft 2009) or which role social justice movements may play in doing so. But if we acknowledge the inherent inequalities in how disasters strike, it becomes relevant to study empirical cases that explicitly incorporate a social justice approach. Such an approach is at the heart of this thesis, which has explored activists' attempts at empowering vulnerable groups in social justice movement arenas after disasters. The aim has been to explore the internal organization of emancipatory projects and how they may enhance empowerment of vulnerable groups.

The theoretical work of this thesis has taken the emancipatory literature into close consideration. This literature helped in teasing out a particularly relevant problem within empowerment theory and practice: emancipatory projects are often initiated and steered by privileged actors who do not belong to the marginalized communities they wish to strengthen, yet the work is based on a belief that empowerment requires self-organizing from within. To investigate this problem empirically, I explored a case that was located in the nexus of disaster management and social justice organizing, namely OS and the ensuing organization Rockaway Wildfire, active in Rockaway, NYC after Hurricane Sandy 2012. This case had the above-mentioned research problem at its very core, as two aspects characterized the organizational process under study: 1) it was a collaborative process between two non-equal actors, where 2) the privileged actor tried to empower the non-privileged actor. Outsider organizers entered an area to empower residents in the wake of a storm. Outside organizers were non-affected by the storm, were mostly white, mostly educated, and had existing organizing skills and economic funds that they controlled. The residents were mostly low-income people of color that struggled with getting back on their feet after a storm that devas-

tated their homes and their neighborhood, and they had little or no experience of the type of social justice organizing that the activists initiated. The outside organizers were fully aware of this power imbalance. Based on an ideological outlook of how capitalism creates persistent socioeconomic and political marginalization for some social groups, while other social groups reap the benefits, the goal of the outside organizers was to empower the residents, and build their collective capacity to alter the unfair circumstances they were in and that had made them particularly vulnerable with regard to the storm. Specifically, outside activists attempted to put into practice three organizing ideals: inclusion, flexibility and horizontality, based on the belief that doing so would create an emancipatory project in which marginalized residents would be empowered. The current analysis explored these ideals over time across three different post-disaster phases: relief, organizational formation, and external collaboration and advocacy. The empirical study traced whether and the extent to which these ideals were translated into practice, and closely looked at the manifested expressions of these attempts across three post-disaster phases. It also looked at whether storm-affected residents within this emancipatory project gained influence over ends and means. By connecting the ideals with the temporal phases, the study was able to demonstrate how challenges to empowerment shifted as the external conditions and the organizational functions changed.

The research problem is not unique to this case, and so the general tendencies that were elicited here may be relevant for every project where privileged groups attempt to empower non-privileged groups, especially if the work is steered by ideals of self-organizing from within. Such projects can be found within the DRR realm, within grassroots social justice organizing, or in any other instance in which privileged actors are attempting to empower less privileged groups.

This concluding chapter elaborates on the theoretical and practical contributions of this thesis. In order to tease out these contributions the chapter starts with a summary of the empirical findings. Afterward the results are interpreted in light of previous research and theory, followed by a section that elaborates on what the results imply for DRR research and practice. The last section sketches the road ahead for future studies of social movements and disasters, and discusses the methodological contributions that this thesis makes.

Summary and Analysis of Empirical Findings

This section summarizes and discusses the empirical investigation. Firstly, it summarizes how structurally differentiated vulnerability was manifested with regard to Hurricane Sandy. Secondly, it zooms in from the wider picture of structurally differentiated vulnerability to the micro processes of organizing, summing up the thematic analysis of the three phases. Lastly, the connection between these micro processes and the larger issue of transformation of vulnerability is discussed.

Structurally Differentiated Vulnerability and Hurricane Sandy

Hurricane Sandy had devastating effects on NYC, and even more so in the area of Rockaway. As an oceanfront community Rockaway was more susceptible to the resulting floods than other parts of the city. Ongoing social and economic marginalization in the area contributed to the effects, so that Rockaway became one of the most heavily affected parts of the city. Unemployment and lack of education, geographic isolation, inadequate transportation services, and lack of other essential services were major obstacles that Rockaway's poorer communities faced long before the storm. The storm aggravated these problems. Public housing residents were left without electricity and heat for several months and had to struggle with long-term health problems due to mold. When transportation services and infrastructure broke down, people lost their jobs and could not access pharmacies and other essential services elsewhere in the city. Businesses in Rockaway shut down so local jobs were also lost (Joseph 2013; Rockaway Waterfront Alliance Report 2013 p 11; The Wave 2013; American Planning Association 2013; Furman Center 2013 p. 4; Koslov et al. 2013; Subayia et al. 2014). In Rockaway, as elsewhere in the city, residents were frustrated with the relief, or lack thereof, that city authorities provided (Rauh 2012; Cotner 2012). First responding agencies and established NGOs were criticized for failing to offer adequate relief support to residents in outskirt neighborhoods of the city (Subayia et al. 2014; Solidarity NYC 2013; Fox News Latino 2012; Killoran 2012; McCambridge 2012; Weiser 2014; Liboiron et al. 2013).

As a response to these problems OS gathered roughly 60,000 volunteers in a major relief effort that targeted outskirt areas of the city. This relief effort was successful in mobilizing volunteers, pulling together resources and providing support to otherwise largely abandoned places and communities. When immediate relief shifted into long-term recovery, OS activists initiated political grassroots projects in different neighborhoods, out of which Rockaway Wildfire in Rockaway was one. After a period of organizational formation, Rockaway Wildfire started to build a coalition of grassroots organizations in the area in order to put pressure on developers and politicians to take low-income communities' interests into account in the post-disaster urban planning process that unfolded in Rockaway after Hurricane Sandy. The thematic analysis of this thesis explored the relief work of OS, the ensu-

ing organizational formation of Rockaway Wildfire in the recovery phase, and the external collaboration and advocacy phase that followed. A summary of the thematic analysis follows in the next section.

From Structurally Differentiated Vulnerability to Micro Processes of Organizing

The thematic analysis was conducted through the lens of three organizing ideals: inclusion, flexibility and horizontality. These were analyzed across three temporal phases: relief, organizational formation, and external collaboration and advocacy. What I found when tracing the shifting process over time in this grassroots setting was that during the relief phase, there were indications that outside organizers managed to empower storm-affected residents by putting the ideals of inclusion, flexibility and horizontality into practice. Through this process residents seemed to gain influence over ends and means, or in other words control over which activities should be carried out, as well as over how the work should be organized. The work was perceived as empowering for storm-affected people, both by residents and outside organizers. In the following period of organizational formation however, when a long-term organization was established, the outside initiators from the Occupy network continued with the ambition to empower residents. They encouraged residents to take on leadership roles and be active partners in agenda setting and formation of the organizational structure. In comparison to the initial relief phase, however, the process of empowerment followed a more crooked line in the recovery phase.

In the organizational formation phase, residents responded in different ways to outside organizers' attempts to empower them. Some residents were positive to the attempts, welcomed the outside organizers' presence, and engaged enthusiastically with the emancipatory project. They eventually became part of the core group of organizers themselves, expressing in interviews that they felt empowered by their participation. The organizing thus resulted in small gains in terms of influence over ends and means for residents: they took active part in shaping the agenda of the organization and participated in the implementation of set strategies and had a say in how the organization ought to structure its work. The work thus had positive effects for a smaller number of individual residents who learned new organizing skills, and got a better handle on issues that were important to them. Potentially such increases in capacity can reverberate in future instances of organizing. These small wins can be seen as important in their own right.

However, the song vibrated with an echo of conflict and resistance. The attempts at empowerment were not appreciated by all residents. The type of critique that residents raised was of two different kinds: some were of the opinion that the attempts were not genuine but merely rhetoric. Interviewees claimed that residents' empowerment was conditioned on their alignment with the views of the outside organizers, and that those residents who were critical were subtly excluded from the organization. Others expressed a frus-

tration with the activists' belief that residents needed to be empowered as they experienced this as patronizing. A few of the dissenting residents engaged in covert or overt resistance toward the activists and the organization. Strategies varied from explicitly sabotaging meetings, spreading rumors about the organization, to simply leaving the organization. This led to public displays of disloyalty, large numbers of dropouts, a few harsh open conflicts, and a crumbling organization.

Despite these internal problems the work continued. In the third phase of external collaboration and advocacy, Rockaway Wildfire attempted to build a coalition of grassroots organizations and put pressure on local politicians and housing developers to take vulnerable residents' interest into account. This failed. Conflicting interests across collaborating organizations stalled further mobilization. Previous internal conflicts within Rockaway Wildfire also made it difficult to attract new members and summon broad support for the coalition and the coalition's influence in the urban planning process was limited.

Assessing Transformation of Structurally Differentiated Vulnerability

Empowerment of marginalized communities is an important matter in its own right. This is especially true within social justice movements because these are important arenas for social and political change. It is within such arenas that the seeds for some of the most important political developments have been planted throughout history, and it is within such arenas that we might see the most promising organizing in the future around issues of disaster vulnerability and inequality. What happened in the micro processes studied here is thus connected to the broader problem of structurally differentiated vulnerability, as it was one instance of a wider struggle for transformation. What took place is, with the words of Campbell, part of a net "of small-scale acts of resistance to inequality, pockets of social protests apparently randomly blossoming in local contexts all over the world" (Campbell 2014 p. 53).

This connection notwithstanding, I did not expect this instance of social organizing to successfully transform structurally differentiated vulnerability, as full transformation would require systematic social and political change at a macro level. And, not surprisingly, the results show no such change. However, the organizing had the potential to bring about a local reduction of vulnerability since the activists and residents were working to change the material conditions for a smaller proportion of low-income residents, issues that were closely connected to their disaster vulnerability. If the demands of the CBA campaign had been realized, low-income individuals and families would have accessed less costly living options instead of staying in sub-standard housing, they would have been able to apply for local jobs with minimum wages, and they would have been able to reside in a stormproof neighborhood. Yet, the organizing failed to achieve even these less ambitious objectives. The analysis shows how these failures in part were a result

of the inner dynamics and interactions between outside organizers and residents within the organization. It seems that inner dynamics can make or break successful external collaboration and advocacy, something that is particularly interesting when these inner dynamics are part of a larger ecology of social justice movements.

Theoretical Contributions

This thesis has explored activists' attempts at empowering vulnerable groups in social justice movement arenas, and found that the process was partly successful, but partly marked by tension, resistance and conflict. How can we understand these results in light of previous theory and research?

Based on the results, it seems that explicit attention to injustices and the ambition to practice egalitarian organizing ideals such as inclusion, horizontality and flexibility is not a guarantee that injustices will be successfully challenged. Even in settings that are expressively and actively challenging inequality, tensions and power imbalances may simmer under the surface. Overt and covert struggles around issues of control can ensue, with subtle hierarchies finding their way into the setting, resulting in a situation in which those who are to be empowered resist such attempts. These findings reflect previous knowledge from the emancipatory literature (see for example Young 2001; Cornwall et al. 2005 p. 793; Holvino 2008 p. 18; Pilisuk et al. 1996 p. 31). Particularly, the results speak to previous research around grassroots organizing, inclusion and participation, where studies have shown that grassroots projects formed by outsiders may result in conflicts, distrust and tensions between benevolent initiators of emancipatory projects and marginalized communities, and that projects may trigger resistance from community members (Aguilar et al. 2010 p. 432; Baxamusa 2008 p. 267; Lewis 2010 p. 332; Campbell 2014 p. 50). Previous ethnographic research has also demonstrated comparable forms of more or less subtle resistance from non-privileged actors (Scott 1985; Mosse 2005; Campbell 2014 p. 50). The analysis undertaken here adds to this field of knowledge an in-depth demonstration of how these processes can play out, as the case provided a detailed understanding of what the obstacles can be.

Furthermore, the thesis analyzed empowerment processes over time across three distinct organizational phases. This case within a case design (Gerring 2004 p. 343) was useful because it pointed to how the various circumstances of the phases implied different possibilities for empowering vulnerable residents. In general, the results are in line with a few broad theoretical expectations. As alluded to in the theoretical chapter, it was to be expected that the phases would pose different types of challenges with regard to influence for vulnerable communities, and that the conditions for collaboration between initiating outsiders' and storm-affected residents would shift over time. Exactly how conditions would shift or what the shifts

would entail in detail was, however, an empirically open-ended question. The analysis in this thesis has filled in some of these blanks. It has demonstrated that the very same organizing ideals that functioned to empower storm-affected residents in the relief phase became troublesome when relief turned to long-term recovery. In the relief phase, there were indications that residents gained influence over ends and means as a result of outside activists' ambitions to translate the ideals into practice. In the organizational formation phase, as well as in the external collaboration and advocacy phase, however, residents' influence over ends and means was partly compromised.

If we break it down according to the three ideals, we saw that inclusion in the relief phase was important because the situation at hand was of a massive scale, and the need to make use of every available volunteer was dire. Inclusion thus mobilized people who might otherwise have stayed passive and who at best would have received aid from public agencies, or at worst had been isolated completely. Yet, inclusion in the long-term phase was more problematic since it meant the coming together of people with very different views and opinions of which type of work should be done or how that work ought to be carried out, which in turn created conflicts. With regard to the ideal of flexibility, it seems that one of the strengths of a self-organized, emergent network, namely the improvisational capacities of its individual members, will become a challenge as that network phases into something that resembles an organization. An organization is by definition less flexible than a network since it needs structure, regulations and plans to function. The difference between flexibility in the different phases was that it was easier to have a flexible approach to the concrete problems that needed solving in the relief phase such as food access or medical and legal aid, or any of the other myriad challenges of acute disaster management. When relief shifted to recovery, and the acute needs and time restraints subsided, political discussions around inequality arose in relation to the storm. As the discussion of how such inequalities should be dealt with became more prominent, flexibility was seemingly no longer an option – these challenges needed a common, coordinated approach. Something similar can be said of the ideal of horizontality. Perhaps it is easier to encourage residents to take on leadership roles if the activities are practical – non-contested or non-political in nature. A period of organizational formation requires more alignment between participants in terms of objectives and organizational structures and strategies. Perhaps outside organizers found it more difficult to give away control over ends and means in the recovery phase because residents' ideas about ends and means sometimes went against their core ideological beliefs.

The results further have implications for theories of trust between collaborating partners. Research around collaboration usually demonstrates that collaboration functions best in the long run, when collaborating partners have gotten to know each other and developed trust (Helmke 2011 p. 133; Aquilar et al. 2010 p. 432; Vangen et al. 2003 p. 8; Chavis 2001 p 310; Salkin et al. 2008 p. 321; Milner 1992 p. 477; Pitsis 2004 p. 576; Sloper 2004 p.

576). The case here shows something else. Collaboration actually functioned much better in the relief phase than in the long-term recovery phase. Perhaps length of collaborative projects is not the only factor. We might also add a factor of complexity: the more complex the activities over which partners are to collaborate the less easy it is. However, the actors in this case were collaborating with a particular goal in mind, namely privileged actors' attempts to empower non-privileged actors. Based on this we could theorize that the more complex the work is the more challenging it is for privileged groups to give away control. Relief work is less complex in that it is about solving concrete and immediate problems of a practical nature, whereas recovery implies attempts to solve more abstract problems and requires agreement around ends and means, or on goals and objectives, preferred organizational style and strategies for action, role allocation and organizational functions. The recovery phase is inherently more political in nature – it is here that discussions around social and political change are crystallized, issues that are perhaps less straightforward to agree on. Outside organizers may hold on tighter to their control simply because they are operating out of a political and ideological mindset that they think is right and that they do not want to see challenged.

Furthermore, the results are interesting in light of Luke's second dimension of power, particularly for the question of how a privileged actor can secure willing compliance from a subordinate actor (Lukes 2005 p. 12). On the one hand, we may say that the outside organizers created willing compliance by gradually empowering only complicit residents, while subtly excluding those residents who challenged them. Through this strategy, outside organizers secured their set agenda for the project. We can question if this somewhat manipulative way of pushing through predetermined agendas is ethically problematic. It does seem a little dishonest. Yet, one could also argue that external the outside organizers' external goals were good in their own right, no matter the internal processes through which they were realized, and no matter that some residents experienced the process as problematic. Establishing an organization that could work for greater influence for vulnerable residents in urban planning processes, and eventually effect change in terms of better housing, employment opportunities and more resilient neighborhoods, are goals that seem hard to argue against. However, the process as it played out was not fully owned by the residents. Their influence over ends and means was restricted, conditioned on their compliance. This in turn is in violation of the ideals of both horizontality and flexibility. Other aspects were the residents' feelings that they were not given the full picture, their suspicions about hidden agendas, and their beliefs that there existed actual leaders behind the talk about non-hierarchies. So perhaps the problem was not that outside organizers had an agenda and that they worked toward realizing it. Perhaps the problem was that the objectives were not disclosed but obscured behind rhetoric that conveyed the message that the residents were the ones who should form the agenda.

Implications for DRR Research and Practice

The work done in this thesis has a few implications for DRR research and practice. Firstly, a shift in the perspective on vulnerability reduction is needed. Focus has to be directed toward how political, social and economic inequality can be breached. Secondly, issues of inclusion, participation and empowerment need to be taken seriously. This means that the somewhat fetishizing and occasionally shallow understanding of these phenomena needs to be altered. I will elaborate on these two points in the following.

Employ a Radical Perspective on Vulnerability Reduction

In future work within the Post 2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015), attention ought to be directed to the reduction of social, economic and political inequality. Within the hybrid field that is DRR (i.e., includes both practitioners and academics), the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), headed by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, is responsible for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). Since the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) in 2005, UNISDR has been promoting and monitoring the implementation of the framework. The HFA notes three strategic goals: implement DRR into development policies and planning; strengthen institutions, mechanisms and capacities to build resilience; and incorporate risk reduction into emergency response programs (ISDR 2005). In order to reach these goals, the importance of reducing underlying risk factors has been noted (ISDR 2005). Following HFA a number of root causes that produce risks have been identified. Among the factors are poverty, hunger, disease, violence, inadequate health services, education, infrastructure, housing, unemployment, land degradation, displacement, and discrimination. Proposed actions to address these root causes are several, among them a more systematic implementation of the International Health Regulation, the promotion of education services, the use of mechanisms for environmental protection, strengthening livelihoods, and leveraging existing social protection mechanisms to provide better services to vulnerable groups (ISDR 2013). Within the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, critical analysis is important in order to make sure that DRR practices do not reinforce political, social or economic imbalances, and produce even further risks. For example, politically unregulated networks between private and public actors, (a very popular solution to deal with transboundary problems such as disasters) might actually decrease democratic accountability (Larsson 2013) and thus erode political capital. Nationally-based insurance options might contribute to a situation in which tax bases come to bear the costs for private development (Tierney 2014 p. 140). This erodes important state resources that are needed to build resilience, and adds to the accumulation of wealth that in turn creates further economic inequalities. Thus, suggested priorities and strategies for action within

DRR should be critically screened so that they: a) contribute to decreased inequality by redistributing social, economic and political capital from privileged to non-privileged groups; and b) in the absence of the above at least do not reproduce or fortify existing inequalities between groups. To do so requires an analysis that goes beyond the immediate assessment of risks in relation to hazards, and looks more to how societal production of risk can be altered by changing the root causes of structurally differentiated vulnerability.

Take Seriously the Challenges to Inclusion, Participation and Empowerment

Based on the work in this thesis, I argue that DRR practitioners and researchers alike ought to take seriously the challenges for participatory DRR. Within inclusive DRR – a subfield of disaster research – there is an abundance of research and practice that deals with vulnerability reduction. Community, inclusion, empowerment, local ownership, and participation are popular buzzwords (ISDR 2013; UNDP 2015; Oxfam Australia 2012; Berke et al. 2006; Leon et al. 2009; Allen 2006; Norris et al. 2008). However, focus often lies on remedies to the symptoms of the problems. Less attention is paid to root problems of inequality. The almost fetishizing discourse around community participation and bottom-up DRR probably stems from the fact that this research field is highly intertwined with the practical policy field. This does not give much room for critical approaches to issues of power and inequality. A certain theoretical immaturity is noticeable within DRR research. Conceptual analysis is often skimmed over and few problems are raised. Instead, it seems that inclusion of and participation by affected communities is straightforward and easy – and simply something that ought to be better enforced. But inclusion, participation and empowerment are contested phenomena that require deep-seated knowledge from facilitators. Emancipatory projects that are not initiated by vulnerable communities face many challenges that need to be cautiously navigated in order not to reproduce existing power imbalances between facilitators/program officers and vulnerable communities.

It is important that facilitators and program officers first acknowledge their own potential privileges in relation to the people they are set to empower. One suggestion for how to alter social inequalities between participants and facilitators is to employ so-called compensatory techniques, as was demonstrated in Chapter 6 of this thesis. However, with regard to compensatory horizontality, the analysis of this thesis pointed to some dilemmas. What I found was that compensatory methods to counter inequality are complicated. Three major problems with the compensatory techniques could be discerned in the case explored here. Firstly, the particular power structures that were made explicit in these compensatory techniques were not the only power structures at play. Attention was predominantly given to race and gender differentiations, and not to whether individuals were affected by the

storm. But those affected by the storm lacked the capacity to make their voices heard in the same effective ways as people not affected by the storm. This problem is solvable; it can be countered with a sensitive approach to the particular contextual parameters of the emancipatory project under scrutiny. Which imbalances that seem to have a bearing on whose voice is heard is something that has to be worked out on a case-by-case basis rather than through simply leaning against the standard gender and race differentiation (although awareness of these potential power imbalances needs to be present as well). Secondly, background inequality does not in every case play out in similar ways. Other factors also weigh in when it comes to who exercises influence and power in a social setting. Individuals understand their positions in social hierarchies differently. They relate differently to issues of social stratification and their own social position within these stratifications. Power dynamics in interaction between individuals are never fully explained by the social positions they inhabit. Therefore, compensatory techniques can create problems in a group. Thirdly, every individual most often makes up a patchwork of different intersectional social positions. If a woman is underprivileged based on her gender but privileged based on her race, a compensatory method is both applicable and non-applicable. With these dilemmas we may conclude that compensatory techniques should be altogether abandoned in favor of universal techniques, where every participant is treated the same and there are no compensations for potential power imbalances between participants. Perhaps there is simply no other way than to treat everyone in the same way. But when we do so, we may end up in a situation where certain individuals may (unconsciously) assert their privileges in a way that allows them to dominate. What we find is a problem that seems practically unsolvable. On the one hand, universal techniques risk the fate of reproducing unwanted power imbalances, and on the other hand compensatory techniques are not always individually applicable. In summary, awareness of and potential strategies to challenge power discrepancies between participants are always important in emancipatory projects, but macro analyses of structural inequalities are not always applicable in every micro setting. It seems that more contextualized, case-by-case analyses are the best ways to address this conundrum. However, further theorizing and more empirical studies are needed. It would for example be very interesting to conduct micro studies of other emancipatory projects that struggle with the same type of issues but employ other solutions to the problem of power imbalances between initiators and participants.

Another important issue is that facilitators may lack important local knowledge and so need to refrain from predesigned agendas, but rather let vulnerable communities take part in formulating goals and strategies for action. If such flexibility is impossible, facilitators instead need to be fully transparent with the agenda for the project, as well as with the limitations for influence for targeted communities in order to avoid a situation in which participants are unclear about the possibilities for influence. If possible, cer-

tain flexibility from the program officers' part in terms of how the forum is structured – how decision-making and deliberation are organized – is warranted. Preferably this should be done in ways that participants feel comfortable with, for example by making use of decision-making modes or organizing tools similar to those that community members are familiar with. This requires deep-seated local knowledge from facilitators, something that can be achieved by interviews with community members, participatory observations of other community events or by seeking help from local contact persons and guides (but make sure to offer decent salaries to such contact persons, as well as be aware of which position the contact person has in the community and whether this in any way may bias their guidance). Finally, even if all of these things have been secured, as this case has shown, tensions may arise. Resistance from participants may come about. Therefore, program officers ought to be in constant dialogue with participants, listen carefully to their thoughts and experiences, and be flexible enough to change strategies and priorities for action if they find that they have strayed from participants' views. Otherwise there is risk for resistance from participants, either overt or covert, and potentially program failure. Furthermore, among targeted community members, there may be different interests and agendas, which may trigger tensions and conflicts. It is important that facilitators are aware of these risks when initiating emancipatory projects, and, have planned strategies for conflict prevention and mediation. However, there are potentially always conflicting interests in any community that project facilitators cannot expect to solve. In order not to fuel such tensions further, it is important that project facilitators be transparent with the set goals and objectives of the project so that community members have opportunities to gauge whether they find it relevant to partake based on a good understanding of what the project is about.

Future Studies of Social Movements and Disasters

This section brings forward the argument that social justice movements will be increasingly important arenas for social and political change, both in DRR practices and in general political development. It also points to a number of methodological considerations to take into account when studying such arenas, based on the work done in this thesis.

If we want to explore and understand empowerment of marginalized groups we ought to pay attention to social justice movements. It is within such arenas that the seeds for some of the most important political developments have been planted throughout history, and it is within such arenas that we may find the most promising organizing in the future around issues of disaster vulnerability and inequality. Social justice movement arenas have a capacity to push the agenda for what should be considered a political problem that formal decision-makers have to deal with. Based on social justice

organizing, new problem formulations that were considered to fall outside of the realm of institutional politics can emerge. Historically, the civil rights movement in the U.S., feminist movements and environmental justice movements across the globe are examples of this. In the contemporary U.S., examples include the Black Lives Matter movement, which is exposing racist structures within police forces (Black Lives Matter 2016), and the Standing Rock campaign fighting for indigenous people's right to land and water in North Dakota, successfully protesting the Dakota Access pipeline (Stand with Standing Rock 2016).

Social justice movements may become of even greater importance in light of current political developments. Political maps are being rewritten all around the globe. Authoritarian forces are pedaling for traction in Russia, the U.S. and Turkey with increasing success. On November 14, 2016, 10 days after the infamous election of Donald Trump in the U.S., political theorist Jeffrey C. Isaac called for political scientists to pay closer attention to issues of civil disobedience, dissent and resistance. He claimed that civil resistance to authority will become an increasingly central feature of the political sphere in light of the recent election and the increased authoritarianism thought to follow. Given a greater importance of civil resistance, teachings about dissent and protests need to be central, not peripheral dimensions of political education, Isaac argued (Isaac 2016). As an illustration of this point, Angela Davis, during a public talk in the aftermath of the election, urged the audience to stop mourning and instead embrace grassroots political organizing, underscoring the need to "struggle over the coming period as we have never struggled before. Whatever we are already doing, we need to do more. We need to accelerate our activism". (Davis 2016). In a similar vein, Peter Dreier stated that Americans ought to "channel their anger into strategic and constructive dissent, which has a long tradition in our country's history" (Dreier 2016). As if answering these demands, millions of people took to the streets a day after the U.S. Inauguration Day in the Women's March, which was estimated to be the biggest protest in American history (Easley 2017) and was mirrored by hundreds of similar protests around the globe (New York Times 2017).

It seems social justice movements may be of even greater importance politically in light of recent political developments. We can think of this situation as a window of opportunity for political mobilization, a critical point of instability that may force people to reorganize (Berkes et al. 2003 p. 6). Perhaps the election of Trump will be, in addition to a great shock for the progressive segments of the U.S., a chance to advocate new ideas and question pervasive assumptions and norms (Goldstein 2009; Walker et al. 2011). Political change may come about as polarization is fueled or as activist and actor George Takei outlines:

In today's political environment, we find ourselves again outsiders, forming a core of those opposed to the powers in Washington and in many of our state cap-

itals. But this is not unfamiliar territory. It is, in fact, where movements were born. The greatest moments in civil rights, from Selma to Stonewall, Seneca Falls to Standing Rock, sprang forward not from eras of harmony, but out of bitter conflicts. (Takei 2016)

Whether Takei is right remains to be seen. However, it is not unlikely that politically interested people, those who were previously moderate non-radicals and engaged with politics through traditional channels of party politics, may become radicalized in light of recent events. To be anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment might become more common in the near future, as people increasingly lose faith in traditional politics and turn to social justice activism instead.

Issues of disaster inequality may move closer to the fore of social justice organizing. For example, there are ongoing developments in the climate change movement. Mobilization around climate change has long been an elitist-oriented movement, but this is slowly shifting, as communities are experiencing the effects of climate change through more frequent, less predictable and sometimes harsher weather and climate-related disasters (Aalst 2006 p. 8; Field et al. 2012 p. 7). Political mobilization from below is brewing, and resistance to the political, social and economic inequalities that produce climate change-related risks may become enhanced. Such a development is worthy of academic attention from both social justice movement and disaster scholars.

This thesis heeds the call for a better understanding of civil disobedience, dissent and resistance. Particularly, the motif of the research problem flags the importance of understanding relationships between privileged and non-privileged actors within social justice movements. For example, the research problem reared its head in relation to the Women's March, as exemplified by a blog post by Char Adams (2017) in which she writes:

If the goal of the march is to see lasting change rather than a one-time event aiming to make people simply feel good, we have to think about race, class, sex, and ability privilege. (Adams 2017)

The research problem is relevant to future organizing within the movement that Rockaway Wildfire is part of too. In November 2016, the national Wildfire Project, the predecessor to Rockaway Wildfire, brought together activists from all over the U.S. to prepare for the new presidency. One of the organizers stated in a video that the meeting participants were grappling with the ways that their "movement culture is a barrier for us to build collective power" (The Wildfire Project Video 2016). Another participant talked about the challenges of organizing in multiracial settings, and yet another one said:

We cannot really talk about the world we want to build if we are not clear on how we are relating to one another. (The Wildfire Project Video 2016)

The next section provides a sketch for how future studies of these themes may be set up.

Methodological Implications for Future Studies of Social Movements and Disasters

There are a few implications of the study undertaken here for future research on social movements and disasters, both in terms of design choices and methodological techniques. Firstly, the fact that the social dynamics of interest in this thesis were investigated in a post-disaster setting made a few of the conflicts and tensions more obvious than they would have been in general long-term organizing. The post-disaster design provided an opportunity to study these tensions empirically and develop theoretical ideas that can be used to study similar processes under different external circumstances, where tensions may be more subtle. As the undertaken analysis demonstrated, it is relevant to look at temporal and organizational shifts and turns. Secondly, a political ethnographic approach that can capture processes as they unfold in real-time may be well suited to continue the exploration of these issues. These points will be discussed in the following two sections.

Firstly, with regard to designing future studies of inner dynamics within social movements, these can be fruitfully investigated in post-disaster situations. In comparison to general long-term organizing within social justice movements, post-disaster processes can function as opportunities for mobilization because of two opposing forces that often characterize disaster situations. In line with previous research, the case analyzed here shows that disasters may increase the divide between vulnerable and privileged groups – because they often enhance the vulnerable groups’ marginalization (Aptekar 1990; Fothergill et al. 2004 p. 96; Peacock et al. 1997). Disasters may shine a spotlight on inequality and can fortify ongoing political struggles along the lines of regional/ethnic/class inequality (Green 2008 p. 245; Pelling et al. 2010 p 24). Secondly, this case was also in line with previous research that stipulated that state failures to respond accurately to disasters may create temporary power vacuums that open up for contending civil society actors working for systemic change (della Porta et al. 2006; Boin et al. 2008; Hannigan 2012 p. 107; Pelling et al. 2010). The emergence of the OS network was a good example of this. Disasters can thus function as critical junctures, where political change can arise and lead to more egalitarian policies as part of the post-disaster work (Pelling et al. 2010 p. 22). This is in line with the thinking of complex ecological systems that assumes that systems will reorganize at critical points of instability (Berkes et al. 2003 p. 6; Goldstein 2009; Walker et al. 2011). The two opposing forces – more visible inequalities on the one hand and power vacuums due to state failures on the other hand – may trigger political mobilization and create tensions within movements. These tensions may be more obvious in post-disaster processes than in general long-term organizing. The fact that post-disaster processes may make underlying conflicts more visible and easier to research have been used

in this thesis to develop theoretical ideas that can be used to study similar processes under different external circumstances, where tensions may be more subtle. This thesis demonstrated the importance of exploring the challenges that different temporal phases may pose to empowerment. These phases were particularly enhanced in the case studied here, given the shift from relief to recovery. But long-term social organizing in non-disaster situations may also undergo different phases that potentially condition empowerment processes, albeit not as explicitly expressed as here. This thesis demonstrated how complexity increased over time, as the movement engaged in issues that were more political in nature. As complexity grew, outside activists became less willing to transfer control from themselves to residents. In line with this, to understand influence, it may be relevant to ask questions about the types of practical and external problems that the movement is engaging in, how complex these problems are, and if there is anything in the external conditions that may cause complexity to shift or increase. Empirical openness to the inner dynamics of interaction, as well as to the external circumstances of the context, is important to unearthing answers to such questions.

Secondly, the analysis in this thesis highlights a few factors that need to be taken into account in future analysis of empowerment. The inner dynamics between initiators and target groups is relevant to look into in order to understand issues of power and control, as is the way an organizational entity is set up. Who is invited, who gets to be part of agenda setting, and who gets to become a leader are central issues that can cast a clearer light on the issue of power. But it is equally important to pay attention to the processes through which these things are determined, and try and tease out the subtleties in the relationships and interactions between privileged initiators and non-privileged target groups. A political ethnographic approach is well suited for exploring inner dynamics within social movements. As della Porta states, ethnographic research allows for “being on the ground to accurately capture fluid, shifting conditions” and enable a tracing of “developing mobilization patterns in embedded social contexts” (della Porta et al. 2014 p. 149). A political ethnographic orientation that seeks to explore a “from-within” perspective, as well as pays attention to the context, is a good start (Gustafsson et al. 2016 p 13). It especially lends itself well to exploring complexities in informal practices of power (Gustafsson et al. 2016 p. 22). The particular techniques may vary, but if possible it is well worth the effort to observe processes in real-time through participatory observations, in addition to conducting semi-structured interviews. As this thesis demonstrated, the triangulation between material from participatory observations and semi-structured interviews was highly useful since it pointed to discrepancies between what was said and what was practiced. The results further point to how fruitful it is to take into account actors’ ideological outlooks and understandings of what power and empowerment is. A classical power analysis that looks at the extent to which an actor has power over another, would not

have been able to capture the richness and nuances of the type of empowerment process studied here. Here, actors were self-aware of their own privileges and had an explicitly stated will to change the structures of power that they were in. The organizing ideals that were elicited based on a close reading of the activists' ideological basis for organizing was an important part of the work. Other emancipatory projects may be based on similar or other types of ideals, but nonetheless it is relevant to explore the motivations behind why organizing takes on the expressions it does. In addition, the importance of focusing on the receiving end of emancipatory projects was evident. The analysis outlined what it means to be someone who is perceived to be in need of empowerment. There seems to be a patronizing component here, which is a delicate issue and one that may trigger conflicts if not handled well.

Concluding Remarks

At one of the participatory observations I conducted, a fundraising party event for Rockaway Wildfire in a rundown industrial building in Brooklyn, a climate justice activist was introducing the work of Rockaway Wildfire. The presenter talked about racial injustice and how tightly coupled it is with climate change. Rockaway Wildfire, she said, is “made up of people from shorefront communities that bear the brunt of both climate and racial injustice”. She finished her introduction by saying:

It is people like Wildfire who's gonna teach us what to do when the storm comes knocking on our doors. (Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 2, 2014)

Her statement echoes throughout this dissertation. By studying the case of OS and Rockaway Wildfire, and the attempts at empowering Rockaway residents after Hurricane Sandy, we learned a substantial deal about something that has been largely silent within the DRR scholarship. Vulnerability differs structurally across social groups. This phenomenon is closely connected to ongoing processes of economic, social and political marginalization – but very few studies focus on how such marginalization can be altered and the role of social justice movement actors in affecting change. To fill this gap, this thesis explored activists' attempts at empowering vulnerable groups in the wake of a storm. It found that the process, although it started as a promising endeavor, in time came to be marked by tension, resistance and conflict, which eventually led to a breakdown of the emancipatory project. These results imply that the challenge of creating empowering milieus is more pressing than previous DRR research suggests.

Such research, highly relevant as it is in our contemporary world, needs to continue to look for practical examples of attempting to reduce vulnerability.

Social justice movements are interesting arenas in this regard. And when exploring such cases, there must be a more fine-grained incorporation of theory from fields of study such as political science, sociology and anthropology, because it is within those fields that the most conceptually mature and critical approaches to inclusion, participation and empowerment can be found. If we are genuinely interested in how structurally differentiated vulnerability can be altered through grassroots processes that are set up to empower marginalized communities, the nuances and complexities of micro processes ought not to be neglected. When studying emancipatory projects, such attention is important because it is within the inner dynamics we may find the obstacles. If we study these things at more aggregated levels, we could conclude that emancipatory projects are successful in achieving empowerment, when in fact they may reinscribe unwanted power imbalances. This perspective is indeed knowledge that may come in handy when the next storm comes knocking at our door, especially if we want to alter the unjust effects that it most likely will have.

I want to make one final note on how to interpret the analysis of this thesis, which could be interpreted as a critique of do-gooders. I want to stress that such an understanding is very far from my intention. I was simply interested in exploring a practically and theoretically interesting problem, namely that there may be something inherently contentious about trying to empower someone else. I ended up spending years combing the insides of a winding, organically shifting, and sometimes very messy process in which this problem was at the core. People who chose to engage in empowerment projects within social justice movements are often driven by a genuine frustration with injustices, even if they are on the privileged side of the equation, and they most often honestly wish to make a difference. The outside activists I interviewed devoted months and even years working toward something they believed would make a difference for marginalized residents. So it is important to remember that these problems can ensue despite the best intentions from initiating organizers, and despite their well-developed awareness of power imbalances and privileges.

Back at the fundraising event, after a young black man from Rockaway Wildfire had given a speech – wildly applauded by everyone in the big hall – a hip hop group of indigenous artists made an impromptu, politically charged rap performance. Eventually the whole party moved up to the rooftop of the Brooklyn building where people danced under the NYC night sky. While the sun slowly rose I chatted away with a few of the activists and residents while making mental notes of everything I would scribble down in my field journal as soon as I got back home.

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviews

Number	Category	Date	Place ¹	Type
1	1. Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator	Nov 26 2013	Manhattan	Respondent Interview
2	1. Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator	Nov 26 2013	Manhattan	Respondent Interview
3	1. Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator	Dec 4 2103	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
4	1. Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 2. Rockaway Wildfire Organizer	Dec 8 2013 Continuous field conversations 2013-2015	Brooklyn Rockaway	Respondent Interview Continuous field Conversations
5	1. Resident and Core Coordinator 2. Rockaway Wildfire Organizer	Dec 6 2013	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
6	1. Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 2. Resident and Core Coordinator	April 29 2013 Dec 6 2013	Rockaway	Respondent Interviews
7	1. Storm-affected Resident 2. Resident and Core Coordinator 3. Rockaway Wildfire Organizer	Dec 11 2013 Sep 28 2014	Rockaway	Respondent Interviews

¹ I have chosen not to convey any details about the exact location of the interviews. Doing so would have uncovered the anonymity of some of the interviewees, since interviews were sometimes conducted in organizational offices, or in people's homes.

8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Storm-affected Resident 2. Resident and Core Coordinator 	Dec 9 2013	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 2. Resident and Member 3. Resident and ex-member of Rockaway Wildfire 	Dec 12 2013	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resident and Member 2. Coalition Member 	Dec 4 2103 Sep 25 2014	Rockaway	Respondent Interviews
11	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resident and Representative of Community Organization 	Nov 26 2013	Manhattan	Respondent Interview
12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 2. Non-resident OS Activist 	Nov 27 2013	Brooklyn	Respondent Interview
13	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 	Dec 23 2013	-	Respondent Skype Interview
14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resident and Member 2. Resident and ex-member of Rockaway Wildfire 	Nov-Dec 2013	Rockaway	Respondent Continuous Field conversations
15	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resident and Member 	Dec 6 2013	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
16	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 2. Resident and Member 	Sep 23 2014	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
17	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resident and Member 2. Ex Member of Rockaway Wildfire 	Sep 24 2014	-	Respondent Email interview
18	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 2. Non-resident OS Activist 	Dec 11 2013	Rockaway	Respondent Interview

19	1. Non-resident Relief Volunteer	Dec 2 2013	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
20	1. Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 2. Resident and Member 3. Coalition Member	2013-2016	Rockaway	Respondent Continuous Field conversations
21	1. Private Developer Representative	Sep 29 2014	Queens	Respondent Interview
22	1. Housing and Preservation Department Representative	Sep 29 2014	Manhattan	Respondent Interview
23	1. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Representative	October 29th 2014	-	Respondent Phone Interview
24	1. New York City Department of City Planning Representative	October 2 2014	Manhattan	Respondent Interview
25	1. Queens Public Transit Committee Representative	Sep 27 2014	Rockaway	Informant Interview
26	1. Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning	Sep 30 2014	Manhattan	Informant Interview
27	1. Non-resident OS Activist 2. Occupy Spokes Council Representative	Sep 21 2014	Manhattan	Respondent Interview
28	1. New York State Assemblyman Representing Rockaway District	Oct 1 2014	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
29	1. New York City Councilman Representing Rockaway District	Oct 6 2014	Rockaway	Informant Interview
30	1. Resident and Representative of Community Board	Oct 8 2014	-	Respondent Phone Interview

31	1. Coalition Member	Oct 7 2014	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
32	1. Resident and Representative of Community Organization	Sep 22 2014	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
33	1. Resident and Representative of Community Organization	Sep 25 2014	Rockaway	Respondent Interview
34	1. Resident and Representative of Community Organization	Sep 24, 2014	Rockaway	Informant Interview
35	1. Resident and Representative of Community Organization	Sep 2014	Rockaway	Informant Interview
36	1. Resident and Representative of Community Organization	Sep 2014	Rockaway	Informant Interview
37	1. Expert Organization Representative	Sep 30 2014	Manhattan	Respondent Interview
38	1. Resident and Representative of Community Organization	Continuous Field Conversations 2013-1016	Rockaway	Informant Field Conversations
39	1. Representative of Architect Firm	Nov 17 2014	Stockholm	Respondent Interview
40	1. Representative of Community Organization	Nov 21 2013	Rockaway	Informant Interview
41	1. Representative of Community Organization	Dec 2 2013	Rockaway	Informant Interview
42	1. Representative of Community Organization	Dec 2013	Rockaway	Informant Interview

43	1. Representative of Community Organization	Sep 2013	Rockaway	Informant interview
44	1. Representative of Community Organization	Sep 27, 2014	Rockaway	Informant Field Conversation

Appendix 2: Observations

Participatory Observations (8)

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 1, 2013
April 29th, 2013, Cornaga Church, Rockaway

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 2, 2013
November 3rd, 2013 at Arverne Pilgrime Church, Rockaway

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 3, 2013
November 10th, 2013 at Arverne Pilgrime Church, Rockaway

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 4, 2013
November 19th, 2013 at Arverne Pilgrime Church, Rockaway

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 1, 2014,
September 14th, 2014 “Climate Justice Bash” at Bays Water Park, Rockaway

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 2, 2014,
September 19th, 2014, Fundraiser Party Rockaway Wildfire, Bushwick

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 3, 2014,
September 21st, 2014, “People’s Climate March”, Manhattan

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 4, 2014,
September 27th, 2014, Screening of film about Rockaway and the CBA-coalition, Rockaway

Field Observations (17)

Field Observation NYC Office of Emergency Management, Study visit
April 22nd, 2013, Manhattan

Field Observation New Jersey Police Department/Office of Emergency Management, Study Visit
April 23rd, 2013, Trenton, New Jersey

Field Observation Fire Department New York Head Quarters, Study Visit
April 24th, 2013, Brooklyn

Field Observation NUY Langone Medical Center, Study Visit
April 25th, 2013, Manhattan

Field Observation 2 Red Cross Head Quarters, Study Visit
April 25th, 2013, Manhattan

Field Observation Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Joint Field Office NYC, Study Visit
April 25th, 2013, Manhattan

Field Observation “Sandy one Year On”, a seminar organized by the Superstorm Research Lab
November 11th, 2013, Institute for Public Knowledge, New York University, Manhattan

Field Observation City Hall Rally, Manhattan, 2013
November 15th, 2013, New York City Council, Manhattan

Field Observation Center of Architecture, IAI New York Chapter, Workshop,
November 26th, 2013, Manhattan

Field Observation Community Board 14 Meeting
September 9th, 2014, The Knight of Columbus Hall, Rockaway

Field Observation Private Party
September 13th, 2014, Rockaway

Field Observation Hunter College, Screening of film about Rockaway and the CBA-coalition
September 15th, 2014, Hunter College, Manhattan

Field Observation Demonstration for Prolonging Ferry Rides to Rockaway,
September 22nd, 2014, Rockaway and Manhattan

Field Observation Flood Wall Street Demonstration,
September 22nd, 2014, Manhattan

Field Observation Community Board 14 Subcommittee Meeting on repair of Boardwalk
October 1st, 2014, Rockaway

Field Observation Aljazeera journalists meet pipeline activists, Rockaway, 2014
October 3rd, 2014, Rockaway

Field Observations Yana, Rockaway, 2013-2014
Volunteer work during field periods: November- December 2013; September-October 2014

Appendix 3: Empirical Material per Chapter

Chapter 1: Introduction: Disasters, Vulnerability and Power

None as direct data points

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives: Empowerment in Post-Disaster Emancipatory Projects

None as direct data points

Chapter 3: Methodological Approaches: Possibilities and Challenges of Ethnography

Interviews

Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4

Participatory Observations

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 1, 2013

Field Observations

Field Observations Yana, Rockaway, 2013-2014

Field Observation Community Board 14 Meeting, Rockaway, 2014

Field Observation Private Party, Rockaway, 2014

Field Conversations

Field conversation Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 20,

Field Conversation Ex Member Rockaway Wildfire 14

Field Conversation Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 3

Chapter 4: Setting the Stage: The Case of Hurricane Sandy, Rockaway and Occupy Sandy

Interviews

Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 12

Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18

Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4

Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 6

Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 16

Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 5

Interview Storm-affected Resident 8

Interview Storm-affected Resident 7

Interview Private Developer Representative 21

Interview Housing and Preservation Department Representative 22

Interview New York City Department of City Planning Representative 24

Interview New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Representative 23

Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 4

Interview Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3

Participatory Observations

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 1, 2014
Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 2, 2014

Field Observations

Field Observation City Hall Rally, Manhattan, 2013

Field Conversations

Field Conversation Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 20

Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis: The Relief Phase

Interviews

Category A: Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer
Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 12
Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 18
Interview Non-resident OS activist and Relief Volunteer 4

Category B: Non-resident Relief Volunteer
Interview Non-resident Relief Volunteer 19

Category C: Storm-affected Resident
Interview Storm-affected Resident 7
Interview Storm-affected Resident 8

Category D: Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer
Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 6
Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 16
Interview Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 9

Participatory Observations

None as direct data points

Field Observations

Field Observation Red Cross Head Quarters Study Visit, Manhattan, 2013
Field Observations Yana, Rockaway, 2013-2014

Field Conversations

Field Conversations Storm-affected Resident and Relief Volunteer 20

Chapter 6: Thematic Analysis: The Organizational Formation Phase

Interviews

Category E: Resident and member
Interview Resident and Member 15
Interview Resident and Member 17
Interview Resident and Member 9
Interview Resident and Member 10
Interview Resident and Member 16

Category F: Resident and Core Coordinator
Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 5
Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 7
Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 6
Interview Resident and Core Coordinator 8

Category G: Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator
Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 1
Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 2
Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 3
Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 4
Non-resident OS Activist and Core Coordinator 13

Category H: Non-resident other
Interview Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning 26
Interview Non-resident OS Activist 27
Interview Non-resident OS Activist 12
Interview Non-resident OS Activist 18

Category I: Resident other
Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 11
Interview New York State Assemblyman Representing Rockaway District 28
Interview Queens Public Transit Committee Representative 25

Participatory Observations

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 1, 2013
Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 2, 2013
Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 3, 2013
Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 4, 2013

Field Conversations

Field Conversation Representative of Community Organization 44
Field Conversations Resident and Member 14
Field Conversations Resident and Member 20

Field Observations

None as direct data points

Chapter 7: Thematic Analysis: The External Collaboration and Advocacy Phase

Interviews

Category J: Rockaway Wildfire Organizer
Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 7
Interview Rockaway Wildfire Organizer 5

Category K: Coalition Member
Interview Coalition Member 20
Interview Coalition Member 31
Interview Coalition Member 10

Category L: Resident other

Interview Resident and Representative of Community Board 30

Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 32

Interview Resident and Representative of Community Organization 11

Interview Resident and ex-member of Rockaway Wildfire 9

Category M: Non-resident other

Interview Private Developer Representative 21

Interview Housing and Preservation Department Representative 22

Interview New York City Department of City Planning Representative 24

Interview New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Representative 23

Interview Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning 26

Interview Expert Organization Representative 37

Interview Representative of Architect Firm 39

Interview Occupy Spokes Council Representative 27

Interview ex Member of Rockaway Wildfire 17

Participatory Observations

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Meeting 4, 2013

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 1, 2014

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 2, 2014

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 3, 2014

Field Observations

None as direct data points as direct data points

Field Conversations

Field Conversations Resident and ex-member of Rockaway Wildfire 14

Chapter 8: Conclusions: Findings and Implications

Interviews

None as direct data points

Participatory Observations

Participatory Observation Rockaway Wildfire Event 2, 2014

Field Observations

None as direct data points

Field Conversations

None as direct data points

