Why ‘small is beautiful’ in municipal disaster prevention

Emily Wilkinson
Department of Geography
University College London
Aim

• Understand similarities and differences in municipal approaches to disaster
• Processes of change
• How institutional context shapes municipal choices and capacities
Why is this interesting?

- International focus on local-level DRR (decentralisation, partnerships, participation)
- Local govt expected to formulate and implement DRR
- Local capacity being shaped by:
  1. Decentralisation of public administration
  2. National disaster management reform
- Local government has greater responsibility
- But does it have the capacity?
The literature

• John Handmer (1996): Potential indicators of local DRR capacity = power or authority; availability of money and expertise; and size in terms of population.

• Allison Rowland (2001): small municipalities in Mexico are disadvantaged:
  ✓ very limited financial resources
  ✓ low levels of civil society participation
  ✓ per capita share of intergovernmental transfers is lower
  ✓ poverty is higher

• Council of Europe (1995): local governments with fewer than 5,000 people lack the capacity to undertake many tasks effectively
Mexico: The Yucatan Peninsula

- Highly exposed to hurricanes
- Municipalities with medium and high levels of marginalisation
- State of Quintana Roo: 8 municipalities (3 with high levels)
- State of Yucatán: 5 municipalities
Methodology

- Qualitative, comparative case study
- 2 states – five municipalities
- Time period: 1999-2008

Case study selection
- Coastal municipalities
- Highly exposed to hurricanes
- Mix of economic, social and political characteristics:
  - Size
  - Economic activities
  - Marginalisation
  - Indigenous population
  - Political party
  - Fiscal dependency

Data collection method
- In-depth interviews with govt, civil society and community stakeholders
- Participation/observation in CP meetings
- Textual analysis of plans
The case studies

State of Yucatán
- Río Lagartos
- San Felipe
- Tizimín

State of Quintana Roo
- Lázaro Cárdenas
- Felipe Carrillo Puerto
Case study characteristics

1. Río Lagartos
   • Small popn
   • <50% primary econ
   • Med marginalisation
   • <50% indigenous popn
   • Different political party
   • High fiscal dependency

2. San Felipe
   • Small popn
   • >50% primary econ
   • Med marginalisation
   • <50% indigenous popn
   • Different political party
   • High fiscal dependency

3. Tizimín
   • Medium sized popn
   • <50% primary econ
   • High marginalisation
   • <50% indigenous popn
   • Same political party
   • Low fiscal dependency

4. Lázaro Cárdenas
   • Small popn
   • >50% primary econ
   • High marginalisation
   • <50% indigenous popn
   • Same political party
   • High fiscal dependency

5. Felipe Carrillo Puerto
   • Medium sized popn
   • >50% primary econ
   • High marginalisation
   • >50% indigenous popn
   • Different political party
   • High fiscal dependency
### Case study characteristics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Municipalities with possible advantages for DRR</th>
<th>Size (popn)</th>
<th>Popn density</th>
<th>Economy</th>
<th>Level of marginalisation</th>
<th>Indigenous popn</th>
<th>Political party</th>
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DRR performance

SIMILARITIES

• General improvement in all disaster phases
• Municipal govt most involved in preparedness and response
• State and Federal authorities most involved in reconstruction
• Significant endogenous efforts:

‘They have their seeds from the region, the old ones that are very resilient. These are stored in a safe place so that they can be used the following year’.

(UNDP promoter, Lázaro Cárdenas)
DRR performance

- Mitigation measures neglected by all municipal governments
- Communications improved:
  - via radio
  - visits to coast
- Communities know how to protect assets
- Little govt support for economic recovery
- Housing reconstruction = most highly rated DM activity in all municipalities
DRR performance

DIFFERENCES

• DM activities in small, coastal municipalities highly rated
• Improvement in temp shelters, neglect of community shelters (in-land)
• Evacuations improved on the coast
  - official disaster preparedness focus
  - communities more organised
  - confusion in-land
DRR performance

In Felipe Carrillo Puerto:

‘Some people did not leave before Hurricane Dean because they did not know they had to. No one comes and tells us we have to evacuate or where to go. Some people go of their accord but the most vulnerable get left behind’.

(Resident, Chunhuhub, Felipe Carrillo Puerto)
DRR performance

- Emergency relief and damage assessments = most contentious area of DM
- Coordination and political problems especially in FCP and LC

  e.g. FCP there was political tension and inefficiency:

  ‘The state government sent aid directly to the communities…and after helping the communities that support them, they sent the rest of the aid to the municipal government to distribute. People were annoyed of course because the municipal government arrived later and didn’t send as much’.

  (UNDP promoter in FCP)
DRR performance

In LC the State Government took over:

‘No one took charge before the hurricane to make sure the aid was ready so that help could reach the communities quickly. The Municipal President was in Spain when Wilma hit and did not return until one week later. This meant no one was officially in charge, which delayed the municipal response and annoyed people’. (Former planning director, Lázaro Cárdenas)
DRR performance

DRR through housing reconstruction:

‘San Felipe was totally transformed. Now people have a secure house and can leave their things inside’

(Former Municipal President, San Felipe)
Conclusions

• Despite lack of resources, small, coastal municipalities were:
  ✓ better prepared
  ✓ responded more effectively

• Explanations:
  ✓ Geographical closeness
  ✓ Institutional closeness
  ✓ Understanding of risks
  ✓ Greater civil society participation

• So far from being a disadvantage, maybe ‘small is beautiful’ for DRR?
OTHER ISSUES

• Trust | Built before disaster

• Leadership

• Many improvements in DRR

• Not necessarily a ‘managed’ approach