

Agency in the Barrio: Exploring the Intersection of Participation, Politics and Urban
Development in Guatemala City

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ABSTRACT

Completed as a series of article-length manuscripts, this dissertation reflects four interrelated aspects of my research on the topics of citizen participation, political practices of vote buying and approaches to community development in low-income urban areas, in the collection of neighborhoods known as Ciudad Peronia on the edge of Guatemala City. Together, the four articles in this thesis explore varying aspects of the social and political dynamics present in the interrelated processes of community organization and local development in Ciudad Peronia. The essays survey the complex array of contextual features that influence local outcomes, while also highlighting the important decisions of key actors. I highlight the interplay between context and agency, and in doing so, provide insight into the efforts of individuals and groups to construct meaningful citizenship rights, especially to basic living conditions, by means of a diverse array of self-organization initiatives and a variety of engagement strategies with the state. Despite the many obstacles revealed in this research, numerous individuals I encountered in preparing this work made a concerted effort to secure dignity and inclusion for themselves and members of their communities.

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List of Abbreviations

BANVI: *Banco Nacional de Vivienda* (National Housing Bank)

COCODE: *Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo* (Community Development Council)

COMUDE: *Consejo Municipal de Desarrollo* (Municipal Development Council)

CM: COCODE Multisectorial

MDC: Municipal Development Committee

MT: *Mesas Temáticas* (Thematic Working Groups)

PDI: Peronia Development Initiative

Introduction

This dissertation grew out of my interest in experiments in participatory governance in Latin America. I originally set out to understand whether and how new forms of citizen participation in the region were able to address the “shallow” democracy often practiced there and observed by many scholars (Diamond, Plattner, & Abente Brun, 2008; Dominguez & Shifter, 2008). Well documented cases of participatory governance, such as Porto Alegre, Brazil, had presented an optimistic picture of the possibilities of strengthening democratic possibility through institutionalized citizen involvement (Abers, 1998; Heller, 2001). Nonetheless, other scholars argued that efforts to promote participation represented a new “tyranny” that did not address fundamental issues of power (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Still other authors called for more investigation of “ordinary” cases of engagement to understand the factors that might contribute to positive, i.e., increasingly democratic, outcomes (Cornwall, 2004; Hickey & Mohan, 2004a). In order to address multiple dimensions of these three linked strands of argument, I sought to provide evidence to advance scholarly understanding of citizen participation under challenging circumstances.

My research addressed a cluster of communities on the edge of the Guatemala City metropolitan area known collectively as Ciudad Peronia. The area is made up of some two dozen distinct neighborhoods, ranging from squatter settlements to working class subdivisions, but is generally characterized by low incomes and significant poverty. Since the founding of Ciudad Peronia, residents have sought to organize themselves and create opportunities for citizen participation in the community’s development. These processes have been fraught with challenges, but have represented important attempts to exercise agency, while contributing to improvement of the area’s diverse neighborhoods. Yet citizen participation and community progress have been limited by numerous obstacles, including low levels of trust among residents, inconsistent contributions from government institutions, patronage and vote buying. The following articles explore in greater depth the dynamics of multiple efforts to expand residents’ participation in the neighborhoods I studied and, in so doing, provide insights into broader questions of agency and citizenship in low-income urban communities.

Chapter 2 explores the history of spaces for citizen participation in Ciudad Peronia. My participant observation of one such instance, the *Mesas Temáticas* (thematic working groups),

allowed me to explore the dynamics of community involvement. The article investigates the challenges faced by area residents who sought to maintain participatory spaces to involve diverse local and government actors in promoting community development in Peronia. The struggles and setbacks I observed have implications for the study of citizen participation more broadly.

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of coproduction, defined as joint contributions by both state and community actors to development and service provision. This essay describes development processes in both Ciudad Peronia and a neighboring low-income community, focusing on the character of neighborhood relationships and external inputs aimed at securing change. Ultimately, I find that neither scenario achieved coproduction and I offer several conclusions concerning helpful strategies and long-term prospects for collaborative development processes for slum upgrading based on my case analysis.

Chapter 4 focuses on the possibilities for individual and collective efficacy in Peronia. The article introduces a framework for empowerment and discusses the intersection of citizen participation and emancipatory processes. I draw on interviews with individuals who participated in local organizations and those that did not in order to explore this relationship. Finally, I turn to the role of resident organizations in catalyzing collective action at the neighborhood level, drawing on four case studies that together illustrate the diverse outcomes of such efforts in Peronia.

Chapter 5 examines the relationship between partisan electoral politics and community organization and development in Ciudad Peronia. This essay describes the characteristics of clientelism and vote buying at the national and neighborhood levels. I analyze the linkages between political party representatives and community leaders and organizations and present data from surveys and interviews to illustrate the perceptions of Peronia residents and neighborhood representatives concerning the partisan involvement of the latter group. Finally, I explore the details of the political involvement of several community leaders, demonstrating that the relationships in which these individuals chose to participate (or not) with political parties was complex.

Finally, Chapter 6 offers brief concluding remarks that summarize the key findings of the study. I highlight several issues that emerged from the investigation and offer policy recommendations and avenues for further research.

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Chapter 2

Fighting for Participatory Space: An Exploration of Civic Engagement in Ciudad Peronia, Guatemala

Introduction

Citizen participation, while far from being a new concept in the history of Western social and political thought, has received significant attention in recent decades from practitioners and theorists alike. This article contains three sections and draws on insights revealed by contemporary debates concerning engagement to explore the dynamics of individual and civic involvement in the context of a diverse, but predominantly low-income urban community on the periphery of Guatemala City known as Ciudad Peronia. After a brief introduction to the idea of participatory spaces and their conceptualization, I explore the evolution of participation capacity building efforts in Peronia, outlining three instances of such attempts in the community's history. Finally, I analyze critical dimensions of the initiatives discussed to glean the insights they provide concerning the possibility of democratic, inclusive and meaningful citizen involvement.

The academic literature includes numerous case studies of engagement in diverse contexts throughout the global north and south. Many analysts have responded to Andrea Cornwall's call for, "new ethnographies of participation that help locate spaces for participation in the places in which they occur, framing their possibilities with reference to actual political, social, cultural and historical particularities rather than idealized democratic practice" (2004, p. 87). Yet knowledge of the challenges of individual participation and the spaces in which the practice of citizenship takes place is still incomplete. Specifically, there is still much to be learned about the ways politics and power enable and constrain the possibilities of actors within participatory spaces (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Hickey & Mohan, 2004b) and particularly how local residents shape such opportunities and processes (Funder, 2010). Finally, more evidence of the difference that involvement makes in policy or development outcomes and the conditions that generate such results is needed if the case for engagement as potentially empowering or transformative is to be sustained (Gaventa, 2006b; Gaventa & Barrett, 2010). In exploring spaces for citizen participation in Ciudad Peronia, I analyze both the context of involvement—particularly the politics of engagement in the locality—and the outcomes of such processes.

Many (though certainly not all) cases presented in the literature have focused on a specific project, initiative or process that displayed real or claimed participatory characteristics. Such instances of individual or group involvement have often been categorized as “invited” or “created” (or “claimed”) spaces, depending on whether they were initiated by an authority (often the state) or by civil society or community actors, respectively. In Peronia, however, such distinctions have blurred as participatory opportunities have been created, closed, been refounded and have continued to evolve with different configurations of state and society involvement. The hybrid and protean nature of the engagement possibilities evident in this poor community, though often nominally sharing goals and structure, adds another layer of complexity to this case and allows analysis of the influence of an evolving context and constellation of actors as well as of different outcomes resulting from each instance of involvement.

Understanding Participatory Spaces: Context and Outcomes

Participation has been much debated in the social sciences in recent decades. Enthusiasm for the idea has thus far survived the critique that much of what constitutes engagement in practice is simply a “tyranny of techniques,” a managed process that does not allow the democratic empowerment it claims to catalyze (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Contemporary scholarship characterizes participatory spaces and opportunities as sites of cooperation and contestation as well as thoroughly embedded in structures of power and politics (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007). In the end, many who have analyzed citizen involvement point to Sherry Arnstein’s observation (1969) decades ago that what is often described as participation is in reality a diverse set of activities, some of which provide opportunity for citizens to take part in or control communal decision-making and others that simply serve to manipulate or placate those individuals.

At its best, participation allows citizenship to be transformed from an idea into practice. Lister captured this phenomenon well by stating, “Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined” (1998, p. 238). Engagement can place power in the hands of individuals and communities and allow them to exercise their agency to make decisions and solve problems, thus presenting the opportunity to create a more civic-minded citizenry and more responsive institutions simultaneously. It is this form of involvement that has been proposed as part of the solution to the estrangement of

individuals from their political institutions in fledgling and mature democracies alike (Gaventa, 2002).

The promise of participation as the practice of citizenship has led to continued experimentation with spaces and processes of involvement in diverse communities across the globe. To understand better how the possibilities of engagement might be more fully realized, spaces for individual and community involvement must be analyzed from different perspectives. I present four important aspects of participation that serve as lenses for understanding the evolution of resident engagement in Ciudad Peronia:

- Spatial
- Temporal
- Political-institutional
- Outcomes

I treat each of these dimensions next.

Spatial

Many authors analyzing experiments in citizen participation have used the term “space” to describe these initiatives, which “are seen as opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships that affect their lives and interests” (Gaventa, 2006a, p. 26). Conceptualizing participation spatially also facilitates understanding of such processes as inherently bounded and circumscribed geographically. Participatory spaces are demarcated physically, a meeting place or forum, but also politically and socially.

In describing engagement spatially, scholars have defined such opportunities along a continuum, with invited openings on one end and created/claimed ones on the other. Invited spaces are those provided by an authority in which individuals and communities are “allowed” (and potentially, encouraged) to participate. Conversely, created/claimed openings are those that result organically from the mobilization and organization of actors around a set of claims, goals or grievances. The case of Peronia demonstrates that participatory spaces may not permanently continue as invited or created in character, but may shift over time, as colonization or appropriation by one set of actors or another alters the nature of contingencies and possibilities of engagement.

Invited, created and other types of opportunities are bounded in different ways. Andrea Cornwall has noted that these openings are far from neutral, “Spaces come to be defined by those who are invited into them, as well as those doing the inviting” (Cornwall, 2004, p. 80). Cornwall has also argued that while all spaces may be subverted, the agency of actors is likely to be limited by the intentions of those who created the opportunities as well as by the relationships and inequalities that individuals bring with them.

Finally, a spatial understanding of participation encourages consideration of the scale of possibility versus the character of the challenges faced by individuals and communities. While feasibility dictates that the majority of participatory spaces exist at the local level, communities face constraints and opportunities stemming from the regional, national and global scales of political and economic activities as well. Ignoring these higher level structural challenges by focusing on community issues can be a critical limitation of participatory approaches (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). In the case of Peronia, engagement occurs in a context of extreme inequality, segregation and exclusion, the product of the underlying political economy of the city and country in which it is embedded. These systemic constraints circumscribe the possibilities for change that can be achieved through citizen participation throughout Latin America (Rodgers, 2012).

Temporal

Participation has temporal, in addition to spatial, dimensions. Engagement may take the form of a series of meetings, a single demonstration or an institutionalized opportunity for ongoing dialogue and decision-making. One-off events or a series of encounters may be important for making a pressing decision or resolving an important conflict. Yet these time-bound instances of participation may be soon forgotten. Worse, they may generate complacency and encourage the sentiment of “mission accomplished.” Although individuals may have exercised their citizenship and agency in important ways, perhaps leading to desired results, these continue to exist only to the extent they are practiced.¹

¹ This statement is debatable. However, for individuals and communities that require collective mobilization in order to exercise citizenship and agency effectively, a loss of momentum due to the apparent resolution of their problem or conflict, by agreement, passage of a law or other outcome, may undermine the continued alignment and action of those actors. According to Michel Foucault, “Liberty is a practice. . . . The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them. This is why almost all of these laws and institutions are quite capable of being turned around. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because ‘liberty’ is what must be exercised. . . . I think it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom” (1984, p. 245).

When participatory spaces are institutionalized they may become sites for engaged democratic governance. Although spontaneous, short-term mobilizations can have incredible power (as seen recently in the Middle East), it is action within participatory spaces in the *longue durée* of political struggle that has the potential to reshape state and society relationships (Williams, 2004). Such an effort requires and encourages vigorous citizenship and consequently may constitute a path to deeper democratic practice.

Political-Institutional

As mentioned above, politics and power are central to the possibilities of citizen participation. As a result, I analyze these processes from the perspectives of representation and inclusion. I also raise questions concerning the relationship between participatory spaces and other institutions and sites of decision-making and political mobilization.

Even when participatory spaces are open to all and engagement is encouraged and facilitated, there will always be individuals who, for different reasons, do not become involved. Even in best case scenarios, only a minority of the population is able to and chooses to engage. Thus, whether acknowledged or not, participatory spaces are often sites of representation in which individuals (or organizations) speak for other groups and communities, while also making decisions on their behalf. Women, the poor and other marginalized groups are typically those who face the most barriers to effective participation in governance (Mahmud, 2007; Navarro, 2010) and who therefore often find themselves represented by others, including civil society organizations. Several scholars, however, have disputed the legitimacy of the representative claims of such groups, whether nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or grassroots organizations (Brysk, 2000; Chandhoke, 2009; de Wit & Berner, 2009). These analysts have contended that many such organizations lack accountability measures and consequently, far from providing venues for voice, their efforts integrate the impoverished into vertical, dependent power relations. The question, “who speaks for the poor,” must be asked of all participatory spaces within which decisions are made that affect marginalized populations. If the answer is, “not those actors themselves,” then representational claims must be carefully justified.

Cornwall and Coelho (2007) have argued that irrespective of formal, and even legal inclusion, marginalized groups frequently, although not always, continue to be excluded or further subordinated despite their engagement with supposed participatory spaces. These authors

have further observed that new involvement opportunities and institutions are subject to the constraint of existing power structures and political culture. Robert Putnam (1993) reached a similar conclusion in his study of political organizations in Italy. Finally, Cornwall and her co-author note that many formal participatory spaces lack “teeth” —institutional backing for decisions made—and in such instances are hollow and may actually undermine the agency of those involved by engaging them in a process that may offer little more than the illusion of meaningful decision-making.

Lastly, interested scholars have argued the political and institutional context of participatory spaces is a critical factor in societal actors’ abilities to utilize these possibilities to promote positive change. Are democratic spaces integrated with other institutions and sites of decision-making and deliberation or are they isolated and relegated to the margins? For participatory openings to provide opportunities to strengthen citizenship and agency they must encourage spillover actions or contagion effects into other arenas of public (and private) life (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007). That is, engagement spaces must become embedded in a wider political project of citizenship building if they are actually to bring about the transformative outcomes often associated with them (Hickey & Mohan, 2004b).

Outcomes

Given the possibility that opportunities for participation may be hollow or toothless or represent instances of rhetoric of citizen control and empowerment without substance, it is important to examine their impacts. Often the justification for involvement and its expected results is framed in terms of “means” and “ends.” The first set of outcomes is related to the specific goals of an initiative, which individual and community participation is intended to facilitate. Indeed, what often matters most to residents is whether their dwelling gets piped water or they are allowed equitable access to local forest resources. They may consider any other gains arising from their involvement as distinctly secondary.

Participatory interventions often involve planning or carrying out community development projects or processes. In such instances, local knowledge (and resources, including uncompensated labor) is sought in order to realize program outcomes and community benefits, although such engagement is rarely straightforward (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). Elite control and potential capture of civic participation processes may lead to results that reinforce local inequality, rather than benefit its poorest members, the often-stated objective of such

interventions (de Wit & Berner, 2009; Labonne & Chase, 2009). Put differently, the ultimate outcomes of involvement for all participants are typically unknown at a project's inception and individuals therefore make their own calculation of potential benefits and costs prior to deciding whether to dedicate their time and resources to such endeavors (Cornwall, 2008).

Another result of engagement in participatory spaces is related to involvement as an end, valuable in itself for the potential empowerment of individuals and communities. However, scholars have critiqued this posited benefit of participation as lacking empirical foundation (Cleaver, 2001). Analysts have also argued that this assertion is too often the product of assumption, rather than arising from an honest accounting of the complexity of the exercise of agency by poor and marginalized actors ((Cleaver, 2001, 2004). Additionally, potential elite control or capture of participatory processes casts doubt on the democratizing effects that some analysts have theorized result from such opportunities (Fritzen, 2007; Funder, 2010).

Some interested scholars have, however, outlined circumstances in which participatory spaces might increase the potential for community control and empowerment. Fung and Wright (2003a), for example, have discussed the need for inhabitants to develop “countervailing power,” by which they mean essentially robust civil society organizations, to counterbalance other powerful local actors. In the same spirit, Cornwall and Coelho (2007) have proposed a set of conditions that might allow for inclusive and meaningful participation:

Amplifying the democratic potential and enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the participatory sphere, the cases presented here suggest, needs to take place on three fronts: catalyzing and supporting processes of social mobilization through which marginalized groups can nurture new leaders, enhance their political agency and seek representation in these arenas as well as efficacy outside them; instituting measures to address exclusionary elements within the institutional structure of the participatory sphere, from rules of representation to strategies that foster more inclusive deliberation, such as the use of facilitation; and articulating participatory sphere institutions more effectively with other governance institutions, providing them with resources as well as with political “teeth.” It is with addressing these challenges—for theory, as well as for practice—that future directions for participatory governance lie. (pp. 24-25)

Finally, in a review of 100 cases of participation from numerous countries, Gaventa and Barrett (2010) documented four areas of potential “ends” or goals of civic involvement:

strengthening citizenship, building capacities for exercising agency, enhancing state responsiveness and supporting social inclusion. The authors highlighted the contingent nature of these outcomes with any given experience of engagement, but they also noted that positive results have been realized even under adverse circumstances. Their analysis underscored the fact that citizen participation can yield promising outcomes, but such efforts can be undermined by a variety of challenges and obstacles as they unfold.

Ciudad Peronia

According to the *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011* report, Guatemala City is a highly heterogeneous and unequal² urban area. One-third of this metropolitan-area's residents live in conditions of deprivation, although often in diverse neighborhoods in which significant numbers of slum and non-slum households live in close proximity. The collection of neighborhoods known as Ciudad Peronia is emblematic of these characteristics and is composed of varied sectors that range from informal slum communities to more working-class enclaves to rural settlements, now being encroached upon by urban growth.

Ciudad Peronia is a relatively new urban community. Although a small number of rural settlements have existed in the vicinity for several (at least) generations, the story of the urbanized neighborhoods of Peronia began in earnest with the devastating earthquake that shook Guatemala in 1976. That disaster caused widespread damage throughout the country and led to a massive public program of temporary housing provision in the capital of Guatemala City for the newly-homeless city residents and rural refugees. The provisional structures then provided by the government turned out to be less than temporary and many families stayed in these camps for years.

Ciudad Peronia was dubbed “The Great Solution” to this housing crisis by the Christian Democratic government of Vinicio Cerezo (Guatemala's president from 1986–1991), which oversaw the transfer of hundreds of families from temporary housing camps and other informal urban settlements in the Guatemala City region to the site in 1987 (IDESAC, 1990). The national government provided the initial property lots offered in Peronia with minimal, but adequate services as well as legal title.³ The Banco Nacional de Vivienda or National Housing

² Guatemala City's Gini coefficient of .50 ranks it among the more unequal cities in the world, according to the report.

³ The BANVI provided new residents loans for the value of their lot. Servicing this debt brought financial hardship to the working-class families seeking a housing “solution.”

Bank (BANVI), along with other public entities and several NGOs, sponsored development initiatives in the new community, such as a food-for-work program and also supported residents' efforts to organize themselves.

Under the Cerezo administration, the central government undertook continued, albeit limited, improvements to the new community, including the construction of an enclosed market. During these first years of Ciudad Peronia's existence other groups and families began to see the area as a solution to their housing needs. As a result, during the next two decades, successive waves of immigrants occupied (illegally) the diminishing public and green spaces surrounding the original settlement. The government and private landowners divided parcels near Peronia into lots and sold them to families able to acquire loans to purchase them. The community grew from the approximately 15,000 residents who called Peronia home in 1988 to between 70,000 and 90,000 inhabitants today, divided into 30 or more neighborhoods (including the original rural settlements).

At present, Peronia is a dense, diverse and largely unplanned urbanized area. Although residents of several of the early informal settlements were able to obtain legal land titles and some basic infrastructure, more recent occupiers have endured long waits for resolution of their legalization petitions (in some cases for more than 10 years) as squatters. In addition, while many of those who live in the rural settlements on the fringes of the urban area do not consider themselves residents of Ciudad Peronia, they are now nonetheless (very) close neighbors, as the urban center's neighborhoods encroach on their communities (and families residing within them sell land to the city dwellers to be subdivided into lots). Thus, traversing Peronia (the main road rises steadily from a riverbank that marks the edge of the community up to nearby hilltops where the rural areas are found), one finds shacks in close proximity to modest one-story houses, and two-or three-level structures also rising in their midst. Corn is planted on steep inclines near trash dumping sites. Goats share the road with buses (used school vehicles brought from the United States to live a second life in Guatemala), rusty pickup trucks and the occasional new car. Nothing is more striking about Peronia than its diversity, even if at first glance the community appears as an apparently undifferentiated mass of concrete and corrugated metal.

Despite its variety of neighborhoods and inhabitants, Peronia is known by public officials and its residents alike as a *zona roja* or red zone, a community overrun by crime and plagued by poverty. The area's residents complain about the high levels of criminality, including violent

offenses. Incidents of such behavior have decreased in recent years, following a truce declared by two gangs that had been fighting for turf in the community for more than a decade. Peronia has pockets of extreme poverty as well, particularly in its informal squatter settlements. The overall character of the community is distinctly working class (in the context of Guatemala's highly unequal distribution of income, this generally means working poor).

Participatory Spaces in Ciudad Peronia

This section traces the evolution of participatory spaces in Peronia, highlighting the evolving context in which such opportunities occurred as well as the outcomes to which they contributed. A historical approach is vital to understanding the possibilities and challenges faced by those involved in contemporary engagement processes, as the legacy of previous attempts at community organization and involvement continue to shape the trajectory of present potentials.

This analysis is informed by the results of more than 30 semi-structured individual interviews,⁴ carried out from July to December 2011 with members of the Peronia community who have been involved in participatory opportunities, including formal representatives of local organizations and active individual participants. Interviews generally took place in the interviewee's residence or a public area. Most lasted approximately one hour. I recorded these conversations and later transcribed them. All of those with whom I spoke were currently involved in some form of citizen engagement in the community and several had a history of involvement dating back to Peronia's foundation. I also interviewed six individuals from government agencies, NGOs or other organizations that were involved in participatory processes in Peronia. I was also a participant observer in Peronia from June to August 2010 and from July 2011 to June 2012. Finally, I have drawn from documents produced by several NGOs and government agencies involved in Peronia.

Early Spaces

Participatory spaces have been a part of the social fabric of Peronia from its first neighborhood's creation. Soon after that community's founding, BANVI sent workers to organize its new residents. These facilitators helped community members form a neighborhood association (with sector committees for health, education, culture, etc.) and provided capacity building to the group's participants. The new organization enjoyed a positive relationship and

⁴ Except where noted, interview participants have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities.

continued support from the Bank as it explored ways to meet the community's needs (IISS, 2006).

This promising beginning to citizen participation was not without its shortcomings. Of the 400 families that originally settled Peronia only 30 individuals were members of the association and approximately 50 people attended most community meetings, roughly one person for every eight households (IISS, 2006). That is, from the outset, "community" participation assumed a representative character, with a small group of individuals making decisions and acting on behalf of the broader population.

Nor did the neighborhood organization have the unconditional support of the government. For example, a list of community needs the group delivered to national representatives, taking advantage of a presidential visit to inaugurate the area officially in 1987, went unaddressed. But participants persevered, making contacts with other public institutions (while also relying on their continuing relationship with BANVI) and obtained materials for priority projects that were then undertaken by community members, some of whom possessed professional experience in construction that they donated to the cause.

According to one of the founders of the neighborhood association, the group worked actively to meet community needs during its first four years (Claudia, personal interview, July 27, 2011). Toward the end of that period, however, citizen participation in Peronia grew increasingly complicated and difficult due to the continued influx of settlers from other temporary housing camps and informal squatter settlements in the Guatemala City region. These newcomers often brought intact community organizations of their own when they settled in Peronia and thus did not easily integrate into the existing neighborhood association. Indeed, quite the opposite often occurred, as conflicts and power struggles erupted between the standing entity and newer groups. One of the founders of the original association, for example, stated in an interview that the more recent settlers destroyed a community hall and stole the materials to construct shacks in the areas they had occupied (Claudia, personal interview, July 27, 2011). She also recounted threats of violence from new groups that eventually drove most of the original neighborhood association's members to abandon their involvement with it.

Thus ended the first experiment of organized citizen participation in Peronia. Individual groups, including the remaining members of the initial association, in the community's growing number of neighborhoods continued to search for resources to meet their development needs, but

in isolation. According to numerous civic leaders I interviewed, these committees and associations frequently made requests to the government for support, but also took matters into their own hands, crafting and realizing community solutions to their neighborhoods' needs. In one sector, for example, residents cut into a private line to bring piped water to their homes. Another neighborhood committee pooled contributions from residents' savings to purchase vehicles for a transportation cooperative. Whenever committees and associations were able to gain access to materials for a project, residents generally provided the labor to ensure its successful completion.

However, amidst these occasional successes of diverse neighborhood groups in Peronia, the seeds of a long-term decline in participation were being sown, the fruits of which characterize the community today. Many local leaders I interviewed told me stories of both successful community initiatives and occasions when individuals collected money from their neighbors to address a collective need, only to disappear with the funds. The imperative to secure land tenure in the numerous squatter settlements in Peronia provided fertile ground for manipulation and deception. In some cases, individuals or groups who "took charge" of securing property titles cheated their neighbors by gathering money, but producing nothing in return. Numerous community leaders and residents I interviewed told me similar stories and stated that such situations had led citizens to mistrust the motivations of those involved in local initiatives (Ana Maria, personal interview, August 9, 2011; Julio, personal interview, July 24, 2011; Claudia, personal interview, July 27, 2011; Ernesto, personal interview, July 25, 2011).

Within this context of fragmented resident groups, some collective organization success in individual neighborhoods and increasing instances of corruption and manipulation, a second effort to create a community-wide participatory space emerged and lived a short life. In the mid-1990's a Spanish Catholic priest, Padre Elias, arrived in Peronia. He would come to play a significant role in the community for many years. According to long-time local leaders I interviewed, among Elias' first initiatives was to propose the creation of a federation of neighborhood groups in order to coordinate development activities. That meta-group was organized and the presidents of the disparate associations came together to discuss and plan projects. Among the members' first actions was to submit paperwork to the municipal government to legalize their organization, but the city never acknowledged their petition. Indeed, the municipality proved an obstacle to the federation's efforts, rejecting the group's

requests to utilize lots owned by the locality for projects whose funding had been secured from various central government agencies. Given these realities, neighborhood leaders soon began to abandon the federation until, once again, less than a handful remained. Interestingly, that number included several individuals who had continued to be involved with the original local association.

The COCODE

One of the groups that participated in the federation was a recently formed committee whose members had decided that in addition to pursuing development projects in their own neighborhood, they would form an independent municipality in Peronia. Soon after formation of the group, an apparent opportunity to realize their goal materialized. According to one of its founders whom I interviewed, representatives of one of the parties vying for the presidency in that year's elections told the committee members that if they promoted the party during the electoral campaign and it won the presidency and a majority in congress, it would support the creation of a new municipality of Ciudad Peronia (Roberto, former independence committee president, personal interview, July 7, 2011). The neighborhood group quickly agreed to assist and went to work organizing. And, indeed, the party achieved its goal by gaining the presidency and winning a majority in congress. However, when the independence committee sought out its political allies after the elections to discuss their agreement, they were completely ignored (Roberto, former independence committee president, personal interview, July 7, 2011).

Members of this neighborhood group indicated in interviews they were not discouraged by this setback, but began to focus instead on issues of immediate concern in the community. The small alliance was able to negotiate with the municipal public works department to obtain materials to pave the area's principal avenue. Members also began to work with the newly formed transportation association of Peronia, and with that organization jointly determined the fares bus drivers would charge to take residents to the capital. This arrangement was not to last, however, as the committee objected to the periodic rate increases the transport association requested. As a result, the transport group soon saw little reason to continue negotiating with an organization whose leaders embraced a grandiose dream, but otherwise enjoyed no legal status as a legitimate community entity. The bus drivers ceased bargaining concerning price increases and imposed them instead. When the committee sought to continue to discuss, the transportation association responded with threats of violence (Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011).

This intimidation led the committee to disband and members met only very occasionally during the next decade. In 2005, however, the original group's members, plus a few new ones (including Padre Elias) began to discuss resumption of their activities. They decided they needed to legalize their organization to further their aims and agreed the best way to do so was to form a *Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo* (COCODE or *Consejo*; a community development council), a new form of local organization authorized by a recent national law.⁵ However, the municipal government refused the group's petition for incorporation as a COCODE and the cost of a lawyer to register as such with the federal government was beyond the group's means. Undeterred, the would-be COCODE's members sought out a congressman from one of the major political parties, who often supported community initiatives, and he expedited the process to grant the group *personaria juridica* or legal personhood (Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011). The resulting entity was one of the first community organizations to gain legal status in the country, and not just as the COCODE of its neighborhood. Rather, the group was now formally the COCODE *Multisectorial* (CM) of Peronia and claimed to work for, and represent, all of the diverse neighborhoods of the area.

Having achieved legal status and having claimed all of Peronia as their territory, members of the CM found themselves in demand. According to former COCODE associates I interviewed, institutions and organizations sought them out for approval to undertake projects in Peronia (Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011; Julio, personal interview, July 24, 2011). The CM organized numerous commissions, including environment, education, health and others, in order to pursue its vision of transforming Ciudad Peronia.

The group also attracted the attention of several organizations seeking to support its work. One NGO provided advice and assistance on the matter of municipal independence, still a priority issue for the CM. Another, an NGO that had supported creation of the group, worked to build its capacity through training sessions, work plan development and technical assistance. Through Padre Elias, the CM enjoyed the support and collaboration of the Catholic Church.

As the COCODE Multisectorial undertook the task of promoting development across Peronia's neighborhoods, it sought individuals to join as representatives from throughout the area, although a plurality of the organization's membership continued to hail from the

⁵ Guatemala's congress passed the law creating COCODEs as the official mechanism of citizen inclusion in development decisions in 2002.

neighborhood in which the independence committee was born. In time, numerous local leaders from throughout the area came to know of the group and some collaborated with it. One long-time community leader I interviewed, however, objected to what he took to be the CM's undemocratic nature noting that the national law required that such organizations be elected in community assemblies (Claudia, personal interview, July 27, 2011). The Peronia COCODE, however, was comprised of a set of unelected community members and those they chose to invite. Dissenting leaders further pointed out that the governing statute said nothing at all about a multi-sector *Consejo*, instead stipulating that each neighborhood and community should have its own such entity.

Despite these concerns, the CM gained stature in Peronia. Members sent out numerous requests for projects and coordinated with governmental and nongovernmental organizations to realize some of those initiatives. According to current and former CM members whom I interviewed, the organization also promoted some initiatives that involved organizing the collective efforts of community members. Nonetheless, the COCODE dedicated much more energy to seeking external resources for larger projects in Peronia. The municipal government was one of the sources of such assistance, although the relationship between local authorities and the COCODE was rather fraught, due to the latter's continued pursuit of an independent municipality of Peronia (Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011). In consequence, the entity received few resources from the locality, compared to those it was able to obtain from other sources.

While vital and important, the CM was not the only organized participatory space in Peronia. At the time the COCODE began to function, the municipal government was also organizing its own neighborhood development committees, similar to it, but organized under local statutes rather than national legislation (Heber Leal,⁶ Municipal Office of Community Organization, personal interview, November 9, 2011). Additionally, a variety of other neighborhood associations existed throughout Peronia. Community organizations comprised of youths and women were active as well, as were numerous groups organized through the Catholic and evangelical churches. In short, the ecosystem of organizations in which Peronia residents participated was diverse, but the CM was the largest and perhaps most active group of those operating. The COCODE also represented the only entity that sought to include participants

⁶ Real name

from across the community's many neighborhoods. Between 60 and 80 residents typically attended CM meetings. The council also began to rotate its meeting place among different neighborhoods rather than wait for representatives to make their way to it.

The group's leadership changed little during the first years of its existence. When the initial president left, another of the founding members of the independence committee took his place. Some other participants came and went as well, but there was significant continuity from the founding of the council in 2006 through 2010. One newcomer was recruited in 2009 to fill the vacant post of vice president, after demonstrating his usefulness in the pursuit of municipal independence. Due to his employment with the National Statistics Institute he was able to obtain information concerning Peronia that government agencies overseeing the independence process required. Yet, according to individuals I interviewed, the new vice president had different ideas about the CM's future direction and began to clash with the president (Jacob Gramajo,⁷ government facilitator, personal interview, March 8, 2012). One important episode critically widened the growing rift between these two individuals and those *Consejo* members aligned with each, just at a time when an unprecedented opportunity arose that put Peronia's organization and unity to the test. I discuss this turn below.

Mesas Temáticas: Creation

As mentioned above, the two rival gangs that had terrorized Peronia for years declared a truce in 2009 that brought some semblance of peace to the community. Mardoqueo Fuentes, an evangelical pastor, brokered the pact. The minister worked assiduously for seven years to lay the groundwork to bring the young men together (Hurtado, 2011). Knowing that few economic alternatives were available to these now-former gang members,⁸ Pastor Fuentes sought the support of the Guatemalan government to set up a cooperative to provide them employment. Seeing a rare opportunity presented by the fragile peace, Guatemalan government officials decided not only to support the minister's proposal, but also to make additional investments in Peronia to address the needs of the long-neglected community (Andres Ramirez,⁹ public social programs coordinator for Peronia, personal interview, October 17, 2011).

⁷ Real name

⁸ The lack of any education and/or employment history as well as the tattoos that immediately announce their previous affiliation, prevent many ex-gang members in Guatemala from being able to enter the work force.

⁹ Real name

The national government's team of community workers convened leaders from Peronia's diverse sectors in May 2010 to begin to understand the principal problems affecting the area's neighborhoods. In several public community meetings I observed, residents presented long lists of concerns, needs, petitions and demands and even brought along seniors and persons with disabilities in the hope of receiving some assistance. In response, government representatives organized 13 *Mesas Tématicas* (MT or *Mesas*; thematic working groups), dedicated to health, education, water and other needs identified by community residents. The MT would provide a space for leaders and organizations from Peronia's neighborhoods to come together and would serve as the link between the community-at-large and national government representatives throughout the development process that was to unfold.

The CM was involved in the MT initiative from the outset. Yet at the same time this was occurring, the rift between the COCODE's president and vice-president was growing sharper. According to individuals I interviewed, very soon after the initial meetings of the *Mesas*, a private business approached the CM with an offer to build a biodiesel plant in Peronia (Jacobo Gramajo, government MT facilitator, personal interview, March 8, 2012; Luis, NGO worker, personal interview, September 7, 2011). The scale of the project was without precedent in the community and involved taking on significant (hundreds of thousands of dollars) debt. Yet the plant promised to be self-financing and profits were to be divided between paying off the liability and a community development fund. Several CM members were very excited about the idea. The president, however, had reservations (Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011). He did not want to risk assuming so large a debt burden should the project not go exactly as planned. So he ignored the pleas of a number of CM members and rejected the proposal. As a result, the vice-president accused him of acting unilaterally and of being an obstacle to Peronia's development. The president, meanwhile, claimed to have only the community's interest in mind. This conflict concerning the proposed plant divided the CM and the antagonism between the two camps spilled over into the newly formed MT (Jacobo Gramajo,¹⁰ government *Mesas* facilitator, personal interview, March 8, 2012).

The MT process, however, gained momentum and the intra-*Consejo* conflict did not slow it. Leaders from many of Peronia's neighborhoods and organizations participated in the *Mesas*

¹⁰ Real name

meetings that I observed two times per week,¹¹ with 40 or more persons regularly in attendance. According to several individuals involved in the MT whom I interviewed, most community leaders were anxious to ascertain what projects the government would undertake in Peronia and were determined to bring something tangible back to their neighborhood constituents (Ana Maria, personal interview, August 9, 2011; Ernesto, personal interview, July 25, 2011). With the help of the government's MT facilitator, each working group undertook a process of analysis and planning, the product of which was a refined, but still extensive, list of project requests. In *Mesas* meetings I observed, participants gave little thought to community-initiated actions in each thematic area, as the lure of external resources kept the focus almost exclusively on interventions the various subject-area groups hoped the government would help to implement.

Meanwhile, national representatives invited *Mesas Tématicas* members to attend weekly meetings with the inter-agency team coordinating the development process in Peronia. This step allowed MT members to hear reports on the various projects underway, while also providing feedback to responsible officials. Community leaders in Peronia were experiencing unprecedented levels of attention from and direct contact with the national government and their expectations for concrete results were high, according to community members involved in the MT process whom I interviewed (Ana Maria, personal interview, August 9, 2011). However, one participant told me that the government was only planning on implementing cosmetic changes and that the various neighborhoods had to insist on real solutions to the structural problems affecting Peronia (Ernesto, personal interview, July 25, 2011).

One of the government's programs in Peronia, called *Bolsa Solidaria* (Solidarity Bag), involved the delivery of a monthly basket of foodstuffs to needy families. The *Bolsa* program had approximately 30 local *promotores*, neighborhood-level administrators, in Peronia, nearly all women, the majority of whom were involved in local neighborhood organizations. However, several community leaders I interviewed (not directly involved in the initiative), stated that the program was extremely politicized and represented a clientelist mechanism of generating political support (Ernesto, personal interview, July 25, 2011; Claudia, personal interview, July 27, 2011). In MT meetings I observed during 2010, the group's members debated whether to include the *Bolsa* representatives in their ranks. However, despite an initial attempt to include

¹¹ I observed the twice-weekly MT meetings from June to August 2010 and weekly meetings from July 2011 to June 2012.

the women, the program's political orientation generated significant tensions and very few *promotores* continued to participate in the MT. Whatever its relative merits, this turn had the unfortunate result of reducing the number of women community leaders involved in the organization.

In July 2010, several months into the *Mesas* process, tensions within the CM reached a boiling point and members decided to hold the first election in the group's four-year existence. Two slates formed, led by the president and vice-president, respectively. The group held the vote at Peronia's largest elementary school one Saturday afternoon in August 2010 and several hundred Peronia residents turned out to cast their ballots. The vice-president prevailed. The voters ousted the original founders of the CM in Peronia and replaced those leaders with a group predominantly comprised of professionals (teachers, low-level bureaucrats, small-business owners) from Peronia's middle-class neighborhoods.

Rumors of manipulation of the election abounded, but the former president did not challenge the results. He did, however, stop attending MT meetings as did other original CM members and a number of leaders allied with them. The reduced and changed composition of the *Mesas* resulted in a new dynamic in the entity. According to interviews with community leaders and the government facilitator involved with the MT at the time, the new CM principals exerted their influence immediately and adopted a more confrontational posture toward the government (Jacobó Gramajo, government *Mesas* facilitator, personal interview, March 8, 2012; Julio, personal interview, July 24, 2011). In meetings with state officials, the new CM president began to issue demands and strongly criticize the government's projects. The group soon dominated MT meetings and quickly appropriated any ideas or proposals that emerged from other participants.

Parallel to the ongoing *Mesas* process, the central government facilitated the creation and legalization of several new COCODEs in Peronia. The former CM president, for example, formed a new *Consejo* in his neighborhood and three other areas formalized groups of their own before the mayor decided that five COCODES was more than enough and refused to support the creation of any more (Jacobó Gramajo, personal interview, March 8, 2012). Of the four newly created entities, two, from the rural settlements adjacent to Peronia, began to participate in the MT. The former-CM president's COCODE remained separate, pursuing parallel projects with support from other community leaders. A fourth *Consejo* focused solely on concerns specific to

its neighborhood and did not actively join the *Mesas*, although it maintained some contact with the CM.

Mesas Temáticas: Transition

The MT entered a new phase in early 2011. Following creation of the new COCODEs, the CM's president wrote several letters and emails to officials responsible for the process in Peronia demanding the removal of the national government's principal *Mesas* facilitator, claiming he was trying to divide the community. The regime complied, withdrawing its lone participant in the MT meetings. However, soon thereafter, the central government's representatives coordinating programs in Peronia stopped inviting *Mesas* leaders to the periodic meetings they had been attending for nearly a year. The national government's projects continued, as did individual-level communication between community and government representatives, but the access to public decision-makers that had previously existed was diminished by these events.

With no formal involvement by the government the MT was now a community-owned and operated participatory space. Reflecting on the role of the central government in the *Mesas Temáticas* process, participants' I interviewed shared mixed views. Most believed the unprecedented attention by national officials and access granted to the community had generated expectations of significant positive changes throughout Peronia, which ultimately went unfulfilled. The government's final report on the community described investments in education, health, youth programs and others, totaling US\$ 2 million¹² during an 18-month period. The perceptions of one *Mesas* participant and community leader reflected the general sentiments of many I interviewed, "[the government's MT process] was a bonfire built with pine branches, it burned hot and bright, but quickly faded." As the individual who offered this assessment also observed:

It's true that we received beneficial projects ... but really they just came to implement palliative measures, because here in this community, we were, in every sense of the word, deteriorated. ... I continue to insist that if they are going to bring a benefit for the community, it needs to be a solution, not a palliative measure ... maybe we just wanted to see the tractors and machines starting to work, but I don't think that was the way it had to

¹² The single largest investment was the construction of a new health center in Peronia, costing more than US\$300,000. That project is discussed further below.

be, we should have strengthened our community organization and plans first. ... I believe the projects were politicized and weren't done with the intention of promoting sustainable social development (Julio, community leader, personal interview, July 24, 2011).

The transition away from government involvement had a number of repercussions for the MT. First, the CM increasingly dominated the *Mesas Temáticas* meetings, although several other community leaders and two other COCODEs remained engaged. Several former participants later reported in interviews with me that they stopped attending gatherings because of their opposition to how the CM had taken over and was managing the MT (Julio, personal interview, July 24, 2011; Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011). Other former *Mesas* members I interviewed indicated that since the government's withdrawal, the group had become all talk and no action. They reported they now saw the crosscutting organization as increasingly irrelevant and decided to stop participating in its activities as a result (Ernesto, personal interview, July 25, 2011).

Although conflicts with the new CM were certainly a factor, declining community participation in the MT seems to support the claims of individuals I interviewed that the majority of the processes' participants were primarily motivated by the expectation of gaining something tangible for their neighborhoods, or possibly, for themselves. As the quotation just above by Julio highlights, government investment in Peronia had long lagged far behind the community's needs. Thus, neighborhood leaders saw the prospect of numerous projects (most likely, correctly) as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to bring visible improvements to the area. Yet MT participants I interviewed suggested that many of their fellow representatives simply wanted to direct investment to their community, rather than adopt an approach designed to address Peronia's needs as a whole (Jorge, personal interview, August 4, 2011). As the government withdrew its direct involvement and many of the projects it had promised remained unrealized, opportunities to influence the target and character of external investment in Peronia became scarce. Several community leaders involved in the MT had developed important contacts in national government agencies and they continued to tap those sources to seek resources and projects throughout 2011. One result was a small horticulture project on the outskirts of Peronia supported by the ministry of agriculture. Yet, in *Mesas* meetings I attended (personal observation and notes, MT meeting, August 30, 2011), the CM maintained its confrontational

stance towards the government, frequently complaining of broken promises. In consequence, there was little direct cooperation between the *Mesas* and the national administrators overseeing the remaining projects in Peronia.

Another factor undermining participation in the MT during this time was the rapidly approaching general election, set for September 2011. I observed significant political party presence in Peronia during the months leading up to the vote. *Mesas* participants I interviewed claimed that most community leaders were affiliated with one or more parties in the hope that the victorious candidate would contribute tangible resources to a local project, or reward the supportive leader with a government job should the party win. Members of the MT decided to keep their group politically neutral, but did allow several mayoral aspirants to present their plans for Peronia and receive feedback from participants (personal observation and notes, *Mesas* meeting, June 14, 2011). MT members also organized a forum in the community featuring several candidates.

On the face of it, partisan politics did not divide *Mesas* members. I interviewed several participants who were deeply involved with different political parties, including standing as candidates for the municipal council, but they all reported they had agreed not to bring their politics into the community space the MT symbolized (Jorge, personal interview, August 4, 2011; Liliana, personal interview, August 8, 2011). Yet, several *Mesas* members I interviewed told me that other local leaders prized their political contacts and commitments and stopped participating in organizations such as the MT (Lorena, personal interview, September 6, 2011; Julia, personal interview, August 3, 2011).

During this time, too, a division of a different sort was growing within the group. The CM had emerged, following the election that changed its composition a year earlier, as the driving force behind the MT. Multi-sectoral COCODE members were now involved in numerous community issues and at nearly every *Mesas* meeting the president had news about one or another initiative. However, in several meetings I attended, CM members expressed dissatisfaction with the *Mesas* as a space and process (personal observation and notes, MT meeting, October 4, 2011). The multi-sectoral *Consejo* president complained on several occasions that the MT was dominated by gossip and talk, with no action. He claimed the *Mesas Tématicas* effort had lived its useful life and it was time to shake things up and start over with a new organization he called the *Mesa Multisectorial* (multi-sector roundtable) (personal

observation and notes, *Mesas* meeting, October 4, 2011). According to a flyer the CM president distributed inviting community leaders to join the *Mesa Multisectorial*, the organization would be a new space to promote “unity, integration, community development” through “concrete projects” that would “reshape Peronia.” Pastor Fuentes, the evangelical minister who had negotiated the peace pact between the community’s rival gangs, was prominently involved in the new initiative, with his church serving as the meeting place for the fledgling entity.

The non-CM members of the MT were outraged that the COCODE Multisectorial had made decisions about the future of the *Mesas* without consulting them. They had no intention of abandoning the space they had struggled to create and maintain in favor of another with a seemingly identical structure and goals. Additionally, several *Mesas* members expressed their unwillingness to be associated with Pastor Fuentes, whom they accused of using his work with the gangs and connections to the government for personal enrichment.¹³

Following a number of often-heated discussions in the MT, CM members withdrew from the group (personal observation and notes, *Mesas* meeting, October 25 and November 17, 2011). Other *Mesas* participants asked the CM to remain involved to help to strengthen the existing space rather than form a parallel one, but to no avail. Soon thereafter, the former CM president (as reported above, now president of a COCODE in his neighborhood) began participating once again in the MT meetings, further exacerbating tensions. An NGO that had begun working with the crosscutting group to provide occasional training programs on leadership and community development saw the fragile organization unraveling and called together representatives of the five COCODES to discuss the implications of the situation. The result was an agreement among all engaged, including members of the CM, to forgive past conflicts, turn a new page, and work together. Immediately thereafter, however, another issue arose that again drove a wedge between the two local organizations.

The original CM had, in the first years of its existence, requested that the central government construct a new health center in Peronia, to augment the small existing facility that did not meet the population’s needs. The group received support in their endeavor from the same congressman who had helped them legalize the CM and their petition had moved

¹³ The Guatemalan government’s final report on Peronia lists two loans to the cooperative set up by Pastor Fuentes to employ ex-gang members, totaling more than US\$20,000. Several community leaders I interviewed believed the minister had stolen that money. The cooperative changed management in 2012, with Pastor Fuentes no longer involved, citing a lack of funds to capitalize its activities.

expeditiously through the various levels of the health ministry. When the central government began to take a keener interest in Peronia, the health center was among the projects promised. A building was indeed constructed on the site that had been planned for the center and was inaugurated by the mayor and the congressman shortly before the 2011 elections. Yet the structure did not meet the specifications of a health center of the type the government had promised and had remained empty as a result.

After the September elections, the nation's outgoing president Alvaro Colom was scheduled to visit Peronia for an "official" inauguration of the health center. The CM objected, arguing that once dedicated the new facility would never be upgraded to what the community needed and the event was cancelled. Upon hearing this, the MT began to work to secure the opening of the center, hoping to request the necessary improvements from the incoming government. During the following month, the two groups gathered multiple signatures from residents to support their opposing positions regarding whether to open the new clinic or to demand its improvement. The *Mesas* and CM called several public meetings at which representatives of the rival organizations accused each other of corruption and of ignoring the community's needs (personal observation and notes, November 8 and 17, 2011). Each group sent numerous letters to various health officials during the same period, attempting to sway them to their view. At the end of this intense, but brief campaign, the MT group was able to convince several important actors, including the incoming mayor, to support the opening of the new health center with the promise of future improvements. Nonetheless, the struggle between the two coalitions had been bitter and had increased the mistrust between their members significantly.

The end of 2011 was fast approaching and in less than a month a new president and mayor would take power. The *Mesas* members recognized that if the newly elected officials perceived Peronia to be divided and conflict-ridden, they might favor other, more stable communities for projects. Thus, several participants asked the local Catholic priest, Padre Elias's successor, to attempt to reconcile the MT and the CM. The clergy member called a meeting to discuss and resolve the dispute between the two groups. The intervention took place and appeared to be successful. Members of each group were able to ask each other direct questions about issues on which they had disagreed and to receive seemingly satisfactory answers to their queries. Both groups recognized they had common goals and were each

working for the betterment of Peronia, and all sides pledged their support for a united MT to be governed by the community's five COCODES.

Mesas Tématicas: New Beginnings?

The new year (2012) brought renewed optimism to the *Mesas*. The entity had negotiated a tentative agreement with the CM and Peronia's mayor seemed eager to work with the group to channel development resources into the community. Neither was to prove simple.

The MT members realized they needed to strengthen their organization to consolidate the group to be able to work more effectively with the municipal government. *Mesas* members, with the help of a supporting NGO, worked out a set of norms, rules and procedures to structure the organization's meetings and activities. Group members also decided, for the first time ever, to vote formally for a leadership council, responding to the CM's president's demands for more structure and organization.

During the meeting in which the election was to take place, several COCODE members left early, citing other engagements. By the time of the vote, only one remained. That individual objected to holding the election due to the absence of her colleagues and walked out of the meeting when the other MT participants refused to postpone the vote. The remaining representatives voted anonymously to elect a leadership council. No representative of the Multi-sectoral COCODE was either nominated or elected in that process. Following this episode, the CM once again left the *Mesas* and continued working independently.¹⁴ In subsequent meetings, the remaining *Mesas Tématicas* members decided they were better off without the CM and made no attempts to convince the group to rejoin (personal observation and notes, MT meetings, February 1 and 15, 2012).

Since his election, the new mayor had indicated an interest in working with the *Mesas* and soon after taking office he invited representatives of the CM to a meeting as well. The *Tématicas* representatives brought a list of community necessities with them and presented them to the newly elected chief executive. He responded by saying that he was not going to be the type of leader the people can come to with their needs and he would see that they were met. Instead, he wanted the municipal government to be a partner with communities in pursuing solutions. He told the MT members they needed to come to him with solutions and project

¹⁴ Including initiating a legal process against the government and several community leaders to prevent the opening of the new health center.

proposals, not just wish lists (personal observation and notes, meeting with Villa Nueva mayor, February 2, 2012).

Neighborhood committees unaffiliated with the *Mesas* began to submit such proposals and the municipal government responded with support, generally materials, for small projects. The MT, however, was unable to focus on specific projects that could be easily defined and submitted, instead discussing “mega-projects” such as health, water and education. Individual members or groups were tasked with advancing efforts in each of these areas, but were unable to make progress in the absence of more concrete and feasible objectives. *Mesas Tématicas* members were further distracted by constant internal discussions of the need to involve other committees and organizations and to share information with such groups (personal observation and notes, MT meetings, January 28, February 1 and March 7, 2012). Yet no strategies or actions emerged from the group’s meetings. In the months after their first encounter with the mayor, *Mesas* participants struggled to adapt to the opportunity to work collaboratively with the new municipal government (personal observation and notes, MT meetings, February 2 and March 7, 2012).

Analysis and Conclusions

This brief history of participatory organizing efforts in Ciudad Peronia contains important implications for the study of citizen involvement. Ultimately, this case highlights the complexity and challenges inherent in real-world scenarios of diverse organizational and individual actors joining their efforts to carry out a project. Community residents in Peronia have long fought for meaningful opportunities to participate in the development of their neighborhoods. Yet they have also contested each other and external actors within such spaces concerning what constitutes suitable project aims and processes.

I discussed above the taxonomy of participation proposed by scholars that divides such spaces between those “created” by community actors and those generated by external agents, who “invite” local citizens to participate. However, Peronia’s experiences with citizen engagement do not fit easily within these labels. State actors were involved in the creation of most of the opportunities I described, yet in each case government involvement gave way in time to exclusive community actor control. In each case, too, public engagement was not alone determinative of the results (or their dearth) of citizen participation. Nor, were residents alone responsible for the consequences of their efforts.

The MT especially provides an example of the hybrid and protean character of many participatory spaces. Although the central government claimed it was creating the entity to provide a new opportunity for community actors, one such organization was already present in Peronia, the CM. Public authorities built the *Mesas* on the existing framework of the CM, giving the group a new name and face, but not altering the essential participants or dynamics that had already developed in the extant COCODE.

Furthermore, despite “creating” the MT and “inviting” community involvement, the government was not the principal actor in the *Mesas Temáticas*. The relevant national agency did send a representative to facilitate meetings and provide information. Yet community participants drove the agenda and the group’s internal dynamics. The MT’s framework largely reflected Peronia’s residents’ priorities, i.e., to bring public resources and development projects to the community. Neither changes in the entity’s leadership nor the Colom administration’s formal withdrawal from the group altered this basic orientation. Indeed, after the elections in 2011, *Mesas* members simply shifted the organization’s focus to the local government to seek access to state resources. The group repeatedly requested a permanent representative from the municipality at its meetings to establish more direct contact and communication.¹⁵

Thus, the MT is difficult to categorize using the literature’s existing labels of “created” and “invited.” The government officially convened the group and set the agenda, yet drew on the existing CM, whose own legalization had been facilitated by a congressional representative. The *Mesas* is best conceptualized as a hybrid space, with more or less external (government) involvement, as circumstances and group dynamics changed. In any case, and as a framing proposition, the MT, like all of the participatory organizations in Peronia that preceded it, was fundamentally oriented toward the state in that members sought to use the possibility the entity represented to access public resources for their community. Ultimately, the analytical proposition to be drawn from study of these local engagement groups is that broad categories to describe participation should be used with care, as actual experiences of citizen involvement defy such labels.

To understand better the character and possibilities of participatory spaces, additional dimensions of the phenomenon must be explored. I draw here on Cornwall and Coelho’s (2007)

¹⁵ The Mayor invited MT members to several meetings and promised to send a representative to the group’s meetings. However, municipal officials visited the group on only two occasions in the first six months of the new administration.

framework for understanding democratic, inclusive and meaningful participation to examine the lessons of the Peronia experience. These scholars pointed to three factors that allow for engagement spaces that could catalyze positive change for marginalized groups:

- Citizen involvement built around broader processes of social mobilization involving marginalized actors
- Measures that address exclusionary elements of participation, such as elite capture or discrimination
- Citizen engagement with “teeth,” i.e., impacts beyond the space of community involvement in the realm of public institutions and decision-making processes (pp. 24-25).

I address these elements in turn to provide insights into the most important questions about individuals’ involvement in Peronia: Did participatory spaces lead to meaningful outcomes for the community? Did engagement constitute the democratic exercise of agency and citizenship? I frame my analysis around the stated goal of the participatory organizations discussed here, advancing community development.

Peronia’s civic organizations were isolated from broader movements or attempts to mobilize marginalized actors. The Guatemala City metropolitan area is home to several groups that advocate for decent housing and basic services in poor urban communities. Examples include the *Movimiento Guatemalteco de Pobladores* (Guatemalan Settlers Movement) and *Plataforma Urbana* (Urban Issues Platform). Yet, the community leaders I interviewed made virtually no mention of any involvement with this broader set of actors. There were exceptions, individual community leaders who had some contact with outside organizations or a visit by an NGO associated with an external movement or federation, but none of the Peronia citizen involvement efforts developed meaningful or sustained linkages to other mobilizations in the metropolitan area.

Several factors likely contributed to this situation. Participation in outside meetings or activities entails costs of time and money. Additionally, the transitory nature of most participatory groups in Peronia was an obstacle to forming sustainable connections outside the community. Finally, it is unlikely that the organizations operating on a regional level could offer leaders in Peronia tangible support to achieve their primary objective of physical community improvements; these groups were oriented towards a broader, long-term struggle for equitable conditions in all of Guatemala City’s slums. For these reasons, participatory spaces in Peronia

remained largely unconnected to efforts to mobilize actors from marginalized areas. That fact likewise implies that local leaders did not take advantage for their neighborhoods of any benefits that might flow from regional advocacy efforts to press for policy changes that might have resulted in material changes in their communities.

Furthermore, Peronia's participatory spaces did not catalyze meaningful mobilization in the community itself. Each opportunity for citizen engagement involved efforts to bring together neighborhood representatives from across the area, rather than promote the engagement of Peronia's residents. Local actors continued to favor this approach despite the fact that community leaders whom I interviewed universally acknowledged that residents' self-organization was weak. Ultimately, entities such as the MT had a limited reach in Peronia. Area residents and community leaders whom I interviewed that did not participate in the *Mesas Tématicas* group had little knowledge of its existence (Alejandro, personal interview, November 29, 2011).

In sum, the weaknesses and instability of participatory opportunities in Peronia reflected broader social and organizational obstacles in the community, challenges that members of groups such as the CM or MT never adequately addressed. Participation in these efforts gave individuals the opportunity to develop their leadership capacities, particularly analysis of community problems and interaction with state actors. Yet this did not result in stronger neighborhood organizations or a broader effort to strengthen community mobilization across Peronia or the Guatemala City region.

A second element of effective and democratic participatory spaces entails addressing exclusion. This necessity encompasses ensuring inclusive representation in groups engaged in involvement initiatives and active outreach to all participants within them. A degree of external facilitation is often an important factor in achieving these objectives.

In Peronia, representatives of groups such as the CM and MT were conscious of the need to promote the inclusive involvement of the area's citizens in community processes, but their efforts to address exclusion were limited. The CM implemented measures to include a more diverse body of participants, notably through holding rotating meetings in different neighborhoods in the area. However, the group itself remained an unelected body until internal conflicts forced members to seek a vote to resolve a leadership impasse. The new CM members, although elected by the community, were no more representative of Peronia's diversity than were

the group's outgoing participants. In addition, some local leaders in the area knew little of the CM's existence or, if they did, disputed its claim to represent Peronia.

The *Mesas* also had limited membership, but it too nonetheless sought to speak for the community. Members of the organization frequently discussed the need to expand participation to include other neighborhoods and groups. Yet these recurring conversations never resulted in concrete actions. Indeed, at times, *Mesas Tématicas* participation dwindled to less than a dozen individuals. Even when the government was actively involved and plans were afoot for projects and resources for the community, seldom did more than 50 individuals attend the group's meetings. Youth, indigenous persons¹⁶ and residents of Peronia's squatter settlements, in particular, were underrepresented in the *Mesas Tématicas* membership.

A related challenge that also served to undermine inclusive involvement was conflict and divisions internal to the participatory groups themselves. Indeed, disputes have undermined the viability of engagement-oriented organizations and their associated spaces throughout Peronia's history. The original neighborhood association, CM and MT all faced dissension and struggle, both internally and with external actors, and each became weaker as a result, and in some cases ceased to function entirely.

Mesas Tématicas members, despite the organization's primary focus on community development projects, spent significant time discussing and occasionally attempting to resolve disputes with individuals or groups within the organization. Indeed, information sharing, dialogue, negotiation and collective decision-making were important aspects of the *Mesas* and occupied much more of the organization's time than actual project planning or implementation. Yet members did not fully appreciate the value of these discussions, often complaining that the group was all talk and no action (personal observation and notes, MT meetings, November 8, 2011 and March 7, 2012). Although there is truth to this claim, it is important to note that this sentiment ignored the significant value of a space for dialogue in a diverse community with a history of divisions.

Finally, both the limited efforts to promote inclusive participation and the frequent conflicts that beset groups such as the CM and *Mesas* highlight the critical importance of facilitation. Participatory organizations and spaces in Peronia seldom received consistent

¹⁶ Reports examining Peronia's demographic composition have estimated that less than 10% of the area's population is indigenous (IISS, 2006).

support and assistance from outside actors. The Catholic Church and an occasional NGO aided community initiatives, but had limited capacity to engage in these concerns. The central government contributed little to the strengthening or organization of the MT, beyond providing a single individual to facilitate meetings for a time. The municipality, meanwhile, had historically limited itself to formalizing neighborhood committees and ignored community-wide organizations such as the CM and MT.

This lack of reliable facilitation left groups vulnerable to internal conflicts, unable to follow through on their stated intentions to promote inclusion and with little organizational capacity more generally. The exception to this situation was the CM during its first years of existence when an NGO worked with the entity's leaders to strengthen the group's organization, train its members in proposal writing and otherwise provide general support.¹⁷ Conversely, the *Mesas*, rather than benefitting from consistent facilitation and resources from the government officials working directly with it, received only ad hoc and intermittent support from external individuals and organizations. This assistance often focused on attempts to manage or resolve conflicts, particularly with the CM, rather than sustained organizational capacity building or provision of resources to improve the MT's functioning.

The third element of participation proposed by Cornwall and Coelho is the extent to which such exercises have "teeth," or articulation with, and influence concerning, institutional decision-making processes that affect communities. In Peronia, this pertains most directly to the stated objective of each of the engagement-oriented organizations to capture public resources for neighborhood development projects.

Overall, the presence of participatory groups and the spaces for dialogue and interaction they both seek to create and embody had a positive impact on development outcomes in Peronia. Entities such as the original neighborhood association and the CM were able to solicit projects successfully that benefited the community, principally from central government institutions. However, elected authorities channeled resources to Peronia at their own convenience and seemingly for partisan political purposes. Government actors decided when and if to engage with participatory groups, even those they were ostensibly responsible for creating, such as the MT. My interviews with state and community actors involved in the *Mesas Tématicas* process did not

¹⁷ After the election of the new CM, the group cut its ties with the NGO, claiming it was an ally of the organization's former president.

reveal any definitive evidence of decision-making influence by Peronia representatives despite the government's seeming enthusiasm for participation and the significant access it granted to the organization's members.¹⁸ Finally, as already discussed, municipal authorities generally ignored groups seeking to represent all of Ciudad Peronia. This orientation may change under a new mayor, but if it does, such will occur as a result of that leader's personal commitment, rather than organized pressure from the MT.

The general lack of political "teeth" of participatory organizations in Peronia has two roots. The first is that groups promoting citizen involvement in the community did not have the backing of a strong legal and institutional framework. The CM managed to obtain formal accreditation as an organization and was able to leverage that status to achieve some influence and prominence. Yet, the group was not organized under Guatemala's legal system. Nor was the MT or any other civic entity in Peronia. Even the formal COCODEs that the central government organized during the *Mesas* process were not able to exercise their full potential rights under the law, because municipal authorities chose not to implement the *Consejo* system and neither the neighborhoods nor the central government had any concrete manner of inducing compliance. Thus, the weak institutional framework for citizen participation in Guatemala denied communities such as Peronia the structure to organize themselves and the legal tools to ensure meaningful engagement.

Furthermore, the "teeth" of engagement groups in Ciudad Peronia were also limited due to a failure to achieve inclusive community representation and address deeper processes of social organization and mobilization. Their frequent claims to the contrary notwithstanding entities such as the CM and MT did not represent all of the area. Even if such spaces had managed to attract representatives from all the community's diverse neighborhoods, my investigation revealed that many of these individuals lack credibility with area residents.¹⁹ Despite efforts to create the engagement entities chronicled in this article, Peronia remains deeply fragmented and area-wide organizational efforts do not exist. Thus, CM and MT members did not attempt to mobilize community resources to address their challenges, but instead limited their efforts to soliciting outside support. This orientation prevented these groups from attaining real influence

¹⁸ The government's MT facilitator told me in an interview that the public institutions involved in Peronia had created a list of projects for the community before the *Mesas Tématicas* process began (Jacobo, personal interview, March 8, 2012).

¹⁹ An issue I explore further in chapters 4 and 5.

in external decision-making processes and allowed government actors to dismiss them with impunity.

Ultimately, the history of citizen participation in Peronia embodies the tension between concerted struggles to open and maintain spaces for community involvement in the process of local development and the limits imposed by internal contradictions and external obstacles. Nonetheless, working collectively enabled, to some extent, the exercise of agency, at least by those actively involved. At points in the history of these initiatives, those working within them played a significant role as protagonists in significant community processes. They articulated problems and sought resources to address the area's many needs. Those residents engaged in participatory opportunities sought to change relationships with state actors, to form partnerships (or make demands) to benefit the community. Their actions and those of similar groups demonstrated the efficacy that participants collectively exercised through the organizations in which they were involved.

The evolution of participatory spaces in Peronia provides a glimpse into a share of resident's efforts in a diverse community to help to shape their own collective future. Many community leaders, as well as those who may not consider themselves such, were involved in varied ways in making and shaping ongoing processes of participation. While several attempts at organizing such opportunities ended in failure, the willingness of individuals and groups to restart these efforts, sometimes years later, provides testimony to their belief in collective approaches to Peronia's challenges. However, participation has not proven a magic solution to the area's needs. Civic engagement organizations have been fragile, weak and often ineffective. Nonetheless, they have opened up different possibilities for development and democracy. Engaged residents have come to expect more from their governments, both national and local. Participatory spaces have also been sites for community members to craft a shared vision for Peronia, however conflict-laden those efforts turned out to be. Engagement processes, though difficult and fragile represent, at least symbolically, and at times in practice, the prospect of the community coming together to pursue a common future. Peronia's recent history of civic involvement demonstrates that many area residents believe in this vision and are willing to continue to fight for opportunities to realize that possibility.

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Chapter 3

Coproduction, Citizen Participation and Slum Upgrading: Evidence from Guatemala

Abstract

Rapidly growing numbers of urban slums and communities with deeply impoverished populations lacking services in developing countries have spawned a search for new strategies to improve the living situations of those residents. Several experts have suggested coproduction, the shared provision of development improvements involving the urban poor and state actors, as an approach to upgrade these neighborhoods. Nevertheless, there is nothing like consensus among interested analysts concerning the efficacy of coproduction. Some scholars have contended that such arrangements can strengthen and democratize relationships between the urban poor and local governments, while others caution that clientelism and weak organizational capacity undermine the possibility of the approach. This article examines coproduction initiatives in two low-income communities on the periphery of Guatemala City, exploring the complex social dynamics associated with each. Although the slum upgrading interventions in both neighborhoods led to improved services for residents, they fell short of the advances promised by advocates of the coproduction model. This analysis argues that the relationship between urban poor residents and local government authorities in these cases was marked by patronage-based exchanges and a weak commitment to citizen participation by authorities. Additionally, the two communities lacked the organizational capacity necessary to act as effective partners in the coproduction process. The article concludes that donors, civil society organizations and governmental actors will need to invest in promoting and strengthening inclusive, participatory governance and civic organizational capacity, and do so for a prolonged period, if coproduction is to realize its potential to generate meaningful improvements in the lives of Guatemala's urban poor.

Introduction

Development scholars and practitioners are increasingly focused on the challenges posed by rapidly growing informal communities throughout the global south. This attention has grown as the world's population has become progressively more urban during the last half century. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme highlighted in a 2003 report entitled *Slums of the World* the fact that nearly one billion people, approximately one sixth of humanity at the time,

lived in precarious conditions. Much discussed works by Davis (2004) and Neuwirth (2005) soon followed, highlighting the desperate plight of a new “informal proletariat” and spurring renewed efforts to address the challenges posed by increasing numbers of such individuals and their communities.

Interventions aimed at reducing urban poverty and improving the lives of slum dwellers have achieved notable successes during the past decade, yet the number of residents living in poverty in informal communities continues to rise globally. In the face of this ongoing challenge, scholars and advocates alike have called for new strategies to improve living conditions in impoverished urban communities, especially access to basic services such as water and sanitation. One such approach is coproduction, described as shared generation of development improvements involving the urban poor and state actors. Despite a number of success stories, coproduction is no panacea, as its implementation is made difficult by the real-world dynamics of poor urban communities and their relationships with government authorities.

This essay explores the challenges to achieving coproduction in informal communities by examining two cases of poor urban areas on the edge of Guatemala City, Ciudad Peronia and El Mezquital. El Mezquital was the site of a major slum upgrading program spearheaded by the World Bank and UNICEF during the 1990’s. Peronia, meanwhile, has benefitted from a recent (2010-2011) government-sponsored development initiative to provide diverse services to residents, as well as the efforts of a newly elected, seemingly reformist mayor. In both cases, public authorities took specific steps to include community leaders and organizations as partners in the slum improvement process. This article explores the strategies and approaches to development undertaken in the two communities, in order to investigate the obstacles to and possibilities of achieving coproduction arrangements between poor urban residents and institutional development actors.

Coproduction

The core idea of coproduction is that multiple actors make contributions to the provision of a good or service. The concept began to be applied in the 1990’s in the sphere of international development reflecting a growing focus on the participation of poor actors in projects and processes intended to benefit them. Ostrom (1996) has pointed to the potential advantages of coproduction for more efficient and effective change outcomes for poor communities, while also noting the challenges inherent in realizing such arrangements. Joshi and Moore (2004) have

argued that although co-production processes do not necessarily represent ideal scenarios, they are widely utilized and often represent positive adaptations to contextual limitations. The authors cite several primary constraints on public sector provision of goods and services, including declining or inadequate governance capacity by state actors and the logistical challenges associated with delivering services in complex environments.

Ackerman (2004) has contended that coproduction arrangements can result in governance and accountability benefits. Joint production of services allows civil society and community actors to promote accountability from the inside, rather than more limited outsider watchdog roles. Mitlin (2008) has echoed this argument, specifically examining the possibilities of coproduction for slum upgrading. She has suggested that not only do such structures improve the efficiency and effectiveness of improvement interventions, but also that such collaborative frameworks may reshape relationships between the urban poor and governmental actors. In such circumstances coproduction demonstrates the capacity of the impoverished to contribute to solutions to urban problems, allows for the strengthening of grassroots organizations and involves the poor and their organizations in the political sphere, both in making claims and participating in decision-making.

Scholars have documented successful cases of coproduction by groups of the urban poor in developing contexts. Gasparre (2011) has highlighted one example of the approach used by the global network Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), based on patient, strategic and collaborative engagement with the state. Gasparre has argued that SDI's promotion of coproduction in such diverse contexts as Mumbai, India, Cochabamba, Bolivia and Harare, Zimbabwe led not only to improved and sustainable development outcomes, but also enabled the urban poor with whom the organization works to engage directly with state actors and build positive relationships radically different from those that existed previously. Yu and Karaos (2004) have chronicled collaborative efforts involving a federation of the poor and various local governments in the Philippines to promote pro-poor solutions to land and shelter needs. They have suggested that building the level of trust among all collaborators necessary for coproduction was challenging, requiring the federation to develop and employ significant capacity and credibility, but the reward was more effective interventions that have secured real gains for slum dwellers in that country.

Challenges to Coproduction

Realizing the potential of coproduction for slum upgrading is difficult, given the challenging dynamics of urban areas in the developing world, particularly the typically existing relationship between the poor residing in those areas and government authorities. According to Elinor Ostrom, "Making these systems work effectively over the long run requires as much change in the attitude and operational routines of public agencies as it requires input from residents in all phases of the project" (1996, p. 1075). Coproduction depends on the willingness of governmental authorities to share decision-making and responsibility with the urban poor. This in turn requires mutual trust and recognition by authorities to a "right to the city," very different from the eviction-based policies practiced in many cities across the globe.²⁰

Desai (2010) examined urban poverty from a political economy perspective and found that the poor generally lack political agency, which he defined as the, "capacity of the poor to select, reward and sanction the leaders, institutions, policies, formal rules and informal norms that directly affect their lives" (p. 2). The author noted that linkages between governing authorities and those residing in informal communities are often personalistic and clientelist in character, despite formal democratic representation. Desai (2010) also contended that social and political fragmentation among heterogeneous slum populations limits collective action and further weakens the political clout of the poor, as does the frequently informal nature of their employment, which precludes strategies such as strikes or collective bargaining. Even when coproduction arrangements are initiated, Mitlin (2008) has warned that government authorities may use them to coopt urban poor groups, although she also has argued that strong grassroots organizations can maintain their autonomy despite such pressures.

Scholars have observed continuing clientelist and patronage-based politics in Latin America, despite formal democratization processes (Escobar, 2002; Fox, 1994; Garcia-Guadilla, 2002). Clientelism undermines the citizenship of the poor by inducing them to exchange their political rights for material goods. This governance scenario thrives in situations of high inequality and social exclusion, common throughout Latin America. In this political context, achieving genuinely collaborative coproduction is a significant challenge.

Despite this legacy, there are signs of openings in the Latin American region that might augur well for the potential of coproduction in its urban centers. The 1980's brought a wave of

²⁰ For the case of Delhi, see Guatam Bhan (2009)

formal democratization to the area and saw the return of national and local electoral processes across the continent. Chavez and Goldfrank (2004) have documented the experiments and reforms in increased citizen participation installed by leftist parties elected in many of Latin America's cities. Abers (1998) and others have examined the famous budget process in Porto Alegre, Brazil, but other examples of participatory governance exist throughout the region (Peruzzotti & Selee, 2009b). Despite these promising shifts, some observers have noted that changing the region's underlying authoritarian and exclusionary dynamics and existing practices has been difficult, irrespective of the institutionalization of democratic elections and the formal existence of mechanisms of citizen participation (Duhau & Schteingart, 2003; Montambeault, 2011; Rodgers, 2012).

In addition to the importance of the nature of the political and organizational context underpinning relationships between local authorities and the urban poor, coproduction also depends on informal community dwellers possessing significant capacity. Ostrom (1996) has argued the poor must develop organization and capabilities to overcome the collective action dilemmas that coproduction entails. Many of the successful instances of coproduction cited in the literature (including the previously cited cases by Gasparre, 2011; Mitlin, 2008; Yu & Karaos, 2004) have involved grassroots organizations with significant capacity, including citywide federations and international alliances. However, in most urban centers of the developing world, such organizational wherewithal is absent. De Wit and Berner (2009) have warned that the vertical patronage relationships in which the majority of slum dwellers are enmeshed limit the creation of groups to represent their interests. These authors have cautioned further that even when such organizations exist, their leaders often become brokers and patrons in their own right by concentrating resources and access to outside organizations, facilitating opportunities for corruption.

In sum, achieving production arrangements requires significant prerequisites: a working relationship between representatives of the urban poor (implying their self-organization) and local governments, as well as robust social capital among informal community residents. Desai (2010) and de Wit and Berner (2009) have contended that such conditions are unlikely in most cities of the developing world. This study examines the outcomes of attempts at coproduction under just such challenging circumstances.

Context and Research

According to the *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011* report, Guatemala City is a highly heterogeneous and unequal²¹ urban area. One third of the metropolitan-area's residents live in conditions of deprivation, although often in diverse neighborhoods in which significant numbers of very poor and working class households live in close proximity. The collection of neighborhoods known as Ciudad Peronia reflects these characteristics as it is composed of heterogeneous communities that range from informal slums, to working-class urban neighborhoods, to outlying rural settlements that are home to both impoverished and better-off residents.

This article contextualizes discussions of coproduction by analyzing the cases of El Mezquital and Ciudad Peronia, neighborhoods located on the periphery of the Guatemala City metropolitan area in the municipality of Villa Nueva. The two settlements were originally established by the National Housing Bank (BANVI)²² as residential areas for working-class Guatemalans, but were subsequently and exponentially enlarged by additional waves of squatters, many of whom were seeking improved conditions relative to the temporary housing or high rental prices they had been experiencing in Guatemala City.

At present, Peronia is a dense, diverse and largely unplanned urban area of approximately 80,000 residents (population estimates vary from 50,000 to 250,000) comprised of more than 30 individual neighborhoods, with distinct characteristics. These include:

- An early BANVI-sponsored development
- Informal settlements resulting from land invasions²³
- Subdivisions with properties aimed at supplying housing to working-class families
- Several rural communities experiencing encroachment by continued urban development.

Despite its variety of neighborhoods and inhabitants, many Guatemala City residents consider Peronia a *zona roja* or red zone, a community overrun by crime and plagued by poverty. Peronia does indeed have a relatively high rate of criminal activity, much of it violent. Yet incidents of

²¹ Guatemala City's Gini coefficient of .50 ranks it among the more unequal cities in the world, according to the report.

²² El Mezquital in the 1970's and Ciudad Peronia in the 1980's.

²³ Although residents of several of the early informal settlements have since obtained legal land titles and been able to develop some basic infrastructure, more recent occupiers continue to await resolution of their legalization petitions (in some cases for more than 10 years) as illegal squatters.

aggressive illegal behavior have decreased in recent years, following a truce between two gangs that had been fighting for turf in the community for more than a decade. Poverty certainly exists in Peronia as well, but the overall character of the area is distinctly working class (which, in the context of Guatemala's highly unequal distribution of income, also means working poor).

El Mezquital is also a diverse community, with five distinct neighborhoods, each the result of a separate land occupation. The first settlements were established on suitable parcels, while later groups occupied areas with steeper slopes. Although upgrading efforts in Mezquital have resulted in improved infrastructure, as will be discussed below, the community still struggles with crime and poverty.

I have drawn data concerning El Mezquital from a number of scholarly articles and investigations describing the community's development process, particularly concerning the role of local and external actors (2000, 2001). I obtained further insight from later studies that examined the neighborhood's dynamics several years after development projects had ended (Batres, Gonzalez, & Bolanos, 2006; Murphy, 2004). This analysis synthesizes the evidence available to draw lessons from the efforts described.

Additional data concerning Peronia resulted from two phases of personal research, the first from June to August 2010 and the second from June 2011 to December 2012. During these periods I was a participant observer of a group of community leaders seeking to promote development in the community. I participated in regular meetings of Peronia's grass roots leaders and representatives as they discussed development opportunities and challenges. In addition I conducted more than 50 individual interviews with local leaders and other residents as well as NGO and local and national governmental actors involved in development processes in Peronia.²⁴ Addressing their experiences with and perspectives concerning such initiatives, I sought to capture the overall pattern of change in the communities I examined while focusing particularly on coproduction initiatives.

El Mezquital

The international organization development workers who first arrived in El Mezquital in the mid-1980's described conditions of the squatter settlement as resembling those of a refugee camp. Indeed, a typhoid epidemic swept through the area's five neighborhoods within the community's first several years of existence, leaving more than 150 children dead. Prior to the

²⁴ Unless noted, I have assigned interview participants pseudonyms to protect their identity.

disease outbreak, local and national authorities had offered the community little support and residents had resorted to crafting their own solutions to their challenges, such as illegally tapping city water pipes. The deaths of children from typhoid, however, provoked such anger among residents that they marched 15 miles to the national palace in the center of Guatemala City, bearing the casket of a child who had died from the disease. This protest of inhuman conditions in El Mezquital proved a seminal event and it led to significant interventions by international development organizations, beginning with health and urban services projects offered by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Doctors without Borders.

The response of Guatemalan government agencies to the tragedy, however, was varied. The municipal government of Villa Nueva remained reluctant to provide public services to El Mezquital's residents, forcing inhabitants to resort to illegal measures. However, the locality never forcibly sought to evict El Mezquital's settlers. And the municipality eventually installed 500 latrines and the central government's health ministry also minimally equipped a health post in the community.

After a period of considerable searching, community leaders found a willing government partner in the National Reconstruction Committee (NRC), originally set up to support refugees of Guatemala's massive 1976 earthquake. In the late 1980's the NRC agreed to a housing project in El Mezquital with beneficiaries providing labor and repaying the cost of their dwelling units over time. The NRC also enlisted the World Bank and UNICEF and, after seven years of delays, undertook a US \$6.5 million urban infrastructure project that included electricity, sewage and household water taps for El Mezquital's residents. The combined efforts of these external organizations during the next several years resulted in significant improvements in housing and infrastructure in the community. The municipal government, however, had virtually no involvement in these initiatives. After completing the projects, the international organizations involved concluded that their intervention in the neighborhood had been successful and withdrew.

Guatemalan national government authorities and international organization representatives hailed the El Mezquital, NRC, UNICEF and World Bank development process as a successful model of partnership between an organized community and external actors. Numerous neighborhood-based organizations, including a resident's association, housing cooperative (with committees dedicated to a range of issues including education, water and

micro-credit), women's cooperative, association of health workers and others, were involved in the initiatives undertaken in the area's five settlements during the 1990's. International and national agencies worked extensively with these groups as well as with a new community coordinating body originally established for the World Bank initiative, in order to plan and implement projects in El Mezquital. Additionally, these local groups organized efforts to solicit contributions to the development projects from residents as required by the international organizations, principally labor and funds for the infrastructure projects.

Given the contributions by El Mezquital residents and a variety of development organizations to the infrastructure and other improvements in the community, it might be tempting to call this a successful example of coproduction for neighborhood upgrading. However, several aspects of the process call such a conclusion into question. The first and most obvious dimension relates to the definition of coproduction, which scholars have consistently conceptualized as shared inputs from society and *government* actors. In the case of El Mezquital, central government agencies played a relatively small role in the development program and its contributions were spread across several entities, creating challenges for sustainable relationship-building. The municipal government was virtually absent from the process, aside from limited and isolated contributions, including the noted early provision of latrines.

Perhaps the definition of coproduction should be expanded to include non-state actors working with communities. However, central to Mitlin's (2008) claims about the benefits of coproduction for neighborhood improvement is the strengthening of relationships between poor residents and (especially) local governments. Government-community linkages were equally important to Ackerman's (2004) conception of coproduction and to his claim that such arrangements can improve accountability as well. Neither of these attributes characterized the El Mezquital development process. Indeed, the overwhelming presence of external actors and resources may well have deepened municipal government neglect of the community.

Despite this shortcoming, the upgrading interventions in El Mezquital appeared to make efficient use of external financing, due to joint contributions by residents and international organizations and to build community organizational capacity through the involvement of numerous local groups. Nonetheless, the participation of local organizations led to problems of its own in the development process. Although several community entities were important actors,

international institutions appeared to consider them more credible and representative than did the native population. Many El Mezquital residents accused the leaders of these organizations of acts of corruption related to the development projects, undermining the credibility of several that were involved in the upgrading programs. World Bank representatives responded to these allegations by creating new community organizations through which to coordinate its projects. However, this unilateral course of action provoked significant backlash that eroded neighborhood support for the Bank's intervention. Finally, the general environment of distrust that existed throughout the process, due to the above factors and limited resident involvement (beyond a select group of leaders) in decision-making, led to protests and threats of violence against individuals associated with the project.

The local conflicts and distrust generated during the upgrading process in El Mezquital extended beyond the life of those interventions. Scholars investigating social dynamics in the community several years after the externally-funded projects ended found that local organization was extremely weak due to residents' distrust of neighborhood leaders, whom many residents accused of acts of corruption during the development interventions (Batres, et al., 2006). Researchers' interviews with inhabitants also revealed significant attitudes of dependency, with external organizations and resources seen as critical to address local needs. Thus, although the benefits of improved physical infrastructure were plain after the international assistance projects ended, so too was the damage to the social and organizational fabric and potential of the community.

In sum, although the development process in El Mezquital led to important improvements in infrastructure and involved collaboration between external actors and local organizations, it did not approach the possibilities outlined in the coproduction model. The narrow participation of residents and the distrust and conflict the initiative generated, as well as the scarcity of government (especially municipal-level) involvement in this case, diverged from the conditions necessary for coproduction. Rather than the upgrading process resulting in both physical improvements and strengthened community capacity to address ongoing challenges in concert with government entities, the international intervention in El Mezquital appeared to weaken possibilities for future development.

Ciudad Peronia

Ciudad Peronia's development trajectory has differed significantly from that of El Mezquital. The primary distinction is that external development actors and resources have played little role in the improvements undertaken during the past decades in the diverse neighborhoods of Peronia. Instead, the area's residents and Guatemala's municipal and central governments have been the primary actors in its development efforts. Predictably, perhaps, the community-led initiatives in Ciudad Peronia have been diverse and varied in their level of success and impacts. I have elected to focus here on the development processes that involved the municipality, with a special emphasis on the current approach by a new reformist mayor and a recent collaborative pilot project sponsored by the national government, in order to assess the extent to which Peronia may have achieved coproduction.

Local Government

The approximately 30 community leaders²⁵ interviewed during this research were nearly unanimous in declaring that the municipal government of Villa Nueva had done little or nothing to contribute to Peronia's development. Nevertheless, it is clear that the locality has in fact carried out initiatives in the community. Respondents, however, perceived that the municipality had not assumed its full responsibility in addressing Peronia's needs.²⁶ This sentiment is widespread in Peronia and other poor areas of Villa Nueva, whose residents often claim the locality rejected and ignored communities like theirs (Batres, Gonzalez, & Bolanos, 2008). In the case of Peronia, which lies on the edge of the municipality, the local government in fact maintained for many years that the community did not fall within its jurisdiction, so citizen perceptions were not without foundation.

Nonetheless, despite residents' assertions, the municipal government has indeed played a significant, if uneven, role in Peronia's development. The approach generally adopted by the local authority has been to contribute materials for projects, such as street paving or school improvement, while citizens supply labor. In other cases, the municipality has contracted private businesses to carry out projects and split the costs with those residents benefitting from the improvements. In some instances too, the local government has carried out projects without any

²⁵ These representatives were individuals who held formal leadership positions in neighborhood organizations or were otherwise actively involved in community development efforts in Peronia.

²⁶ The municipality's 2009 report included only a few projects and programs in Peronia, including one street paving effort, donations of building materials, chairs and desks and small literacy and youth sports programs.

citizen contribution. Only the first of these arrangements even superficially resembles coproduction. But even in that case, given the nature of the relationship between residents and municipal authorities, calling such limited joint initiatives coproduction is misleading.

Those community leaders I interviewed who offered an unfavorable view of the Villa Nueva government reported that they made repeated requests to local officials for assistance of various kinds that were ignored. Specifically, municipal authorities had done little to address the needs of several of Peronia's informal settlements, despite frequent petitions by community members and officials' promises to that effect (made particularly during political campaigns). Yet the local government carried out water, sewer and paving projects in another neighborhood lacking those services, all in the year preceding the 2011 general elections. Thus, while the municipality has surely invested in improvements in Peronia, residents and leaders I interviewed argued that many projects have been chosen based on arbitrary, or politically motivated criteria, rather than on community needs.²⁷ Even in cases in which both residents and the municipality contributed, labor and materials to a project, the nature of the relationship between community groups and the locality in these examples precluded the achievement of authentic coproduction.

A new mayor took office in Villa Nueva in January 2012 promising a very different governing approach. At events during his political campaign and initial meetings with grassroots leaders after he took office, he claimed he would work in partnership with all of the communities of the locality. In a meeting I observed with Peronia's leaders less than a month into his administration, the mayor admonished them for coming to him with only a long list of needs. He stated he would be breaking the mold of leadership in Guatemala and would not play the role of the patriarchal chief who "solves" all problems; rather he would empower communities to address the challenges they faced themselves.

The approach and language used by the new elected executive resembles that of coproduction as he invited residents and local associations to become partners in development. The mayor requested proposals from groups and neighborhoods, not just a list of problems, and promised to facilitate solutions. He proposed numerous initiatives in Peronia, including dental clinics, adult education and soccer fields, most to be carried out with materials contributed by the

²⁷ This, despite an institutionalized process in the municipal planning office of ranking projects based on cost, number of beneficiaries, socio-economic level of residents and number of recent projects carried out in the community.

municipality and residents' labor (personal observation and notes, February 2, March 14 and August 4, 2012).

Yet his offer of what might be labeled “infrastructure via coproduction” was not without challenges. The mayor asked grassroots groups to present him with technical proposals to address community problems, yet few individuals or organizations in poor areas had the know-how to produce such documents. The mayor also proposed improving community organization, saying that he would establish *Consejos Comunitario de Desarrollo* (COCODEs or *Consejos*, community development councils²⁸) in each neighborhood in the municipality (replacing the existing patchwork of COCODEs, municipal development committees and neighborhood associations). This was a promising advance, as at the time of his announcement, Peronia had only five *Consejos*. Yet this organizational work lagged behind his other projects. Moreover, the municipality did not articulate a plan to address the low levels of mutual trust and suspicion of community leaders present in many neighborhoods in Peronia, which were identified as a key obstacle by both residents and local organizers I interviewed. In addition, in meetings and events I observed, the new mayor made repeated promises to organize a municipal development council, another component of the COCODE system, to formalize citizen participation in development decision-making. However, during the first year of his administration he had not taken any announced steps to fulfill this pledge.

Nonetheless, the new chief executive implemented practices never before seen in Peronia. He assigned one member of the locality's municipal council and one department head to form direct linkages to the community. These individuals attended local meetings that I observed and brought information about the municipality's plans and projects to area leaders.²⁹ Six months into his administration, the Mayor visited Peronia to carry out an exercise he has called *Sueños Compartidos* (Shared Dreams). In this activity, which I observed, community leaders gathered together and proposed projects, discussed the different options and then voted for their preference, establishing a ranked list for the community. The new municipal administration clearly envisioned a different relationship between grassroots and government

²⁸ A 2002 national law established the COCODEs to formalize community participation in development in Guatemala. Although *Consejos* have been organized in most rural areas, many municipalities in the Guatemala City metropolitan area have failed to implement the system fully. Only 17 COCODEs had been formally organized in Villa Nueva's approximately 500 communities, as of 2008. Instead, local government authorities had promoted their own Municipal Development Committees.

²⁹ However, after several months of consistent contact, both of these municipal representatives stopped attending local meetings in Peronia, possibly due to the significant demands made on them by residents.

actors. Yet it remains unclear whether improved communication and participatory planning, in the absence of community capacity, constitute the shared development approach coproduction's advocates envision.

Central Government

The Guatemalan central government has been involved in Peronia since the community's founding in the mid-1980s. However, after an initial first several years of significant attention and investment, the nation ceased to be a major actor in the area's development, funding only a handful of isolated projects through the years, typically corresponding to electoral cycles.

During the first months of 2010, the government returned to the area, however, due, in no small part, to a surprising truce declared by the area's two warring gangs. Seeing a rare opportunity to consolidate peace in a notoriously violent and difficult area, public institutions initiated an unprecedented level of engagement with Peronia's leaders to plan and implement an 18-month integrated development program. According to official records, the goal went beyond reintegrating now ex-gang members into the community and society to addressing the structural factors that perpetuated poverty and social exclusion among many residents of Peronia (Ramirez, 2011).

In May 2010, the Office of Social Programs of the First Lady (SOSEP) convened more than a dozen ministries, agencies and programs to coordinate investment in a Peronia Development Initiative (PDI), designed to be a pilot project for government engagement in marginalized urban areas. According to the SOSEP coordinator, whom I interviewed, the government's approach was to work in partnership with the community to facilitate the PDI through a strategy based on co-responsibility, and thus break from traditional approaches that had seen the government as the principal actor and the targeted community as, at most, a source of labor (Andres Ramirez,³⁰ personal interview, October 17, 2011). To enable such collaboration between state and community actors, a government facilitator organized neighborhood representatives into thirteen *Mesas Tématicas* (MT or *Mesas*; thematic working groups) devoted to health, education, youth and other priority issues. *Mesas* leaders were given unprecedented access to public officials and were invited to participate in meetings with representatives of state agencies to hear progress reports and share their ideas and perspectives.

³⁰ Real name

The MT's first task was to analyze Peronia's many needs. Each thematic group, composed of 3-5 community members, assisted by a government facilitator and representatives of a small NGO, worked to identify needs and possible interventions, which they then presented to SOSEP coordinators. However, by this time, government ministries had each simultaneously prepared their own investment plan for the PDI and were mobilizing to begin work. The government facilitator working with the MT later informed me in an interview that the community's own analysis had little impact on the projects undertaken through the initiative (Jacobo Gramajo,³¹ personal interview, March 8, 2012).

Community leaders I interviewed reported their expectations were high during the first several months of the process. The *Mesas* convened twice a week or more to receive information on new projects and to address issues that arose. In addition to the facilitator, other government agency representatives often attended these meetings to provide specific information concerning programs that could be undertaken in Peronia. Although the MT's analysis had revealed a number of possible community-initiated actions to address needs, in meetings I observed participants focused on anticipated PDI projects and gave little thought to organizing the residents to promote collective approaches to the area's problems.

Through SOSEP and other offices, the national government made an initial effort to strengthen community organization in Peronia via creation of COCODEs. Public efforts led to creation of four new *Consejos* in different neighborhoods to add to the single such entity that had existed previously. According to national government and community leaders I interviewed, at that point, municipal authorities³² refused to legalize more such groups on the grounds that Villa Nueva had its own system of community organization. The SOSEP coordinator emphasized to me in an interview that strengthened civic capacity and citizen participation were important elements of the government's PDI and necessary to ensure consensus, transparency and sustainability. He also said that weaknesses of resident organization and involvement undermined the PDI, claiming that community leaders fought for influence and personal benefits rather than working together for the good of the area. Indeed, in August of 2010, a conflict concerning a project created a rift within Peronia's original COCODE. Members of the group held an election to determine the future leadership direction and, amid allegations of

³¹ Real name

³² The municipal government, despite repeated invitations, never participated actively in the MT process, although its officials did occasionally send representatives to meetings.

manipulation and vote buying, the then-vice president ousted the incumbent president. The new COCODE leadership was much more demanding and oppositional than the former, and it quickly became the voice of the MT in discussions with government officials.

Increasingly frustrated by the attitude and actions (including the exclusion of the government facilitator by request of a few members of the newly elected *Consejo*) of the Mesas, the SOSEP rescinded its invitation for leaders of this group to attend meetings with government agency representatives. Many community leaders I interviewed reported that they were equally upset with the COCODE's negative stance toward the government and chose to withdraw from the MT process as a result.

Those who remained involved in the process focused on sending written demands to government agencies and on the few PDI projects being implemented jointly by community and state actors. One such effort was a small horticulture plot managed by community members, mostly women, with help from the state agriculture agency, including training, seeds and fertilizer. Another was a project called *Escuelas Abiertas* (Open Schools) that employed community members with technical skills in computing, electronics, sewing, etc., to conduct classes for local residents.

Yet the bulk of the US \$2 million the government invested in Peronia between June 2010 and December 2011 was in physical infrastructure and the government's signature programs, such as the *Bolsa Solidaria* (Solidarity Bag), which distributed food essentials to families in need (Ramirez, 2011). The *Bolsa* was a source of contention in Peronia and most community leaders I interviewed said the program was indeed necessary to alleviate poverty, but was used principally as a clientelist tool to generate political support for the incumbent party's presidential candidate.³³ The *Bolsa* became emblematic of the national government's involvement in Peronia and most MT members I interviewed said they were grateful for the investment, but thought the initiative was aimed mostly at generating political support rather than truly addressing the causes of poverty, much less working in partnership with the community.

What had begun with such promise and high expectations ended with both government and local actors frustrated by the other's perceived deficiencies, according to those I interviewed.

³³ *Bolsa* administrators replaced the program's first coordinator in Peronia due to community opposition to her overt politicization of the program. A contemporaneous assessment of a related Guatemalan government program, *Mi Familia Progresa* (My Family Progresses), a conditional cash transfer, found that the initiative's structure and implementation had clientelistic characteristics (Duarte, Ochaeta Aguilar, & Flores y Flores, 2011).

Community members felt misled by central government officials' talk of collaboration and lofty promises. Public officials meanwhile expressed their exasperation at the inability of community leaders to come together as responsible partners in development. The SOSEP coordinator said in an interview with me that despite the government's efforts to break the culture of dependency, community leaders in Peronia expressed unreasonable demands while avoiding responsibilities, even as they fought amongst themselves for influence and personal benefits (Andres Ramirez, personal interview, October 17, 2011). In sum, the PDI fell short of meeting the definition of coproduction. Although it had begun with auspicious rhetoric and significant community participation, conflicts among residents and their representative groups and mutual distrust among the same and between those entities and public officials led the government to distance itself from civic leaders and continue the project without active citizen engagement.

Beyond these challenges, the local and central government development approaches in Peronia evidenced obvious shortcomings that prevented the realization of coproduction. First, these governments' development initiatives in Peronia appeared to be motivated in significant part to gain political advantage. In both cases, a majority of community residents I interviewed believed that public resources were being used to buy votes, rather than promote authentic development. Regardless of the extent to which this was indeed the case, this perception shaped citizens' views of the governments' intentions and the resulting skepticism proved an obstacle to authentic collaboration between community and government actors. It seems clear, too, that less than transparent mechanisms of distributing public resources resulted in suspicion and fragmentation among community organizations and leaders, as each sought to obtain personal benefits or tangible resources for their neighborhoods.

In addition to these political factors and claims, and related to them, was government actors' weak commitment to citizen involvement. Despite an early apparent willingness to engage citizens as partners in the development process, public officials did not seriously integrate community input into plans for the PDI. Furthermore, when engaging residents became more challenging, the government opted to withdraw from continued interaction, rather than invest resources in facilitating participation and mitigating conflicts. The evidence from this study suggests that while public officials may well have been interested in community participation, they had limited options for investment in Peronia, consisting generally of the existing *Cohesion Social* programs. Furthermore, it seems likely that government leaders had

little understanding of the social dynamics present in the community and little expertise in encouraging participation under such challenging circumstances. Finally, the government likely needed to show visible results of its projects before the September 2011 elections, leaving little time for capacity building and organizational processes prior to the PDI.

Even the commitment of the new mayor of Villa Nueva to involve poor urban residents as partners in the development process can be questioned, despite his promises to do so. The newly elected official did open up spaces for communities to present projects and priorities to the municipal government for consideration. However, despite his assurances he would organize a local government development council and COCODEs in Peronia, neither of these initiatives was realized during the first year of the new administration.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, the area's residents, leaders and groups themselves lacked the organizational capacity to overcome collective action dilemmas and partner effectively with the government on coproduction for community improvements. Some promising steps taken during the PDI, such as the formalization of four new COCODEs and the organization of the MT, did not account for or mitigate the significant levels of distrust and fragmentation among residents and community groups. Residents I interviewed told me that many neighborhood representatives were corrupt and used their positions to pursue personal benefits (Claudia, personal interview, July 27, 2011; Gabriela, personal interview, August 16, 2011; Lucia, personal interview, October 26, 2011). By the same measure, community leaders I interviewed acknowledged the distrust felt by their neighbors and said it was a result of previous individuals having abused their positions for personal gain, including gathering money from residents for initiatives they never carried out. As a result, civic leaders with whom I spoke said they were often unable to organize their neighborhoods to contribute even when public resources were available (Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011; Ernesto, personal interview, July 25, 2011). Despite the creation of a community-wide forum in the guise of the MT, most grassroots leaders competed for scarce resources, rather than collaborate to secure shared aims. Moreover, interviews and my own observation suggested that leaders and organizations in Peronia had very few meaningful connections with their counterparts in other communities in Villa Nueva. In consequence, they could neither learn from each other's experiences, nor form a united front to advocate for their common needs.

Finally, the new mayor's call for development proposals presumed a level of technical capacity on the part of community groups and leaders that the vast majority did not in fact possess. Even the analysis of community problems carried out by the MT required significant assistance by outside actors. This highlights another important deficit: neither the municipal nor central governments provided meaningful facilitation of community participation in order to achieve coproduction. The local Catholic Church and an occasional community organizer from a small number of local NGOs provided the few resources available to leaders and organizations in Peronia dedicated to enabling inter-group and combined civic-governmental action.

Conclusion

While the development processes in El Mezquital and Ciudad Peronia demonstrated some successes that resulted in material improvement in the conditions in which many residents lived, neither achieved the requisites of coproduction. In both cases, the actors involved were unable to overcome the twin challenges of achieving a collaborative relationship between the government and the urban poor while addressing civic organization and capacity.

The relationship between public representatives and poor urban citizens remained fraught in both communities due to one or a combination of the following factors: a limited conception of participation by external actors and political manipulation of development interventions. In the case of El Mezquital, the first concern was evident. For earlier municipal development efforts as well as the central government's initiative in Peronia, both applied. For Villa Nueva's new mayor, the first factor appears to have been the most limiting.

In both El Mezquital and Ciudad Peronia, external actors opened spaces for community participation. Yet citizen involvement was limited to consultation and organizing inputs to development processes whose contours were defined elsewhere. Decision-making remained the preserve of external authorities. Gaventa (2006a) has labeled this "invited" participation, and contrasted it with "claimed" or "created" participation, in which societal actors open spaces for citizen involvement. In the cases examined in this article, limited "invited" participation played a significant role in preventing true collaborative partnerships between the urban poor and government actors from being realized. That factor alone, however, did not prevent these coproduction projects' full success.

The second obstacle to a coproduction relationship between civic and public actors in these cases was the continued infiltration of clientelist and patronage objectives into local and

central government development initiatives. The politicization of government investment contributed to low levels of community trust and likewise undermined comity between residents and local leaders, who were often seen, rightly or wrongly, as complicit in public officials' patronage schemes. The specter of clientelism limited the possibilities for genuine citizen-government coproduced development projects.

A third and equally important factor in the failure of coproduction in El Mezquital and Ciudad Peronia was a lack of organizational capacity at the community level. As noted above, many of the successful examples of coproduction cited in the literature have involved grassroots organizations of slum dwellers, city-wide federations, and/or the support of local and international NGOs. Neither El Mezquital nor Peronia was so endowed. Instead, these communities evidenced a patchwork of local organizations with varying capacities and perceived legitimacy by their residents. Interpersonal trust, particularly between residents and local leaders, in both communities was low. The lack of organization and capacity left both neighborhoods unable to intercede to exceed the limited involvement required by external actors effectively and, in the case of Peronia, the political manipulation that accompanied development initiatives. Low levels of organization and trust also limited the ability of the communities to contribute meaningfully, as coproduction entails, as free-rider behavior undermined collective action.

The two cases examined in this article call into question optimistic assumptions about realizing coproduction for upgrading informal settlements. The evidence from El Mezquital and Ciudad Peronia demonstrate the significant challenges that limit such collaborative arrangements in poor urban areas. Yet they also point to concrete actions that might facilitate its achievement. The first is the need to consider coproduction within broader frameworks of participatory governance. A more inclusive governance structure could address the obstacle of limited citizen involvement in decision-making found in both El Mezquital and Ciudad Peronia, thus facilitating improved trust between government and community actors. In some cases, participatory governance has undermined clientelist structures and practices (Abers, 1998). Finally, a more democratic governance framework could help to ease citizen fears that coproduction actually constitutes a form of "outsourcing" of state responsibilities to poor communities, consonant with a neoliberal vision of development.

Perhaps more important is the capacity of publics to engage in coproduction. El Mezquital and Ciudad Peronia evidenced the divisions, distrust and lack of organizational capacity common in many low-income urban communities in developing nations. The most basic prerequisite of coproduction is functioning and credible neighborhood-level organizations that can bring residents together to pursue a collective project. These, too, were absent, for the most part, in the two communities investigated in this article. Building and strengthening such local groups in contexts such as those of El Mezquital and Ciudad Peronia requires significant and long-term organization and facilitation on the part of outside actors. This element was underemphasized and/or poorly implemented in all of the urban development processes described above.

Successful past examples of coproduction resulted from capable neighborhood and community organizations aligned with city-wide and even international federations of slum residents and organizations. Such networks have been able to leverage significant resources and expertise and enter into arrangements with local governments based on mutual respect and understanding, limiting the pressure of clientelist and patronage-based influences on coproduction processes. These networks and federations did not spring up overnight. Instead, their development required years of struggle by organizational leaders and support from international actors. Building up such capacities in Villa Nueva, much less the entire Guatemala City region will be a long-term undertaking requiring significant resources from civil society and likely, international organizations.

However daunting, investment in the areas of inclusive and participatory governance and community organizational and networking capacity enhance the possibilities of coproduction, and the promise that the approach offers for urban development in slum neighborhoods. The cases of El Mezquital and Ciudad Peronia demonstrate that interest by outside organizations in collaborating with low-income residents to pursue development often falls short of coproduction. Although the approach holds possibilities for the improvement of conditions in poor urban communities, such partnerships face numerous challenges that can easily derail promising efforts. Local governments, civil society organizations, community organizers and international agencies must invest significant resources for sustained periods in facilitating improved enabling environments for coproduction in order to see such relationships fulfill their promise.

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Chapter 4

Empowering the Community: An Exploration of Participation and Agency in Ciudad Peronia

Introduction

Latin America has changed significantly during the past 25 years. The region as a whole has become much more democratic, although with numerous continuing deficits and shortcomings when measured against that criterion. Poverty and inequality remain significant challenges, and increasingly urban ones, despite an improved political and economic climate. In order to tackle these lingering obstacles and advance the living circumstances of citizens throughout the region, scholars and activists have called for more and deeper democracy, specifically they have promoted increased control by citizens “over decisions that affect their lives” (Gaventa, 2006c, p. 11). Notable cases of such enhanced participation in cities such as Porto Alegre, Brazil as well as numerous other experiments throughout the region have demonstrated the potential for improved democratic responsiveness and development effectiveness resulting from participatory governance (Selee & Peruzzotti, 2009). Yet, civic engagement experiments in Latin America often take place in deeply segregated contexts and may not address existing issues of inequality and exclusion (Rodgers, 2012). More broadly, evidence suggests that the urban poor continue to lack political agency (Desai, 2010) and that even collective organization does not uniformly lead to action and empowerment (de Wit & Berner, 2009). These ongoing challenges highlight the barriers to democratic inclusion by the impoverished, despite the creation of formal participatory frameworks.

Further study of efforts to encourage political engagement by the poor is needed. Case studies have revealed both the challenges to and possibilities for participation for marginalized actors inherent in political spaces and arenas (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007) and pointed to the need for more detailed investigation of the micro-politics of involvement for what they may reveal concerning the dynamics of empowerment (Cornwall, 2004; Hickey & Mohan, 2004b).

This analysis helps fill the need for evidence from localities experimenting with participation under more “ordinary” circumstances of inequality, exclusion and the struggle for development. It focuses specifically on the possibilities for empowerment of marginalized actors and their communities through participatory opportunities and activities. This article examines involvement and empowerment in the context of a diverse, but predominantly lower-income,

community on the periphery of Guatemala City known as Ciudad Peronia. Since its establishment in the 1980's the area has been the site of both formal and informal experiments in citizen participation. Ciudad Peronia and its residents have also been subject to political, economic and social exclusion and marginalization, driven by both external and internal factors. As a result, this investigation contextualizes, examines and appraises the possibilities for empowerment through citizen participation under such conditions.

Empowerment Examined

The study of power and empowerment has a long history in the social sciences. Yet, defining power is challenging, because as Steven Lukes has suggested, power is “ineradicably value-dependent” and “an ‘essentially contested concept’” (1974, p. 26). John Gaventa has neatly captured this concern:

Some see power as held by actors, some of whom are powerful while others are relatively powerless. Others see it as more pervasive, embodied in a web of relationships and discourses which affect everyone, but which no single actor holds. Some see power as a “zero-sum” concept—to gain power for one set of actors means that others must give up some power. Since rarely do the powerful give up their power easily, this often involves conflict and “power struggles.” Others see power as more fluid and accumulative. Power is not a finite resource; it can be used, shared or created by actors and their networks in many multiple ways. Some see power as a “negative trait”—to hold power is to exercise control over others. Others see power to be about capacity and agency to be wielded for positive action (2006a, pp. 23-24).

This definitional uncertainty carries over into discussions of empowerment as well. Individuals and groups often conceptualize the idea differently depending on their perceived social standing and the manner in which they believe the exercise of power has affected their lives. Others, scholars in particular, may be influenced by an ideology or even ontology that shapes their perceptions of the concept based on their understanding of history and reality. Adding to this confusion is the fact that power is manifest in a variety of forms. Gaventa (2006a), drawing on Lukes, has identified three of these expressions:

- Visible power, which is seen in overt struggles for influence and resources and may be associated with pluralist conceptions of contestation and decision-making.

- Hidden power, which is active in setting agendas and establishing the “rules of the game.”
- Invisible or internalized power through which the powerful and powerless alike internalize prevailing discourses which shape their perceptions of reality and their view of their legitimate role and possibilities in it (pp. 29).

Hayward’s (1998) description usefully synthesized and expanded Gaventa’s tripartite typology by suggesting that the differing views of power he identified, shared a common concern—to reveal and to critique the differential social constraint on human freedom—as well as a conceptualization of power as an instrument agents use to alter the independent and/or authentic action of the powerless (p. 9). According to Hayward, mechanisms of power are not simply tools of the powerful, but rather, “[define] fields of possibility. [They] facilitate and constrain social action” (p. 12). Consequently, she described a continuum of power relationships, ranging from domination to freedom, in which the critical mediating variable determining an individual’s placement on the spectrum is the capacity of an actor, through concerted effort, to shape the limits of his or her exercise of agency. An individual enjoying relatively more autonomy and capacity to exercise their efficacy freely does not necessarily “possess” more power, but rather is relatively less constrained in making choices by the multiple and cumulative actions of other actors in space and time. This understanding of power defines empowerment as gaining an increasing degree of freedom, i.e., the ability of an individual or group independently to shape and expand their horizons of possibility.

This view also implies that emancipation is inherently a process. The accumulation of capacities and resources to shape and expand possibilities can be a long road for those who face social, cultural and economic barriers. Becoming aware of the nature of oppression and the opportunities of maneuvering within such constraints can only be gleaned through trial and effort. Indeed, it is that very process of individual and social learning, struggle and effort that yields potentials for actors to acquire a sense of agency.

Empowerment, therefore, is earned. It cannot be bestowed. A social worker cannot emancipate their client, nor can a development organization “give” power to a community. The conditions for potential enablement can be afforded and facilitated, but for one individual to “empower” another is innately self-contradictory as it negates the targeted person’s capacity to exercise agency. Thus, those “seeking to empower” must be sensitive and thoughtful and ever

attuned to the self-efficacy of those with whom they deal. Overly anxious (and ultimately paternalistic) would-be “empowerment bringers” might possibly increase some capacities of those with whom they work and overcome some visible constraints they confront. But in the process they might well reinforce dependency and feelings of inferiority that will continue to undermine the ability of the “empowered” to imagine and shape new possibilities for themselves.

Any useful definition of empowerment must explicitly conceptualize the phenomenon as a process undertaken by specific actors seeking to exercise their agency. The expansion of personal and community capacities is one factor in reshaping the field of possibilities for those individuals. Equally real, however, are potential constraining structures that preserve status quo inequalities and exclusion, and which limit the extent to which personal and community resources can be leveraged to induce change. Individual or group empowerment under these circumstances may well entail struggling with, overcoming and appropriating the power of others.

A useful synthesis of these factors underpins Deepa Narayan’s definition of empowerment, “the expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one’s life” (2005, p. 4). Narayan has usefully viewed the concept as comprised both of the opportunity structures in which actors are enmeshed; composed of the social, economic, political and institutional situations that may enable or constrain their possibilities and the individual and collective resources and capabilities that allow those individuals to exercise agency within the spaces available.

This definition of empowerment is multidimensional. Narayan draws a broad distinction between external factors (opportunity structure) and internal elements (resources and capabilities). The capacity of individuals and groups to define the limits of possibility is clearly a product of the internal and external dimensions of empowerment Narayan proposes. Actors must possess resources and capabilities that allow for the exercise of agency as well as recognition of their own efficacy,³⁴ but there must also be spaces, created by themselves or others, in which they can practice their freedom.

I employ Narayan’s basic empowerment taxonomy with additions drawn from other scholars as a conceptual framework for this article. Figure 1 illustrates the dimensions of

³⁴ Friedman (1992) proposed the concept of social power (resources such as knowledge, skills, assets, social organization) that permits the exercise of psychological power (self-efficacy) and political power (collective action and decision-making).

efficacy divided between opportunity structure and resources and capabilities, with each element further subdivided as shown. I discuss each of these facets of empowerment in greater depth below.

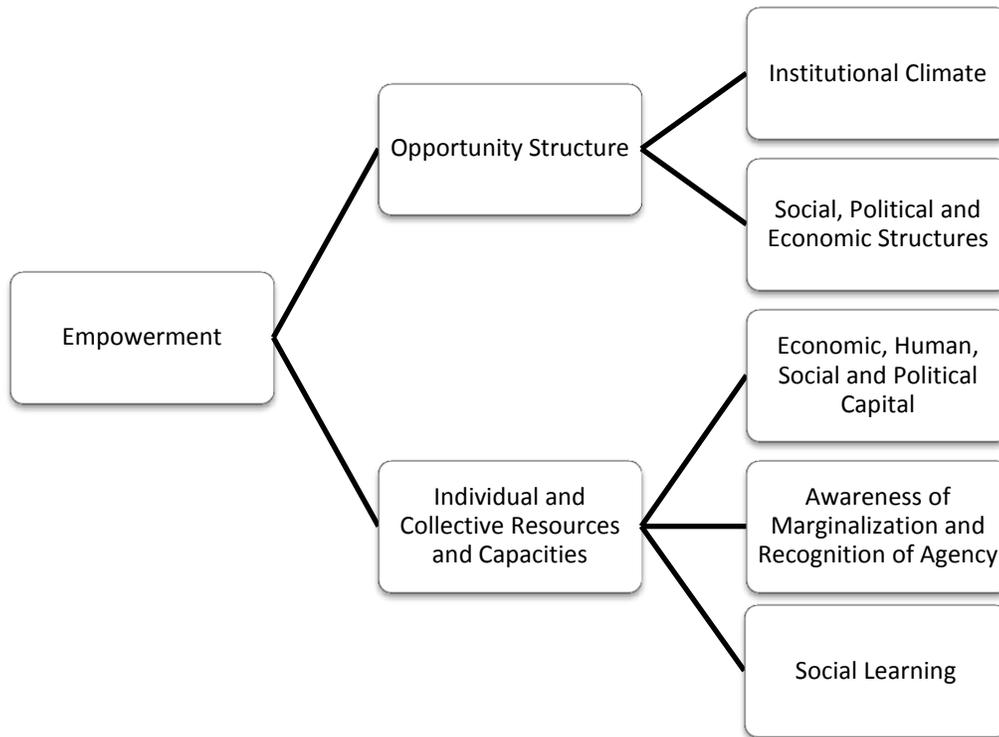


Figure 1: Dimensions of Empowerment (adapted from Narayan, 2002)

In discussing opportunity structures, Narayan (2002) has drawn a helpful distinction between institutional frameworks and social, political and economic influences. Institutional climate includes both formal laws and regulations and informal norms and patterns that exist in a given context. States, the for-profit sector and civil society entities and other organizations operate in governance systems in which both formal and informal structures and relationships interact, enabling or constraining action by different groups in distinct arenas. Institutional climates that promote access to information, inclusion and accountable governance favor empowerment, particularly when governance systems promote citizen involvement in decision-making and problem-solving (see Briggs, 2008; Fung & Wright, 2003b). Contexts in which these elements are partial or absent present obstacles to efficacious action by social actors.

Opportunity structure also includes the broader social, political and economic systems that exist in a nation, which inevitably benefit and include some groups more than others. Social structures may be overt, such as India's caste system, or subtler, as, for example, continuing racism and sexism in the United States despite legal equality. Likewise, political structures may be formally inclusive while still de facto excluding groups of people, perhaps even the majority of the population. Finally, economic structures, including local markets and the distribution of productive assets as well as the global capitalist system, have produced great wealth for some while others remain deeply impoverished. Social, political and economic systems frequently overlap in the groups they benefit and those they exclude, often leaving very few spaces for action by marginalized groups. Nonetheless, such structures are not impenetrable and may offer opportunities (or have them opened by external pressure) for action and resistance. Such "cracks" can allow social actors some initial purchase from which efforts to secure empowerment and equality can be undertaken.

Several types of individual and collective resources and capacities are integral to empowerment:

- Assets that meet basic human needs, including housing, financial resources and sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- Human capacities, such as education, skills and knowledge.
- Social resources and capabilities, such as networks, organizational capacity and leadership.
- Political capabilities, including capacity to engage the state and what Glyn Williams (2004, p. 95) has called the, "navigational skills needed to move through political space, and the tools to reshape these spaces where this is possible."

Generally speaking, these resources can be understood as different forms (economic, human, social, political) of capital. Developing and/or gaining access to types of wherewithal that actors previously lacked is an important component of empowerment.

A related, but distinct, dimension of empowerment involves psychological capacities and resources that lead to a sense of self-efficacy. Paulo Freire's idea of conscientization as well as Appadurai's concept, "capacity to aspire," captures this facet of emancipation (Appadurai, 2004; Freire, 1970). These processes and capacities allow actors to recognize their own resources and

the possibility of exercising their agency while also highlighting the structures of marginalization and exclusion against which they must struggle. Yet, as Narayan's (2005) conceptualization makes clear, awareness alone does not constitute empowerment. The construct also demands that individuals and groups possess resources and opportunities for action to bring about change. However, awareness represents a critical first step.

The process of utilizing resources and exercising agency may lead to another dimension of empowerment: social learning and the co-production of knowledge. Individual, group and community capacity to act effectively in challenging and shifting environments is a product of their ability to learn (Innes & Booher, 2003). Learning in this sense is different from human capital as it is the result of reflective action. This presupposes some measure of agency and space to act. Understanding empowerment as a process allows for the possibility of social learning through a cycle of action-reflection-action. This conceptualization is powerful because it permits individuals to generate new knowledge and understanding collectively, an act that entails both the exercise of agency and an expansion of perceived possibilities (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2006).

Both individuals and collective actors can develop and exercise distinct forms of capital, critical awareness and learning. The capacity of groups is related to the sum of their assembled individual resources, yet collective organization also opens up further possibilities for exercising agency by amplifying the voice and influence of those involved. However, realizing the benefits of group membership is often challenging for poor and marginalized individuals (Mohanty, 2007; Thorp, Stewart, & Heyer, 2005; Weinberger & Jutting, 2001) and the possibilities of collective action depend on numerous contextual variables (Ostrom, 2000). This makes combined organization and capabilities all the more valuable when achieved.

Participation and Empowerment

The ideals of participation and empowerment have become increasingly popular in both academic and policy circles during the past two decades. These concepts have often been linked and some scholars have described engagement as inherently empowering. Nonetheless, criticisms of both concepts have emerged and cast doubt on the prospects of empowerment via involvement. Investigating these issues helps to clarify when and how participation may lead to efficacy.

Researchers, for example, have identified increased engagement as a key component of women's empowerment (Karl, 1995), a means of contributing to the development of psychological aspects of self-efficacy, such as self-confidence and motivation (Zimmerman, 1990) and a space to sustain relevant gains from previous initiatives (Lyons, Smuts, & Stephens, 2001). Furthermore, participation involving state and societal actors can reshape formal institutional structures and informal political practices, leading to improved accountability and more effective citizenship (Abers, 1998; Hordijk, 2005).

The field of development studies has exhibited considerable enthusiasm for the idea of empowerment through participation. Institutions, perhaps most notably the World Bank, engaged in work in the Global South, have been particularly interested in community (and to a lesser extent, individual) participation as a means of pursuing the dual objectives of more efficient and effective development interventions while also promoting empowerment. Much of this interest in engagement and efficacy in the international development community can be traced to the popularization of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), a methodology pioneered by Robert Chambers, and similar approaches. Inspired by Freirian ideas, Chambers conceptualized PRA as a means of empowering the excluded by taking power from development practitioners and putting it into the hands of the poor (1997). Much of mainstream development work has been based since on the twin claims of participation and empowerment.

Criticisms of this approach emerged as the idea became increasingly popular in development studies and practice. PRA (and similar approaches it inspired) were criticized as under-theorized (Kapoor, 2002), too reliant on a simplistic understanding of community, agency and empowerment (Cleaver, 2001; Rowlands, 1995) and constituting a "tyranny of techniques" (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). These assessments shared the view that PRA and related strategies all used the term empowerment simplistically and in a way divorced from any real understanding of power as potentially entailing struggle and contestation.

Other critics of popular conceptions of citizen participation have also raised the issue of power. Sherry Arnstein (1969), for example, noted more than four decades ago that citizen engagement can be empowering or disempowering. Many scholars since have argued that participation and participatory governance are profoundly embedded in relations and structures of power (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Gaventa, 2006a). These analysts have suggested that failure to grapple with issues of politics and power, by treating citizen

involvement and empowerment as if they constituted technical interventions alone, will increase the influence of the already-powerful and thereby preserve the status quo and existing hierarchies and inequalities (Cornwall, 2004).

Often, those managing participatory opportunities define the social actors involved as “beneficiaries,” “clients” or “stakeholders.” Engagement designed with such categories of individuals and communities in mind may offer more limited possibilities for these to question, and possibly expand, the boundaries of potential action whereas involvement conceived as the active practice of citizenship may offer more opportunity for the exercise of agency (Gaventa, 2006b). Yet, even proponents of the emancipating potential of citizen participation recognize that the institutional design of such engagement represents only one factor involved in realizing efficacy; context, specifically power dynamics and inequality, can undermine the best-designed interventions (Fung & Wright, 2003a).

Frances Cleaver has warned against, “conceptualizations of agency as deliberate public participation in decision-making and collective action,” calling such definitions “too narrow” (Cleaver, 2007, p. 223). Individuals in poor and marginalized communities exercise agency, purposive or more habitual, on a daily basis in order to survive and make incremental improvements to their quality of life. For these individuals non-participation may be a rational decision. Yet involvement in community leadership, organization and development represents a specific space and mechanism for agency, one that presents opportunities for developing empowering resources and capabilities. Participation thrusts individuals into the public domain, where they must navigate broader institutional frameworks and opportunity structures. Engagement entails the learning and practice of citizenship through the exercise of rights and fulfillment of responsibilities. And citizenship and agency are directly linked through engagement as Ruth Lister has observed, “Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined” (Lister, 1998, p. 228). Thus, considering participation and empowerment together, and indeed, as inextricably linked, emphasizes agency as well as the potential for emancipatory gains by means of involvement.

Ciudad Peronia

According to the *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011* report, Guatemala City is a highly heterogeneous and unequal³⁵ urban area. One third of the metropolitan-area's residents live in conditions of deprivation, although often in diverse neighborhoods in which significant numbers of poor and non-poor households live in close proximity. The neighborhoods known as Ciudad Peronia reflect these characteristics and range from informal settlements to more working-class enclaves to outlying rural village-like clusters.

Ciudad Peronia is located on the edge of the Guatemala City metropolitan area in the municipality of Villa Nueva. The National Housing Bank (BANVI) originally established the community in the early 1980's as a residential area for working-class Guatemalans, particularly those left homeless by the massive earthquake that devastated the country in 1976. Peronia was subsequently and exponentially enlarged by successive waves of squatters, many of whom were seeking respite from temporary housing or high rental prices in Guatemala City.

At present, Peronia is a dense, diverse and largely unplanned urbanized area comprised of more than 30 individual neighborhoods, with distinct characteristics. These include:

- The original, BANVI-sponsored development
- Informal settlements resulting from several land invasions³⁶
- Subdivisions with properties being sold to working-class families
- Several rural communities now being subjected to urban development as resident families sell parts of their land for residential subdivisions.

Despite its variety of neighborhoods and inhabitants, most Guatemala City residents know Peronia simply as a *zona roja* or red zone, a community overrun by crime and plagued by poverty. The area's residents do complain about its high levels of criminality, including violent crime. Yet incidents of such behavior have decreased in recent years following a truce declared by two gangs that had been fighting for turf in the community for more than a decade. Peronia has pockets of extreme poverty as well, particularly in its informal squatter settlements. Yet the

³⁵ Guatemala City's Gini coefficient (a measure of income distribution; 0 representing perfect equality and 1 all income accruing to a single individual) of .50 ranks it among the more unequal cities in the world, according to the report.

³⁶ Although residents of several of the early informal settlements were able to obtain legal land titles and some basic infrastructure for their communities, more recent occupiers continue to await resolution of their legalization petitions (in some cases for more than 10-years so far) and are meanwhile formally considered illegal squatters by public authorities.

overall character of the area is distinctly working class (in the context of Guatemala's highly unequal distribution of income, this generally means working poor).

Residents of Peronia have worked to form community organizations to promote infrastructure and other improvements since the foundation of its first neighborhood. As the area grew, the number of development committees and associations also expanded, each focused on the needs of its own community or sector. These groups utilized multiple strategies to obtain improvements for their residents, including mobilizing resources and labor, requesting support from the local or national governments or occasionally receiving resources from a non-governmental organization. Yet individuals I interviewed said there were also many incidents of fraud and manipulation in which community leaders or groups requested money from residents for projects, only to disappear with the funds. In other cases, Peronia-based organizations requested support for initiatives from public institutions, only to be ignored. The interview and survey data (detailed below) I present in this article indicate that most area residents believe that community leaders and groups are ineffective and motivated by self-interest. As a result, few citizens are actively involved in Peronia's neighborhood organizations.

The Guatemalan congress passed a law in 2002 aimed at systematizing citizen participation at the community and municipal level. The statute created *Consejos Comunitario de Desarrollo* (COCODEs or *Consejos*; community development councils), which were given responsibility for coordinating residents' participation in development and decision-making. A decade after its passage the statute's results have been mixed (Halloran, 2011). That is, COCODE implementation has been uneven, particularly in the municipalities that make up the Guatemala City metropolitan area. This outcome occurred in part because Villa Nueva had instituted its own structure of citizen participation in 1998, through Municipal Development Councils (MDCs), to systematize the then-disorganized committees devoted to housing, water and other improvements. In consequence, after the Community Development Council legislation passed in 2002, Villa Nueva resisted adopting the new approach. Indeed, more generally, as of 2008 only 17 *Consejos* existed among the municipality's more than 400 neighborhoods. In 2009 Villa Nueva, instead of adopting the COCODE framework, updated its MDC regulations and continued organizing those groups instead. Although *Consejos* and municipal development organizations share the same basic function, consolidating resident involvement in local

improvement efforts, the national legislation includes other features not present in the local statute, such as a municipal development council (COMUDE).

The current participation-oriented organizational landscape in Ciudad Peronia consists of five COCODEs and numerous MDCs, as well as groups focused on women's empowerment, youth issues and volunteer firefighters, among others. The *Consejos* and municipal development entities are formally organized to address community needs, particularly infrastructure, most often through petitions to the local or central governments. Additionally, local leaders from across Peronia have formed a group denominated *Mesas Temáticas* (MT or *Mesas*; thematic working groups) to share information and address common needs.

Research Methods

I conducted key informant interviews and surveys between October 2011 and March 2012 with participants in community organizations and other Peronia residents who were not formally involved with such groups to generate the primary data for this study. The investigation focused on four neighborhoods within Peronia:

- Gran Mirador, a large (approximately 500 families) residential area that was the product of one of the first land invasions in Peronia. Mirador has achieved significant infrastructure improvements.
- Anexo, a smaller (approximately 75 families) informal slum settlement that has seen few improvements since residents first occupied the area 10 years ago.
- Regalito, another small (roughly 75 families) informal slum settlement occupied five years ago, whose residents are working on several small upgrades.
- La Selva, a long established rural community (approximately 200 families) on which Peronia's growth has gradually encroached.

I selected neighborhoods that were working to make community improvements, rather than subdivisions with legal titling and adequate housing and infrastructure, in order to examine the possibilities of empowerment under challenging circumstances. Additionally, the chosen communities included cases of both strong and weak local organization and participation and so together represent the diversity present in these dimensions across Peronia.³⁷

I interviewed 12 participants (6 men, 6 women) in COCODEs, MDCs and other community organizations ("participants") and 13 individuals (5 men, 8 women) who were not,

³⁷ Although I offer some specific comparisons between different neighborhoods, I selected several individual communities within Peronia to include a diversity of perspectives based on differing experiences and histories of participation, rather than for the purpose of comparative study.

when interviewed, participating in any group³⁸ (“nonparticipants”), with approximately three participants and three non-participants from each neighborhood. The semi-structured interviews with members of both groups focused on the opportunity structure and individual and collective resources and capacities each perceived as present in their neighborhoods. A more exhaustive inventory of resources and capabilities was beyond the scope of this investigation. Nevertheless, these interviews revealed much about how Peronia residents perceived and experienced participation and empowerment.

I also conducted random³⁹ surveys of between 20 and 25 nonparticipant residents in each of the four selected neighborhoods, focusing on perceptions of neighborhood problems, future wellbeing and community leaders and organization. This study is part of a wider investigation of citizen participation in Ciudad Peronia. In consequence, I have also drawn on perspectives from interviews carried out with other community leaders and direct observation of participatory practices in Peronia MDC, COCODES and other organizations. Finally, this article draws on additional data I gathered in Anexo during July 2010 that consisted of five individual semi-structured interviews with two participants and three nonparticipants and 44 individual surveys with nonparticipant residents addressing social capital and community organization. I transcribed and coded all personal interviews and tabulated and analyzed all surveys myself. Unless otherwise noted, all references to specific interviewee names are pseudonyms, selected to help to protect the confidentiality of those with whom I spoke.

Participation and Empowerment in Peronia

The data gathered from participants involved in community organizations as well as non-participants provides insights into the possibilities of exercising agency under circumstances marked by marginalization and exclusion. Peronia does not present a black-and-white case of empowered participants and disempowered non-participants. Indeed, in many ways, I have concluded that participants and nonparticipants demonstrate similar attitudes and histories of self-efficacy and agency. Yet, there does seem to be a divide between the small minority that engages in formal community organizations and groups and the majority that do not. Those civically engaged often complain about the passivity of their non-participating neighbors, although they acknowledge that past cases of corruption and manipulation have exacerbated the

³⁸ According to the 2008 Latin America Barometer survey, more than 73% of Guatemalans participate in religious groups, thus non-participants may have been involved in such organizations.

³⁹ I selected at random two streets in each neighborhood and surveyed approximately 10 residents on each.

current situation of little community involvement in organized group efforts at neighborhood improvement. Meanwhile, nonparticipants often noted in interviews with me that group participants like to be involved and have the time to do so, whereas they have other obligations.

I employ the conceptual framework outlined above of opportunity structure and individual and collective resources and capabilities to describe the dynamics of participation and empowerment in the groups I examined. I first discuss the perceptions, resources and attitudes of non-participants and thereafter those of civically involved individuals. Although there are similarities between these groups, there are key differences as well, some of which I attribute to the experience of participation. Yet, perhaps even more noteworthy, are the dissimilar attitudes and perceptions of collective organization and action expressed by representatives, participants and non-participants alike, in the four neighborhoods. I explore these variations for lessons about the possibilities and obstacles to exercising agency within such contexts in a separate section below.

Nonparticipants

Opportunity Structure

Research participants from the four neighborhoods were keenly aware of the structures and conditions that limited their life possibilities. Nearly every interviewee noted they faced significant marginalization in both the economic and political spheres. Peronia residents consistently mentioned the economic exclusion to which they perceived themselves subject. Many individuals noted that employers often refused to consider applicants with a Peronia address, because of its reputation as a *zona roja*. Such discrimination affects not only very poor uneducated residents, but also those with some education and professional experience and exacerbates what is, according to my interviewees, an already miserable economic situation, where jobs are difficult to obtain and pay is poor. Several said the neighborhood's economic situation had been steadily declining for a number of years, as stagnant wage levels fell further relative to the rising cost of living.

Meanwhile, nonparticipants frequently described political parties and candidates as seeking to manipulate residents through false promises and vote buying with a few bags of cement or metal roofing sheets, only to abandon the community once they attained office. Residents of Anexo and Regalito pointed to their ongoing insecure land tenure situation as proof of their political marginalization, despite repeated petitions and government official promises

that they would gain title. Many interviewees spoke negatively of the former mayor of the municipality of Villa Nueva who served three terms, from 2000-2012, saying that he had openly declared that he did not care about Peronia and had done virtually nothing to improve the community during his time in office. Residents of Regalito offered a somewhat more positive view of the municipal government, which had provided some small contributions to neighborhood projects, although according to residents I interviewed, it had not addressed either their land tenure situation or their requests for piped water, their two highest priorities (Regalito nonparticipant woman 2, personal interview, March 21, 2012; Regalito nonparticipant man 1, personal interview, March 22, 2012).

The nonparticipant Peronia residents interviewed reported few openings in the formal local governance framework that would provide them an opportunity to be heard or to take action to improve their community. These individuals reported uniformly that they knew of the organized group in their neighborhood, whether a COCODE or an MDC, and that they were aware such entities petitioned the municipal and, occasionally, central governments for community improvements. Yet most I interviewed indicated that little had come of such requests, aside from a few small contributions or projects undertaken many years ago, and that they personally had no direct contact with the municipal government or other actors, including the *Mesas Tématicas*, that existed explicitly to provide a mechanism for citizen participation.

Resources and Capabilities

Nonparticipant residents of the four neighborhoods reported varying degrees of personal resources and capabilities. As mentioned, a full inventory of such assets was beyond the scope of this study. I focus instead on the most relevant such resources mentioned by study participants. Individual resources and capabilities vary widely in Peronia and across the four neighborhoods examined. Those interviewed who had a job⁴⁰ or who had an employed family member, pointed to that income as their principal resource, whereas the unemployed interviewees immediately identified work as their most pressing need. Interviewees also frequently mentioned education as an asset that they possessed or, more often, lacked.

Collective resources and capabilities also differed significantly among the four communities. In Anexo and Gran Mirador, most residents expressed skepticism about the

⁴⁰ According to a 2011 government report, the average family income in Ciudad Peronia was US\$250 per month or \$3000 per year. As mentioned, this figure varies significantly among Peronia's various neighborhoods as well as within them. According to the World Bank, Guatemala's per capita income for 2011 was \$2,870.

possibility that their neighborhoods could organize to address their needs, despite the existence of community leaders and groups whose formal purpose was to do just that.⁴¹ In contrast, inhabitants of Regalito and Selva frequently mentioned the improvement projects neighborhood residents were undertaking collectively, which had been organized by community groups. I explore this difference more fully below.

Despite an awareness of their limited opportunities and resources, the majority of the nonparticipants interviewed stressed that individual effort would allow them to improve their situation and get ahead. Indeed, when asked about those who were better off in their neighborhood, the majority of unengaged interviewees indicated that those who were the hardest workers were the best off (although they also mentioned those with better educations). Most residents also noted that some external support would be even better, however, particularly in order to make improvements at the community level. A minority went so far as to say that their future prospects depended entirely on the intervention of the government or some other external institution. Yet most interviewees shared the outlook of this woman:

Getting ahead depends on each individual, not on anyone else. It depends on each person moving forward. ... For example, if I want to improve my shack, that's on me, but if we look at legalization, that depends on the government or better sewers, I consider that to be the municipality, the government, as well (Anexo nonparticipant woman, personal interview, November 29, 2012).

One study participant observed to me that his opportunities were few because he had little education, but he was making sure that his children studied so they might achieve more than he had (Anexo nonparticipant man 1, personal interview, July 15, 2010). Many others shared similar stories about improving the situation of their families by ensuring their children received an education. This is indicative of the cautious optimism most individuals expressed about their

Community	Anexo	Gran Mirador	La Selva	Regalito
Better off in 5 years	72%	30%	59%	80%
Same in 5 years	6%	33%	18%	10%
Worse off in 5 years	22%	27%	27%	10%

Table 1: Survey Respondents' Expectations of the Future for Self and Family

⁴¹ And, in the case of Gran Mirador, a significant history of collective action that had resulted in successful community improvements that had markedly changed the neighborhood (see below).

family's future prospects. Table 1 reports attitudes about the future offered by respondents in the four neighborhoods in this study. The data show significant optimism in Anexo, La Selva and Regalito, and more divergent opinions in Gran Mirador.

Data from the interviews enriches this picture. For example, several respondents in Anexo expressed the expectation that their personal situations would improve, even as they were pessimistic about any improvements at the neighborhood level (Anexo nonparticipant woman 2, November 29, 2012; Anexo nonparticipant man 3, January 8, 2013). In Gran Mirador, many interviewees pointed to previous improvements in infrastructure marking the community's transition from the *asentamiento* (squatter settlement) it had once been to a *colonia* (neighborhood), yet voiced skepticism on the likelihood of further progress and also raised concerns such as low wages, unaffordable education and unemployment. It may be that the expectations of Gran Mirador residents were higher, given the visible improvements the neighborhood had already achieved.

The majority of interview participants expressed significant uncertainty regarding their future situation. Most qualified their optimistic assessments by saying that things would improve for them only if God willed it. Some had no idea whether their situation would brighten, saying everything was in God's hands. As one interviewee put it, "*Aqui, como le digo, solo a la voluntad de Dios*" (Here I tell you, it's just up to the will of God) (Anexo nonparticipant man 4, January 9, 2013). Such statements demonstrate the general insecurity many whom I interviewed and surveyed felt about their situation and their shared perception that ultimately, they lacked control over what happened in their lives.

As mentioned previously, Ciudad Peronia is comprised of an extremely heterogeneous set of neighborhoods. Each community is also diverse with markedly varied family assets and incomes. Nonetheless, most of those interviewed claimed that the majority of residents in their neighborhood were in the same situation and faced equivalent barriers and limitations as those they confronted. A smaller set of individuals noted that within their area, some had more opportunities, often due to better education. In general, however, interviewees were reluctant to admit to or discuss differences within the community.

Many individuals noted that survival in Peronia has taught them life lessons, as had sharing with family and friends. Interview participants articulated fewer experiences with broader processes of social learning. Few could identify any such instances and even the

collective projects interviewees mentioned consisted solely of manual labor and/or monetary contributions.

Residents of these four neighborhoods of Peronia were aware of the broader structural constraints they faced and the rather limited opportunities of which they were able to take advantage. However, they also recognized their own agency, that through their sweat and effort, they could improve their situations, or at least those of their children. Perspectives diverged, however, on the possibility of improving their communities. Residents of Regalito and Selva spoke of the achievements they had realized collectively, while their neighbors in Anexo and Gran Mirador lamented their neighborhoods' lack of unity and poor leadership in interviews with me. These different views concerning community improvement will be discussed further below.

Participants

Opportunity Structure

In general, Peronia residents who participated in community organizations shared similar attitudes about their collective marginalization with their neighbors who were not involved in such groups. Participants interviewed frequently mentioned that those in Peronia often face economic discrimination. There was also consensus among interviewees (participants and nonparticipants alike) that the municipality had not fulfilled its obligations in Peronia, although perceptions of the interest and effectiveness of the local government varied among the groups. The municipal government had made a recent contribution to each of the four communities I studied,⁴² although this was generally restricted to a relatively small amount of material (cement, tubing, etc.) for a specific project. According to a minority of those interviewed, local government responsiveness had increased since creation of the COCODE or MDC in their neighborhood.

Yet most participants recounted dozens of requests they had sent to the municipality over the years that received minimal or no response. In some cases, the locality answered an appeal by contracting a private company to carry out the work and sending a bill to each neighborhood resident for the cost of doing so (sometimes amounting to several times the average monthly wage of Peronia residents). Interviewees also mentioned the attitude of the long-time mayor,

⁴² Most, if not all, of the resources reportedly contributed to these neighborhoods came during the year leading up to elections. During the years prior to this, these neighborhoods had received little or no attention from the municipal government. Thus, many Peronia residents, whether participants or non-participants, suggested that these local government resources constituted a form of vote buying by the then-mayor, who was seeking reelection.

who had made (and subsequently broken) many promises to the community concerning projects and improvements and had, on other occasions, indicated that he had no interest in working in the area. In sum, although some individuals interviewed were somewhat satisfied with the limited attention they were currently receiving from the municipality, those with a longer history of community involvement maintained that their neighborhood, and Peronia as a whole, had largely been ignored.

Resources and Capabilities

The community organization participants interviewed for this study generally indicated resources seemingly at or above the average for their neighborhood. All had regular employment, either through a job or their own small business or had a spouse who made enough that they could afford not to work. In the case of the squatter settlements of Regalito and Anexo, participants lived in shacks similar to those of their neighbors. The levels of education attained by residents varied significantly, although all interviewed were functionally literate and many had studied at least through the elementary level. Their children were almost universally studying (or had graduated), at the *basico* or middle-school level, at a minimum. Thus, the community organization participants reported possessing sufficient resources to allow them to live without scarcity, although most mentioned times of hardship (sometimes in the very recent past).

Participation in a community organization or group presented individuals with an opportunity to expand their social resources and political capabilities. These individuals built contacts within their organization, most obviously, but also throughout their neighborhood and even in other areas of Peronia, through relationships with other community groups and leaders. Those engaged also had opportunities to gain leadership experience and confidence, as well as to interact with government actors and agencies (even if only by submitting written requests).

Participants also were able to contribute to and access collective resources and capacities, although this possibility varied significantly among the four neighborhood organizations. The president and vice president of the MDC in Anexo told me in interviews that they worked virtually alone in many cases, whereas COCODE members in La Selva said that approximately 10 individuals participated in the group and supported community initiatives to varying degrees. In all cases, interviewees reported that membership did allow access to certain opportunities,

including government programs. In each neighborhood, one or more participants had paid positions as field administrators for those initiatives.

Engagement also provided those individuals involved opportunities for formal training and learning. Virtually all of the participants reported having participated in training provided by a government entity or NGO as these agencies or organizations have sought to build capacity at the neighborhood level by preparing leaders for a variety of situations. COCODE and MDC members reported receiving at least some minimum orientation from municipal authorities (or in some cases, a national government agency or a local NGO) concerning their roles and responsibilities. Other training topics included disaster mitigation and preparedness, community organization and project management, among others. In addition to these formal learning opportunities and perhaps more important than these experiences in practice, participants also emphasized the many lessons and informal learning occasions to which they had gained access through their involvement in community work and leadership. Many spoke of learning about working with the government, of becoming familiar with different state agencies and of gaining facility in writing formal requests and administering resources. Most also mentioned learning how to be a leader in the community, leading by example and acting accountably and transparently, so they would not be accused of corruption.

Like their nonparticipant neighbors, most participants I interviewed said they were cautiously optimistic about the future, especially if one was willing to make an effort to get ahead. Those who were engaged that I interviewed generally thought that those who were more prosperous in their neighborhoods were those who had worked harder. One participant with whom I spoke told me:

There are people [in Anexo] who make an effort and there are those that make an effort in a material sense but also in God's plans, following what he demands. Those people have been and continue to be prosperous. Then there are people that aren't like this. They want to continue living in the same way as when they first arrived here, they don't want to try to improve their situation. And there have been opportunities, even though they have been hard to take advantage of, there have been opportunities to not be in the same situation as when we first invaded here (Anexo participant man 1, personal interview, January 10, 2012).

Most I interviewed thought they could continue to improve their living conditions and that others could as well. One COCODE member from Gran Mirador said that even if people could not find a job, they could sell something in the community. She recounted her own experience of being without work and selling tortillas in the streets and eventually buying clothes and other merchandise to sell from her house (Gran Mirador Participant woman 1, personal interview, October 25, 2011). This interviewee and others emphasized the importance of having an attitude and a belief that an individual can overcome barriers and improve life for themselves and their families.

As a group, those interviewed expressed some uncertainties as well, however. Some noted that the cost of living had kept rising even as work opportunities were ever more scarce. Others noted that even if one worked hard and saved a little money, criminal extortion or violence could quickly reverse those fortunes. Consequently, many who reported optimism about the future added a caveat: “*Si Dios quiere* (if God wills it).”

As for the community as a whole, development group participants emphasized the value of effort and work, combined with organization and unity. Most of these respondents agreed that some outside support would be optimal with the preferred arrangement being external contribution of materials while the community provided necessary manual labor. Attitudes concerning this aspect of organizing the community for improvement varied significantly among the four neighborhoods and will be explored further in the following section.

Like their nonparticipant neighbors, there was some divergence of opinion among those engaged with community organizations on the topic of inequality and difference. Several of those involved that I interviewed claimed that everyone in their neighborhood was in a similar situation and condition. Yet others (or sometimes the same interviewee) emphasized the differences in their communities. The MDC president of Regalito, for example, noted that some area residents enjoyed a steady income from one or more shops they owned, while others could not feed their families every day.

Finally, participants who had engaged in community-based organizations or projects demonstrated their agency by the very act of their involvement. Often, the critical first step was to join a group. Each of the engaged individuals interviewed had their own story of how they began participating. Most interviewees with whom I spoke did not have a long history of community engagement. In the most common scenario, they had some involvement in a church

group or parent-teacher association and were then nominated and elected to serve in their neighborhood's COCODE or MDC. Others were elected without ever having participated previously, but were placed in a leadership role based on being a professional or because perceived as honest and responsible. Some spoke of feeling unqualified and unprepared to take on such responsibility, but that their neighbors encouraged them to do so and they had accepted as a result. And still a few others actively sought out group membership because they wanted to be involved in community affairs, without necessarily having been active in any prior civic activity. A minority of those interviewed had a more extensive background in community, having participated for many years on various committees and groups, prior to joining the COCODE or MDC.

Irrespective of their path to involvement, participants I interviewed often said that engaging in community organizations had changed their mentality. As one COCODE member told me in an interview,

A person who hasn't had the experience of working for the community [in a local organization] isn't the same as someone who is involved ... before I started participating, projects for the benefit of the community didn't matter to me, I was only interested in my own personal situation, I thought that others would take care of the neighborhood improvements (Mirador participant woman 1, personal interview, October 25, 2012).

Now that they had been involved in the community, participants I interviewed in all four neighborhoods said that they were willing to continue to invest time and effort in engagement, if their neighbors wished for them to carry on. Even in the more difficult situations, such as Anexo, the leaders I interviewed said they did not succumb to the frustration and fatalism of their neighbors who saw little possibility for community unity, organization or development.

According to the president of the MDC in Anexo,

Sometimes you feel like saying "I don't want anything to do [with community leadership], this wasn't what I expected" ... but then I think of my long-term plans [for community improvement] that I have made ... just because there is an obstacle, doesn't mean that your plans will be destroyed ... or some people come and talk to me and that encourages me to continue with my plans (Anexo participant man 1, personal interview, January 10, 2012).

Individual participation did indeed make a difference in some cases, when a specific leader shepherded a project through to completion or worked effectively to keep community members informed and included in ongoing processes. However, in some cases the dedication of one (or more than one) leader was not enough to counterbalance the distrust and pessimism of their fellow residents. It is to this question, of the conditions necessary to generate sustainable change and action at the neighborhood level, that I now turn.

Empowering the Community

Participation in organizations and spaces, such as COCODEs and the *Mesas Temáticas*, offer opportunities for residents to enhance their individual resources and capabilities and to find openings for action within existing structures of governance. Such involvement provides benefits to participants, but what are the larger impacts for the community of such engagement, if any? Can local leaders and organizations empower their communities? Or at least facilitate opportunities for residents to overcome the attitudes of passivity and suspicion that often prevent collective action in Peronia? Can the opposite occur? I explore these questions and their implications for the empowerment potential of community participation next.

Gran Mirador: The Rise and Fall of a Community Organization

In many ways, Gran Mirador has been the most successful neighborhood in Peronia. Several hundred families occupied the area only a few years after the community's initial creation. These squatters erected temporary wood shelters and had no access to water, electricity or any other services. Early in the neighborhood's history, residents illegally tapped into Peronia's utility systems, but eventually reached an agreement with the private companies providing those services and the municipality to obtain legal access to them. The population of Gran Mirador organized to press its claims and nearly every family contributed. Neighborhood committees also organized to address legalization and to obtain local government or NGO⁴³ support for street paving, school building and sewer installation, all carried out with labor and financial contributions from residents. Seven years after they arrived, residents also successfully negotiated with the BANVI to allow each family to purchase the plot on which it had settled and to begin to transform their shacks into houses. Thus, during the course of a decade, Gran Mirador changed in character from a squatter settlement to a more formal neighborhood.

⁴³ Médecins Sans Frontières financed a sanitation project in the community during the 1990's.

Yet, even as the physical infrastructure of the community visibly improved, its social foundation was decaying. During the years of active improvements, many individuals and groups claimed to be spearheading development initiatives. Some of these engaged in fraudulent activities. They requested money from their neighbors, sometimes accompanied by threats of eviction, for a project or initiative, and then delivered nothing, often leaving the community altogether with the funds entrusted to them.

The cumulative result of these acts was a growing suspicion among residents of all neighborhood leaders and groups; only 12% of those I surveyed in Gran Mirador reported that their local representatives were honest and 70% indicated that they thought community leaders used their positions to pursue their personal interests. Thus, even as several of Gran Mirador's longtime leaders were organizing and legalizing Peronia's first official COCODE, collective projects and actions in the neighborhood virtually disappeared. Few residents were willing to contribute labor, much less money, to efforts they thought would enrich corrupt neighborhood "leaders." As an example, one long-time COCODE member recounted in an interview the story of a small park the group had built a few years earlier. Those engaged thought that if they started work on the project, clearing the ground and installing play areas, other residents would see their example and contribute as well. Instead, rumors circulated that the *Consejo* members were being paid for their work and no one helped them finish their effort.

More recently, the Community Development Council itself has lapsed into relative inactivity, according to several prior participants who claimed the group seldom met, had no projects or activities planned and had been abandoned by nearly half of its original members (several of whom, according to those remaining, had joined because they thought it would provide them an opportunity for self-enrichment). The remaining participants still occasionally met and even proposed projects or activities, although these rarely got off the ground due to a lack of support from fellow members and the broader community.

Several neighborhood leaders suggested in interviews that the success of the community in improving its infrastructure had left residents with fewer needs and therefore diminished incentive to get involved in further projects. In the survey of Gran Mirador residents carried out as a part of this study, respondents cited high levels of violence as the community's most pressing challenge. Yet nearly two-thirds of those who shared that concern said that neighbors working together represented a part, or all, of the solution to the posited issue. However, only

15% of my survey respondents described community organization in the neighborhood as “Good” while more than twice that number considered it “Poor” and their opinions of community leaders were uniformly low, as discussed previously. Clearly there is interest on the part of residents in being involved in addressing the challenges still present in the community, but the perceived divide between residents and leaders undermines the possibilities of collective action.

The case of Gran Mirador is in many ways emblematic of Peronia as a whole: improving physical infrastructure with declining trust and community organization, as indicated by my survey results. During the last decade, neighborhood development entity members have focused on attaining physical improvements, while taking no action to address increasing levels of distrust and frayed social fabric. The current COCODE’s declining organizational capacity does not augur well for either prospect.

Anexo: More than a Decade of Frustration

In 2002 approximately 100 families first occupied the narrow strip of land at the edge of a steep embankment now known as Anexo. Whereas Gran Mirador achieved significant gains in its first decade of existence, Anexo has changed little. The houses in this neighborhood are shacks and although the street that passes through the residential area is in relatively good condition, thanks to materials provided by the municipality, it represents the only improved infrastructure in the community.

Members of Anexo’s MDC have been negotiating with the local government for more than a decade to gain secure land tenure and infrastructure improvements for the neighborhood’s residents, with little to show for it. In interviews, community leaders claimed that years of rejection by municipal officials had undermined inhabitants’ willingness to continue to invest time and effort in such initiatives. More modest neighborhood proposals have also suffered. For several years, the MDC has sought to construct a small building on an empty lot for community meetings and activities. However, residents have refused to contribute labor, materials or money, so the project has gone nowhere.

Prior to the most recent elections, the municipal government offered to give permission and contribute materials to extend sewerage to Anexo’s houses. In return, community members were expected to work to clear a major blockage where the main sewer line passed under their neighborhood. The MDC president complained that although some residents had done their

share and the municipality had been fulfilling its commitments, the blockage was more significant than originally thought, and soon all parties lost interest, leaving the project half finished. The president had already heard rumors and complaints from some citizens, blaming him for promising sewer access and not delivering.

Unfortunately, this episode demonstrates a similarity between Anexo and Gran Mirador. Like their counterparts in Gran Mirador, residents of Anexo have experienced manipulation and deceit by some of those claiming to be community leaders, leading to significant skepticism and distrust. At the time of this research the neighborhood was represented by its third MDC, the first two having disbanded amid claims of corruption and manipulation. Development Committee members I interviewed said that they worked hard to overcome and address this sad legacy, but evidence suggests that their success has been limited. My survey of Anexo residents suggested that respondents have little trust in their current community leaders, with 94% reporting that those individuals use their positions to pursue personal interests and less than half stating that these individuals were honest or working for the good of the community. Only 22% of respondents thought that neighborhood leaders shared sufficient information with residents. Several interviewees reported that the current MDC president had collected donations from residents on occasion for copies, phone calls and trips to the municipal offices, yet had nothing to show for it, causing them to question whether he used their money as he said he would. Other residents interviewed, however, claimed the current committee was making an honest effort and the community did not support the group as much as it should.

The president of the MDC was the only active member at the time of this research and he made a point of being visible and helpful in the neighborhood. When a heavy storm hits the community, he goes door-to-door to check on residents. When the sewer project was being undertaken, he worked most days alongside community members and municipal employees. He has dedicated time and energy to pursuing the neighborhood's legalization. Yet he has accepted the deterioration of the MDC and has not established consistent mechanisms of information sharing and collective decision-making, which might begin to rebuild trust with community residents. It appears that the combination of previous corrupt local leaders and the municipality's refusal to grant the neighborhood legalization during the past decade has undermined severely the possibilities of collective organization and action in Anexo. Furthermore, in the MDC president's drive to produce tangible results of any kind for the neighborhood, he seems to have

underemphasized the process by which those results are generated. Thus, he has been unable to earn the trust of his neighbors or convince them to participate in efforts to improve the community.

Regalito: Hope and Change?

Like Anexo, Regalito is an informal community created by illegal settlement of a narrow strip of land at the edge of a steep drop-off. Unlike most other invasions in Peronia, the 75 families who moved to Regalito in 2006 already lived, as renters, in various neighborhoods in the community. Like Anexo, too, Regalito's MDC has actively sought to negotiate with the municipal government for property titles and infrastructure-related services, but these have not yet been forthcoming. As a result, the neighborhood is still comprised of shacks and its residents lack water and sewer service.

A concrete walkway runs through the community, a project organized by the MDC with contributions of money and labor from each family (and a small donation of cement from the municipality). The sidewalk is the most visible of several small initiatives residents have jointly undertaken, demonstrating a proactive attitude and community organization that differentiates Regalito from many other Peronia neighborhoods. The president of the MDC holds regularly scheduled meetings⁴⁴ as he has since the neighborhood's foundation that a representative from each family is required to attend (although families are no longer fined for missing a meeting, as in the past). The community organization president shares information concerning neighborhood projects, government programs (such as a monthly basket of basic food staples delivered to impoverished families called *Bolsa Solidaria*) and other relevant news and opportunities in these gatherings and those attending make collective decisions regarding which options to pursue. When projects are selected for action in these meetings, each family is expected to do its part to bring them to fruition.

Another example of Regalito's organization was residents' decision to improve the entrance to their community with a reinforced gate to provide better security at night. The MDC obtained three signed estimates for the cost of materials from different suppliers and members, at their regular gathering, chose one. Residents then organized collectively to carry out the work to install the entryway in a matter of days.

⁴⁴ As this research was proceeding, the president changed these meetings from weekly to twice a month, to reduce the time burden of attendance.

Surveys I undertook in the neighborhood confirmed this high level of organization and participation. Table 2 below shows positive ratings of community organization and leadership by Regalito survey respondents.

	Community Organization			Community Leaders				
	Good	Average	Poor	Effective	Honest	Work for the good of the community	Pursue personal interests	Share sufficient information
Regalito	50%	45%	5%	65%	65%	95%	0%	80%

Table 2: Resident Perceptions of Regalito Community Organization and Leadership

Regalito’s high level of organization and commitment to making improvements may be under threat, however. The MDC’s vice president claimed that besides himself, only the president is active in the group and that strong leadership has made residents complacent (personal notes, January 7, 2012). Now they only want to be told what to do, rather than being a part of looking for solutions. The organization officer mentioned that he has not sought reelection to his post, but each year there is no one else willing to take it on, so he has stayed.

Regalito has achieved significant community cohesion and citizen participation despite the challenges of informality, poverty, a lack of basic services and a heterogeneous population without a shared history of living together. Although the committee has not yet attained its two primary priorities, legalization and municipal water service, it has coordinated numerous other smaller actions and activities, approved and carried out by community members that have materially improved residents’ quality of life. The MDC practices transparency in its choice processes, promotes collective decision-making and seeks mandatory and uniform participation and contributions from citizens for targeted projects. These efforts have built a trusting relationship between residents and their leaders and a commitment from Regalito’s inhabitants to acting together to change their community. Nevertheless, recent trends suggest that the MDC’s leaders must strengthen and renew neighborhood residents’ involvement if they are to continue to remain engaged and motivated.

La Selva: A New Beginning

The social dynamics of the La Selva community are quite different from the other neighborhoods described above and from Peronia in general in that most families have lived in

the area for generations. The community first organized a development committee more than 25 years ago to coordinate the installation of piped water to residents' lots. That project was a success, but the committee pursued no further initiatives or improvements. Eventually, several members of the original development committee passed away and the neighborhood's leaders made no effort to replace them. The group slowly became dormant except for collection of water dues,⁴⁵ sporadic maintenance of the system and one or two small, isolated projects.

In 2010, community members learned the central government was organizing several COCODES in Peronia and they approached a local facilitator about creating their own such group. Soon thereafter, the neighborhood organized an assembly and those present nominated twelve residents, three from each of the settlement's four sectors, to form the *Consejo*. In the same meeting, participants decided their main priority was to repair and upgrade the community's water system, which was outdated and in poor condition after years of neglect. The COCODE sent out petitions to the municipal government and several NGOs for materials and technical support for the project, but did not receive any response.⁴⁶ So the group consulted with neighborhood residents in another meeting and decided to move forward with the project alone, with community resources. *Consejo* members then collected money from each family and organized work, nearly every Sunday for more than a year, to improve the water system.

Such an ambitious project involving mobilizing money and effort from across the community would be impossible in most of Peronia's neighborhoods. Indeed, COCODE members I interviewed mentioned the difficulties in carrying out this project in La Selva, noting some individuals had tried to avoid contributing time or money. Yet the community development council was able to generate and maintain broad support for the undertaking by openly sharing its progress and challenges as well as chronicling resource use and insuring that residents were included in project decision-making. COCODE leaders held quarterly meetings open to all community members to provide information about the project, particularly on the budget and to make decisions. At the end of the first year of the *Consejo Comunitario*'s term, the group organized an event with residents to assess their work to date and to seek suggestions for improvement in decision and consultation practices. Community members were asked to

⁴⁵ Even revenue collection became sporadic, as many community residents did not keep up with their payments and the committee seldom made any effort to track down those not paying.

⁴⁶ Eventually the new COCODE did receive some limited materials from the municipal government, but the majority of the contributions came from residents.

submit anonymous written comments, which were then read in the general meeting. COCODE members responded to any questions or comments.

These efforts have paid off. In less than two years, the community group has managed to earn significant credibility in the community. La Selva residents I surveyed gave *Consejo* leaders high marks with approximately three of four indicating that these individuals were effective and working for the good of the neighborhood. The survey results indicated room for improvement, however, as nearly two-thirds of respondents also reported that community organization was average and 40% suggested that local leaders should share still more information with residents. Nonetheless, the dedication of the COCODE to transparency and community inclusion in project choices and implementation generated significant support and enabled residents to undertake and complete an ambitious improvement effort that relied primarily on their own resources.

Conclusions: Exercising Agency and Citizenship

This article has examined participation and empowerment in four neighborhoods of Ciudad Peronia, based on the perceptions and experiences of individuals who had been involved in community organizations and a sample of those who were not so engaged. Participant and nonparticipant residents of the four residential areas offered similar perceptions of the structures that constrain their actions and agency, particularly in the economic and political spheres. Yet most interviewees also claimed that individual effort was a key factor in improved wellbeing. Both participants and nonparticipants also shared a cautious optimism about their personal and family prospects.

A willingness to work hard to achieve a better future despite an acknowledgement of the obstacles faced is indicative of a recognition and exercise of personal agency shared by residents who participated in community organizations and those who did not. Individuals with significantly different personal and family resources emphasized the value of their own efforts. Indeed, the hard work of those I interviewed was readily apparent in their houses and shacks, which almost all of them told me they had built themselves.

Yet this individual perception of empowerment, demonstrated by the majority of the research participants, was set against a backdrop of divergent collective resources. In two communities, Regalito and La Selva, coordinated action was possible and had resulted in discernible progress. Anexo and Gran Mirador, meanwhile, demonstrated an absence of

community organization and capacity. In two neighborhoods concrete activities were being carried out with the involvement of residents to improve their overall quality of life. In the remaining two, obstacles, especially past instances of real or perceived corruption and an absence of municipal support, had undermined the efforts of individuals and groups to promote positive change.

The diverse circumstances of these four communities suggest the utility of examining empowerment through a multidimensional lens, as this study has done. By using Narayan's framework for empowerment, including opportunity structure and individual and collective resources and capabilities, I focused on the multiple factors contributing to or limiting the exercise of agency in the communities I examined. The opportunity structure faced by residents and their development organizations in the four neighborhoods was uniform, very limited support from the municipal government, which did not include addressing residents' most pressing needs (particularly legalization in Anexo and Regalito). However, individual resources and capacities varied markedly both within and among the neighborhoods. Nonetheless, when capacities existed they did not a priori directly translate to neighborhood outcomes, which were instead a function of specific practices of information sharing and decisionmaking. These facilitated the development of collective resources and allowed for meaningful community action.

The cases of Regalito and La Selva demonstrate that despite significant obstacles, including a lack of external support and no or tenuous legal land tenure, communities can marshal internal resources to pursue positive changes. In both of these cases, vigorous efforts to ensure transparency of resource use and to include residents in decision-making by community organizations facilitated collective action. In contrast, Gran Mirador's COCODE could point to many more, and more impressive, results, yet that group had very little resident support and still less capacity to mobilize residents to address the neighborhood's remaining challenges.

Anexo presents the most difficult case of the four. This neighborhood has been virtually ignored by the municipal government and has suffered from the same manipulation and corruption by community leaders as other neighborhoods in Peronia, but with none of their successes. Yet even in this situation, many Anexo residents interviewed and surveyed pointed to the need for the neighborhood to be more united and to support the efforts of the MDC and its president, who has shown a willingness to endure and overcome by sheer perseverance the

indifference of the municipality and the passivity of community residents. Efforts to reform the development committee to ensure representative membership, along with practices of information sharing, transparency and collective decision-making, might enable Anexo to take action on a simple, but visible initiative, such as a monthly trash cleanup, for example. This could set the neighborhood on the road towards reestablishing trust and commitment to working collectively. Would such a change affect government intransigence on the issue of legalization and extension of services? Perhaps not, as elected municipal authorities appeared to have calculated that ignoring the neighborhood's requests did not entail an appreciable political cost. Yet it might allow residents to take steps towards small, but real, improvements in their individual and collective quality of life notwithstanding the local government's continued disinterest. Further, it would help build capacities such as social trust which, while likely not as highly valued by residents as legal title or piped water would nonetheless redound to more active citizenship, which would, in turn, probably enable future benefits in the long-term and perhaps even gain the support of the municipality.

Participation in formal community organizations is certainly not the only possible expression of agency by Peronia's residents. Yet, the process of citizen engagement in the four neighborhoods did entail citizen efficacy as individuals worked to bring change to their communities. Participation also involved the practice of citizenship, as COCODE and MDC members accepted important responsibilities even as they pressed for residents' rights. When these organizations were able to generate trust, through practices of inclusion and accountability, they were able to mobilize community members to work together towards improvements, thus confirming Lister's assertion that, "community development is important for citizenship for its impact both on the wider community and on the individuals involved" (1998, p. 232). Where participants and communities were paralyzed by ongoing social conflict and distrust, the groups enjoyed much less success. Nevertheless, instituting practices to renew community solidarity and cohesion might, in time, begin to address this challenge. That is, current or new COCODE and MDC participants could conceivably make decisions and take actions that might open new possibilities for change in their communities.

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Chapter 5

“Bread Today, Hunger Tomorrow:” The Intersection of Clientelism, Vote Buying and Community Organization in Guatemala City

Introduction

Political clientelism has been much studied in Latin America. Yet some researchers have observed that the term has been used to refer to an extremely broad range of political exchanges and connections and has lost much of its explanatory power as a result (Alvarez, 2012; Hilgers, 2011). These scholars suggest that moving beyond “clientelism” as a blanket descriptor and toward more specific accounts and explanations will bring more analytic clarity to the work of studying citizen-politician linkages under diverse conditions.

This article contributes to efforts to realize that aim by exploring the intersection of politics and community organization in Ciudad Peronia, a predominantly low-income area located on the periphery of Guatemala City. I describe and analyze the diverse practices and relationships that constitute the interface between political party representatives (candidates and staff members) and development organization leaders in Peronia. This study contributes to the literature concerning clientelist relationships and exchanges by examining citizen-politician linkages in the context of Guatemala’s weak political party system in which the conditions for such connections do not exist, thus privileging less stable vote-buying practices. Moreover, this article provides evidence that purchasing votes is relatively infrequent in the Guatemalan context due to the uncertainty that the exchange will garner “positive” outcomes for those seeking such support. This reality gives parties an incentive to seek linkages and arrangements with community leaders to mobilize votes. Finally, this research delves into the impacts of local civic leader involvement in politics for the prospects of community organization and larger development processes in Ciudad Peronia.

I first address the concept of clientelism as it applies to political relationships and structures in poor urban communities in Latin America. As I note above, I draw on recent research that suggests the term should be defined more clearly and contrasted with vote buying. I then apply the findings and propositions thus derived to the recent history of Guatemala, drawing lessons about clientelist and vote-buying practices attempted in recent years by the nation’s political parties and national government administration. Finally, I describe and analyze

the linkages between neighborhood leaders and parties in Ciudad Peronia, and suggest several of their implications for community organization and development.

Clientelism and Barrio Politics

Clientelism consists of “citizen-politician linkages ... based on direct material inducements targeted to individuals and small groups ... willing to surrender their vote for the right price” (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007, p. 2). Classic conceptions of clientelism describe asymmetrical patron-client relationships in which the citizen relinquishes political rights and autonomy in order to receive some material benefit or benefits from the benefactor (Fox, 1994). However, the institutionalization of electoral democracy in Latin America has obliged scholars to reconsider the nature of clientelism, which has evolved and endured in the region notwithstanding the development of formally democratic voting systems in many nations (Fox, 1994; Garcia-Guadilla, 2002; Taylor-Robinson, 2006).

Democratization has altered clientelist relationships in many countries, imparting relatively more power to clients vis-à-vis patrons, shifting their ties from normative-symbolic ones to rational-instrumentalist connections and increasing the importance of brokers within the political framework (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). Auyero (1999, 2000) has described how patronage resources distributed through the Peronist party networks in Argentina are perceived by clients as personalized and reciprocal, thereby “*explaining and clarifying* [clientelist exchanges], *justifying and legitimizing them*” (Auyero, 1999, p. 305, original italics). In this way, despite decades of electoral democracy in Latin America, the factors favorable to clientelism, including continuing poverty and inequality, have ensured the survival of the practice in the region. Political linkages based on patron-client relationships thrive in environments in which inequality and exclusion are present (Escobar, 2002) and at the same time reinforce those ties (Medina & Stokes, 2007). Nearly 30% of Latin America’s population or approximately 168 million individuals, live in poverty (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2012). This ongoing situation provides fertile ground for clientelist practices, particularly given the retrenchment of states in the region as a consequence of neo-liberal policies in recent decades (Auyero, 2000, p. 60).

Alvarez (2012) has argued that the character of citizen-politician linkages and relationships found in many parts of Latin America is most appropriately described by broad definitions of clientelism, which include any exchange of political support for benefits

understood as a favor instead of a right, rather than more limited accounts focused on the specific exchange of votes for material benefits (vote buying). However, this definition poses a challenge to students of clientelism because more expansive characterizations lose a measure of explanatory power as they incorporate a greater array of political practices. Alvarez concluded that her study of barrio politics in Montevideo, Uruguay, “illustrate[d] the conceptual difficulties that persist in characterizing on-the-ground particularistic politics” (2012, p. 58). She pointed especially to the uncertainty (for both patrons and clients) of exchanges and the mediating role of community brokers in local politics.

Hilgers (2011) has underscored this point concerning the lack of definitional (and thus, conceptual) clarity in studies of clientelism:

Clientelism has become so blurred as to be haphazardly interchangeable with something as brief and operationally straightforward as a candidate paying a citizen a certain amount of cash on election day for his vote and something as durable and complex as the Christian Democratic Party’s political control in southern Italy. As a result, it is both difficult to operationalize clientelism and to use it for theory-building. (p. 572)

Accordingly, she has asserted, “In addition to being an exchange in which individuals maximize their interests, clientelism involves longevity, diffuseness, face-to-face contact, and inequality” (2011, p. 568). Hilgers has distinguished clientelism from vote buying, contending that the latter involves a one-time interaction and thus constitutes a relatively weak bargain between patron and client, one that both parties, as a result, often have an interest in breaking.

Hilgers’ critique furthers the development of a more nuanced understanding of politics in Latin America. This is particularly true for low-income urban areas, generally characterized by interested scholars as hotbeds of clientelist practices and relationships (Desai, 2010). For this study, I use as a point of departure Hilgers’ conceptual distinction between more durable forms of clientelism based on established relationships and opportunistic vote buying characterized by one-off exchanges.

Alvarez, Gay (1994, 1999) and other scholars have investigated the complexity of neighborhood politics in poor urban communities in Latin America. These authors have often described the networks and relationships found in such areas as clientelist and they have done so

in an effort to illustrate the general propensity of residents of such communities to seek out brokers and patrons who can provide goods and services in exchange for political support. Indeed, patronage-seeking is often more attractive to the poor than riskier approaches based on collective action and contestation (de Wit & Berner, 2009; Leonard et al., 2010; Mosse, 2010; Wood, 2003)

Several scholars have found that community leaders play a key role in mediating between neighborhood residents and politicians in the very poor areas of Latin America (Choup, 2003; Gay, 1999; Montambeault, 2011). These citizen representatives seek resources for their communities and in some cases they have openly offered residents' votes to political leaders in return for tangible benefits, such as infrastructure improvements. Gay has described the experiences of two contrasting localities, one in which a locally acknowledged leader deftly shopped his neighborhood's votes to the highest bidder and another in which civic leaders rejected clientelist politics and sought to build more equitable alliances with parties sympathetic to their area's interests (1999). Numerous shades of grey lie between these extremes that are typified by complicated relationships among communities, politicians and parties. I explore this complexity in a case analysis of Ciudad Peronia below.

Both more formal clientelist relationships and less structured patronage seeking have impacts at the neighborhood level, in addition to the fact that each erodes democratic governance. Vertical, patronage-based citizen-politician linkages undermine horizontal organizing and alliances by de facto forcing communities to compete for scarce resources and incorporating (and co-opting) leaders as local brokers (Shefner, 2008, pp. 40-41). Nevertheless, in many cases, patron-client relationships can allow for a degree of accountability and citizen participation. This fact illustrates the complex and context-specific character of clientelism (Hilgers, 2009).

These community-level impacts have significant implications. It is important to continue to study local patronage exchange practices in order to understand the reasons for the continued existence of clientelism and vote buying in many of Latin America's electoral democracies. Detailed ethnographic accounts such as this effort allow observers to specify the political linkages and exchanges that give meaning to the term "clientelism." Such understanding will be vital if Latin America's leaders and citizens are to continue successfully to deepen the reach of democracy in the countries of the region.

Politics, Clientelism and Vote Buying in Guatemala

Guatemala transitioned from military dictatorship to democracy in 1985, with the approval of a new constitution and a successful presidential election. Since that initial changeover the nation has held seven presidential elections and these have included an orderly transfer of power to another political party in each instance (Guatemala's 1985 constitution limited presidents to one term). Additionally, democracy in the country has successfully withstood several challenges, including President Jorge Serrano's failed "self-coup" in 1993 and former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt's illegal presidential bid in 2004. The most recent (2011) election offered a demonstration of the relative resilience of Guatemala's electoral democracy when the constitutional court declared the presidential candidacy of the incumbent party contender, the ex-wife of the then-president, illegal despite the fact that the government mobilized major protests and demonstrations in support of her candidacy.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, Guatemala's institutionalization of democratic governance has been partial and remains weak. *The Economist Intelligence Unit's* 2012 Democracy Index placed the country 81st out of 167 countries surveyed and labeled Guatemala a "hybrid regime" (between "flawed democracy" and "authoritarian rule") with significant democratic shortcomings in both institutions and political culture (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013). Other analysts have highlighted the country's fragile and porous institutions, unrepresentative governments and the failure of public programs to provide meaningful advances in the lives of the poor majority of citizens, as indicators of democratic shortcomings (Briscoe & Rodríguez Pellecer, 2010; Isaacs, 2010; Mainwaring & Scully, 2008). The nation's success in holding free and fair elections has not reduced Guatemala's inequality, ranked 14th highest in the world according to the World Bank's 2011 Poverty and Equity Data. UNDP's 2010 Human Development Report suggested Guatemala's Human Development Index was in fact one third lower than originally calculated when the report's analysts factored inequality into their assessment.

For their part, Guatemalans are deeply unsatisfied with the state of democracy in their country. According to the 2012 Americas Barometer "Political Culture of Democracy in Guatemala" survey, nearly half of the nation's citizens do not support the political system, more

⁴⁷ Sandra Torres, divorced then-president Alvaro Colom after becoming the ruling *Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza* (UNE, National Unity of Hope) party's candidate for the 2011 elections. The divorce was a transparent bid to sidestep a constitutional provision barring family members of a sitting president from running for that office. The high court found that Torres' divorce, some six months before the first round of the elections, did not make her eligible to run for the presidency given that she had been the president's wife for much of his term.

than 50 percent do not trust the nation's justice system and more than a third do not believe democracy is always the best form of government (Azpuru et al., 2012). Furthermore, on a 100-point scale, Guatemalans rated their trust in their country's political parties at 36. Nearly half of those surveyed believed that parties are not necessary for democracy.

In fact, Guatemala's numerous political parties are among the nation's weakest democratic institutions. For example, 17⁴⁸ parties participated in the 2011 elections for president, congress and municipal mayors. Nevertheless, many are ephemeral: several cease to exist following each election and even parties that have controlled the presidency and congress have faded into irrelevance after two or three electoral cycles.⁴⁹ Reflecting the dissatisfaction of Guatemalans with their government and parties generally, in more than 25 years of electoral democracy no party has held the presidency or control of congress⁵⁰ more than once.

Omar Sanchez (2008) has observed that Guatemala's electoral laws set an extremely low bar for party creation, resulting in their proliferation. He has argued that attaining power and private benefits has been the driving motivation for their creation by political entrepreneurs and for their financing by Guatemala's most powerful business actors (and increasingly, drug traffickers), too (see also International Crisis Group, 2011). Such instrumental usage of parties along with poor state performance and relatively weak democratic institutions has impaired the robust development of a party system. Representation is extremely weak and is predicated predominately on individual relationships based on patronage or populism rather than ideological or programmatic linkages (Sanchez, 2008). According to a study by a Guatemalan NGO, the nation's parties dedicated two-thirds of their campaign spending to media advertising in the 2011 Guatemalan election and the partisan group that spent the most (40% of the total advertising spending of all participating parties), the *Partido Patriota* (PP, Patriotic Party), won the election ("Informe Analitico," 2012). However, the report notes that the source of these funds was often unclear. Immediate financing from frequently publicly opaque and at least sometimes illicit sources has become key to winning elections in Guatemala, in lieu of longer-term processes of building a political base.

⁴⁸ Although there were two electoral alliances involving two parties and one involving three parties.

⁴⁹ The two parties that controlled the presidency from 1996-2004 won a total of three seats (out of 158) in Guatemala's congress in the 2011 elections and less than 3% of the presidential vote (only one of the two parties fielded a presidential candidate).

⁵⁰ No party has ever been elected as the largest party in congress more than once. Due to significant *transfuguismo*, congressional representatives switching parties, some parties have been the largest in congress at one point during more than one term.

Kitschelt and Wilkinson's findings (2007) have reinforced this argument. These analysts have asserted that clientelism can function only when political party actors can reasonably expect individual and group "compliance ... with clientelistic inducements" (p. 8) or can develop monitoring capabilities to punish defection and freeriding. Numerous weak parties with little public credibility and short life spans are not well positioned either to cultivate relationships with citizens based on repeated interactions to ensure predictability or to create monitoring systems, such as through mass rallies.⁵¹ Thus, as Hilger (2011) contended, political parties in Guatemala generally lack the capacity to form longer-term clientelist relationships, opting instead for one-shot vote-buying exchanges with individuals and groups. In order to facilitate such practices, party representatives often seek to identify local brokers or intermediaries. These may be community-level leaders or government workers (these individuals are often one and the same).

In short, despite the increasing prominence of media advertising in political campaigns, patronage practices remain vital in Guatemala. Recent surveys provide evidence of the extent of vote buying in Guatemala. One 2012 poll found 4.4% of respondents admitting to having sold their votes in return for favors or material goods. Meanwhile, 37.2% of those responding reported observing cash-for-votes exchanges in their community. Those responsible for conducting the survey calculated that respondents significantly under-reported their participation in vote buying and that, as a result, it was reasonable to conclude that at least 17% of those responding were directly involved in such transactions ("Una Aproximación," 2012).

The "Political Culture of Democracy in Guatemala" survey also yielded evidence of significant vote buying (Azpuru et al., 2012). Nearly 19% of respondents to that poll reported occasionally receiving offers of favors or material goods from political parties and nearly 16% stated they had frequently received such proposals. Yet, according to survey respondents at least, vote buying tactics did not have their desired effects. Of those reporting frequent cash-for-votes offers, nearly 50% stated that such efforts made them less inclined to support the proffering politician or party versus just slightly more than 25% who indicated they were further inclined to vote for those promising resources or favors. Among survey respondents reporting infrequent exposure to vote buying tactics, three times as many indicated that such behavior dissuaded them from voting for the politician or party as those that reported that patronage offers swayed their

⁵¹ International observers have not reported significant flaws or fraud in Guatemala's elections, but they have noted deeper problems in the political system (International Crisis Group, 2011).

support in favor of the party offering it. As with the “Una Aproximación” poll, respondents likely underreported their positive reactions to cash-for-votes offers and that fact should be borne in mind when interpreting these results.

Parties have sought to use state resources extensively to generate political support. Guatemala’s mayors have achieved some success in building clientelist and/or vote-buying machines. Indeed, some have used these mechanisms to win reelection four, five or, in one case, six times.⁵² However, in recent elections, voters have on average only returned approximately one third of mayors to office.

Party officials with access to power at the national level, congress and the presidency, have also devised means of employing state resources as political patronage. Guatemalan presidents have repeatedly sought to use distribution of fertilizers to rural peasants, the escalation of payments (and promises of even greater sums) to those pressed into civilian defense patrols during the civil war⁵³ and manipulation of social funds⁵⁴ to channel resources directly to millions of individuals in bids to strengthen and expand their political base. Parties represented in Guatemala’s congress have also distributed state resources as patronage through politicization of the infrastructure works approved by that body. Scholars investigating politics in one rural department in Guatemala found:

Political patronage has become the principal vehicle for the allocation of scarce state resources, and the most successful politicians in the region base their electoral appeal on their ability to prise out these resources and deliver public goods (Briscoe & Rodriguez Pellecer, 2010, p. 39).

Alvaro Colom’s UNE party, which governed the nation from 2008 to 2012, launched an even more ambitious program of state patronage than his predecessors. The vehicle was a set of twelve social initiatives known as *Cohesion Social* (Social Cohesion). The President’s wife

⁵² Arnoldo Medrano, mayor of a small municipality adjacent to Guatemala City, won election six times representing six different parties. He is currently under investigation for heading a network of corruption.

⁵³ The Guatemalan military began to form these groups in communities throughout the country in the 1980s. The patrols were responsible for a significant percentage of the killings that occurred during the civil war.

⁵⁴ The national government created several social funds aimed at ameliorating poverty among the country’s indigenous population in the early 1990s, as part of the process that led to the 1996 Peace Accords. Supporters argued the funds would indeed help to attack poverty, but they uniformly lacked mechanisms to ensure their transparency and therefore allowed significant discretion in their distribution, making them vulnerable to clientelist manipulation (Urizar & Gruenberg, 2006).

directed these initiatives, involving nearly US \$2 billion, during the Colom administration⁵⁵ (Martinez, 2011).⁵⁶ Although a full analysis of the practices and impacts of the *Cohesion Social* programs has yet to be undertaken, one study by the Guatemalan chapter of Transparency International investigated the conditional cash transfer component and found that the initiative had characteristics of political patronage due to its vague inclusion criteria for beneficiaries, focus on wide coverage at the expense of impact (\$20-40 per month per family) and public nature of the act of receiving program benefits (as opposed to alternatives, such as directly depositing money into a bank account, utilized by other countries with similar programs) (Duarte, et al., 2011). I discuss the character of another component of *Cohesion Social*, the *Bolsa Solidaria* (Solidarity Basket), a monthly allotment of staple foodstuffs, below.

The results of the 2011 elections evidenced the vote garnering potential of the *Cohesion Social* approach. Despite entering the contest without a presidential candidate, the UNE came in second in number of congressional representatives and of mayors elected nation-wide. Had the party selected a legally viable candidate for the presidency, he or she would in all likelihood have passed into the second round of voting⁵⁷ and UNE might have become the first party to win reelection in Guatemala's history. The fact that the party gambled on Sandra Torres' candidacy demonstrates the weakness of these groups as institutions in Guatemala. The episode suggests that the UNE party existed first and foremost as a vehicle to power for the Colom/Torres family.

Previous studies of poor communities of the Guatemala City region have discovered brokered forms of patron-client linkages, centered on the provision of material goods to address community problems. In her study of two low-income neighborhoods located in the capital city, for example, Grant (2001) found strong evidence of patronage practices, due in part to the fact that residents had few means of addressing their needs apart from offering their votes. Another investigation of an urbanized area on the periphery of Guatemala City also highlighted significant individual links among communities (especially among their leaders) and political parties, which yielded some personal and civic benefits, but caused significant intra-communal conflicts and divisions as well (Batres, et al., 2008).

⁵⁵ The budget for *Cohesion Social* increased in each of Colom's four years in office. During the final year of his term, *Cohesion Social* represented approximately 10% of the entire national budget.

⁵⁶ Sandra Torres headed *Cohesion Social* for more than three years before her divorce from Alvaro Colom.

⁵⁷ Before the constitutional court declared her candidacy unconstitutional, Sandra Torres was second in the polls. If this trend had persisted through the final six weeks of the campaign she would have gone on to the second round of the presidential election.

Political parties routinely channel their patronage resources into poor urban areas. Given the state's limited response to the many needs of the nation's urban residents, partisan groups represent a potential vehicle to poor community residents during electoral campaigns to provide them scarce resources. The remainder of this article explores the structure and impacts of party-based patronage practices in one low-income urban neighborhood in Guatemala City.

Ciudad Peronia

According to the *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011* report, Guatemala City is a highly heterogeneous and unequal⁵⁸ urban area. One-third of the metropolitan-area's residents live in conditions of deprivation although often in diverse neighborhoods in which significant numbers of poor and non-poor households live in close proximity. The collection of neighborhoods known as Ciudad Peronia reflects these characteristics. Peronia is composed of diverse neighborhoods that range from informal settlements to more working-class enclaves to outlying rural village-like clusters.

Ciudad Peronia is located on the edge of the Guatemala City metropolitan area in the neighboring municipality of Villa Nueva. The National Housing Bank (BANVI) originally established the community in the early 1980's as a residential area for working-class Guatemalans (particularly those left homeless by the massive earthquake that devastated the country in 1976). Successive waves of squatters subsequently and exponentially enlarged Peronia thereafter. Most of these settlers were seeking relief from temporary housing or high rental prices in Guatemala City.

At present, Peronia is a dense, diverse and largely unplanned urbanized area comprised of more than 30 individual neighborhoods, with distinct characteristics. These include:

- The original, BANVI-sponsored development
- Informal settlements resulting from several land invasions⁵⁹
- Subdivisions inhabited by working-class families

⁵⁸ Guatemala City's Gini coefficient (a measure of income distribution; 0 representing perfect equality and 1 all income accruing to a single individual) of .50 ranks it among the more unequal cities in the world, according to the report.

⁵⁹ Although residents of several of the early informal settlements were able to obtain legal land titles and some basic infrastructure for their communities, more recent occupiers continue to await resolution of their legalization petitions (in some cases for more than 10 years so far) and are meanwhile formally considered illegal squatters by public authorities.

- Several rural communities now being subjected to urban development pressures as resident families sell parts of their land for residential subdivisions.

Despite its variety of neighborhoods and inhabitants most Guatemala City residents know Peronia simply as a community overrun by crime and plagued by poverty. Peronia's residents do complain about the high levels of crime, including violent criminality. Yet incidents of such behavior have decreased in recent years, following a truce declared by two gangs that had been fighting for turf in the area for more than a decade. Furthermore, although the overall character of the Peronia is distinctly working class, there exist pockets of extreme poverty as well, particularly in the community's informal squatter settlements.

Research Approach and Data Gathering

I collected data for this study during two periods. I spent three months in Ciudad Peronia, from May to August 2010, as a participant observer in a group called the *Mesas Tématicas* (MT; thematic working groups), which brought together representatives from numerous neighborhoods across the community to discuss challenges and development proposals. During that time I conducted eight initial semi-structured interviews with local leaders and residents of one of the area's informal squatter settlements in addition to engaging as a participant observer. I returned to Peronia from June 2011 to March 2012 and carried out 50 additional semi-structured interviews with key informants, including community leaders and residents and government and civil society actors. I selected interviewees from across Peronia, with a balanced representation of men and women and at least three community leaders and three residents from each of four diverse neighborhoods:

- Two informal squatter settlements, occupied in 2002 and 2006 (approximately 75 families each)
- One former informal neighborhood that achieved legal status and services in the 1990's (approximately 500 families)
- One rural community immediately adjoining Peronia, becoming increasingly urbanized due to the area's continued growth (approximately 200 families).

I undertook these interviews in the months preceding and following Guatemala's September 2011 national elections and they addressed questions related to development, community

organization and politics, including residents' perceptions of political parties and candidates, patronage and vote buying and local leadership.

Additionally, I carried out 154 household surveys in seven neighborhoods in Peronia following the elections. I selected two blocks in each neighborhood randomly and surveyed approximately 10 households located on each. In a minority of cases, I surveyed multiple household members (separately, no more than two). I undertook surveys in the following communities:

- The four neighborhoods described above
- One informal squatter settlement inhabited in 2002
- Two subdivisions with predominantly working-class residents.

The surveys included questions regarding perceptions of community organization and leadership, political activity and the involvement of local leaders and groups in political activities during the elections. The findings presented in this section arose from my examination of these forms of information concerning the Peronia community.

Politics and Community Organization in Peronia

Politics

Salvador Gandara who had served three terms as mayor dominated municipal politics in Villa Nueva and was campaigning for a fourth stint in office at the time of this research. In the previous election in 2007 Gandara had placed first of nine candidates with 32% of the vote, 10 percentage points more than the runner up. Yet in 2011, he faced significant obstacles. Most pressing, he was fighting a court decision to keep him off the ballot due to corruption charges against him.⁶⁰ Additionally, he faced strong opponents in his reelection bid, one from the *Partido Patriota* whose presidential candidate led in the polls and another from Colom's UNE party, which had all the resources of the *Cohesion Social* at its disposal. A third rival, Edwin Escobar, was from a middle-tier party, but had amassed significant financial backing from private businesses and was well known for his philanthropic work in Villa Nueva.

Nonetheless, as the election neared, Gandara acted very much like a candidate expecting to be on the ballot. He managed to amend the municipal budget in order to free up more than \$3

⁶⁰ The corruption charges stemmed from both his time as mayor as well as a short time he served in the central government during the Colom administration. At various times during the election year he had been under house arrest and barred from assuming his duties as mayor. As of this writing, the corruption case against him is still open and awaiting trial.

million for road construction and repair projects, which he inaugurated in the weeks leading up to the election (Orantes & Lara, 2011).⁶¹ In the months before the contest, too, the municipality set up a clinic to provide free eye exams, undertook several infrastructure projects in different neighborhoods and held rallies featuring the then-mayor and his political party.

In the end, Gandara could not resolve his legal issues and was not on the ballot on election day. Edwin Escobar won the Villa Nueva mayoral election, with 31.5% of the municipal vote. The UNE candidate came in second with 19% and the PP candidate was third with 18%. The numbers in Peronia were similar to the overall results with Escobar gaining 25% of the votes, the UNE candidate receiving 17% and the PP candidate netting 19% of the ballots cast.⁶² Peronia's 9,150 votes⁶³ represented 7.3% of the total cast in the municipality.

Community Organization

Residents of Ciudad Peronia have worked to form community organizations to promote infrastructure and other improvements since development of the first neighborhood in the area. The BANVI organized an association among the area's original residents in the early 1980s when first working in the community and also provided individuals to support the group. This organization worked to bring improvements to meet residents' needs, but began to clash with the leaders of new groups of settlers⁶⁴ and disbanded in the face of conflict and threats.

As Peronia grew, both through illegal occupation and legal subdivisions, the number of committees and associations expanded as well, each focusing on the needs of its own neighborhood or sector. These groups utilized multiple strategies to bring improvements to their areas, including mobilizing community resources and labor, requesting support from the local or national government or occasionally receiving resources from a nongovernmental organization. Numerous community leaders I interviewed discussed contact with political party representatives in their pursuit of neighborhood improvements in past years. Indeed, the establishment of the original Peronia settlement was part of a strategy by the then-governing Christian Democratic

⁶¹ Guatemalan law prohibits the inauguration of municipal projects in the months leading up to elections.

⁶² These are the totals from Ciudad Peronia's 32 voting stations, as reported by the *Tribunal Supremo Electoral* (TSE, Electoral Supreme Court).

⁶³ Population estimates for Peronia range from 60,000 to 300,000. Peronia's low vote total is both a reflection of its very young population and the fact that a significant percentage of its inhabitants are not registered to vote in Villa Nueva, having been born outside the municipality and having failed to transfer their registration. Voter abstention rates are difficult to calculate, but may also be considerable (election records indicate that the nationwide abstention rate was 30%).

⁶⁴ Groups from earthquake refugee settlements or congested informal communities nearby carried out several of the early land occupations in Peronia. Often these settlers arrived with established community leaders and organizations.

Party to add to its support base by providing housing and urban services to hundreds of families (IISS, 2006).

While the early community groups were generally informal organizations more formal arrangements gradually began to emerge. In 1998, the municipality of Villa Nueva instituted a structure of citizen participation through Municipal Development Councils (MDCs) to systematize the then-disorganized committees devoted to housing, water and other improvements. Nationwide, a 2002 law created the *Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo* (COCODE or *Consejo*; a community development council), which were responsible for coordinating local participation in development decision-making. However, Villa Nueva resisted implementing the new system and in 2008 only 17 COCODEs were operating among the municipality's more than 400 legally defined neighborhoods. Instead of moving toward the *Consejo* system, Villa Nueva updated its MDC regulations in 2009 and continued organizing those groups.

Ciudad Peronia's current development organization landscape consists of five *Comunitario* entities and numerous MDCs, as well as women's, youth and volunteer firefighter groups, among others. The COCODES and municipal development groups seek to address community needs, particularly infrastructure, most often through petitions to municipal or central government agencies. Additionally, local leaders from across Peronia have formed a group called the *Mesas Temáticas* to share information and tackle common concerns.

Despite the numerous local development organizations in Peronia, community-led initiatives to address neighborhood deficiencies, such as collectively building a school or installing water pipes for household taps, are few. There are several factors driving this situation. The most obvious is that municipal and national government actors, NGOs and communities themselves have improved infrastructure, to differing degrees, in many of Peronia's neighborhoods. Yet access to adequate services in the area is still deficient and formal infrastructure, particularly water and sanitation, is absent in the area's informal settlements.

The general passivity and attitudes of dependency of Peronia's residents is an additional factor in the relative paucity of their engagement in development efforts.⁶⁵ One representative of an NGO active in the community noted in an interview with me that his organization struggled

⁶⁵ I explore the issue of dependency and passivity in more depth in the essay "Empowering the Community? An Exploration of Participation, Agency and Citizenship in Ciudad Peronia"

to work in the Ciudad area because citizens were often unwilling to make any contribution to proposed initiatives, instead expecting his organization to assume full project responsibility and costs (Luis, personal interview, September 7, 2011). Several prominent community leaders I interviewed complained that area inhabitants were unwilling to contribute to improvement projects, although a minority reported that resident participation and contributions in their neighborhoods was high (Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011; Fernando, personal interview, July 15, 2010; Alejandro, personal interview, November 29, 2011). When a group of dentists in the United States contributed equipment for a new dental facility in Peronia in 2012 with the stipulation that inhabitants construct the facility, so few community members participated in the project that volunteers had to be brought in from other areas to finish it on time (personal notes and observation, community meeting, January 10, 2011).

In some cases citizens' attitudes are driven by recent experiences with projects carried out by government or external entities without their significant involvement, either in planning or execution. Whereas Peronia's residents constructed many of the community's first schools, roads and water systems, public or non-governmental institutions constructed much of the infrastructure thereafter, and with little community contribution.

More problematic, however, is the generalized perception expressed by interview participants and survey respondents that most community leaders and groups are primarily self-interested, using their positions to seek personal benefits rather than serve the overall good of the neighborhood.⁶⁶ Numerous interviewees from across Peronia's diverse neighborhoods recounted cases in which community leaders (many self-appointed) had cheated or manipulated their neighbors (Ana Maria, personal interview, August 9, 2011; Julio, personal interview, July 24, 2011; Claudia, personal interview, July 27, 2011; Ernesto, personal interview, July 25, 2011). The schemes varied, but often had the common element of an individual or group claiming to be organizing a project (or in some neighborhoods settled by land invasion, negotiating to legalize property ownership) and gathering community contributions, often accompanied by threats of exclusion for those who were hesitant to donate. The project or land titles never materialized and the individuals often disappeared. Other cases involved local organizations that assumed responsibility for an important service, often water. Such groups often charged arbitrary rates

⁶⁶ As discussed below, 35% and 46% of survey respondents reported that their neighborhood's leaders were honest and worked for the community, respectively.

and kept the profits instead of reinvesting them in improving facilities or support. My observation and interviews revealed numerous such stories in Peronia's neighborhoods (some concerning individuals who still reside in the community) and as a result many initiatives are greeted with skepticism by residents, who are unwilling to contribute their effort, much less their money, only to be cheated again.

Government and NGO workers familiar with Peronia confirmed the occurrence of such scenarios. According to one civil society organization employee I interviewed:

Unfortunately, situations of corruption arose when different individuals began to form committees of various kinds, such as water commissions, or when these persons solicited monetary contributions from their neighbors. This led to the weakening of community organization and participation in efforts to advance neighborhood development (Luis,⁶⁷ personal interview, September 7, 2011).

Other research efforts have found similar patterns of distrust between community members and their would-be leaders in other low-income communities in Villa Nueva (Batres, et al., 2006, 2008; Murphy, 2004) and Guatemala City (Grant, 2001).⁶⁸ Yet, there are also exceptional neighborhoods where leaders are trusted and organization is strong. Often, these communities have had leaders who have worked both to ensure collective decision-making and to secure its transparency. In these few areas, local organizers have been able to gather resources – money and labor – from residents in order to address community needs.

Representatives of the majority of Peronia's neighborhoods, however, find themselves in a difficult situation. The surveys of area residents I undertook (see Table 4 below) revealed low opinions of neighborhood leaders. Interviewees often reported their representatives did nothing to address their neighborhoods' needs. Yet as noted above, citizens are generally unwilling to be involved in collective efforts to attend to their stated priorities, both because of suspicion born of past acts of corruption and because of attitudes of dependency created by paternalistic or clientelistic projects or programs that have benefited them without their active contribution or participation. Even well intentioned leaders with clean track records are often unable to marshal community resources to undertake improvements. Logically, they turn to the municipal and national governments to request resources and projects. However, most neighborhood leaders in

⁶⁷ I altered the names of interview participants to preserve the confidentiality of their remarks in so far as possible.

⁶⁸ See De Wit and Berner (2009) for a discussion of the challenges of community organization and representation in poor urban areas in the Indian context.

Peronia I interviewed claim that the public sector at all scales has ignored them.⁶⁹ Although there is evidence of government-sponsored projects and resources throughout the community, it is clear that the scale of investment has not matched the area's needs and that many neighborhoods (particularly those that were the product of land invasions) have been virtually ignored.

Every four years, however, during the political campaign season, the availability of public resources increases significantly. Government (both municipal and central) sponsored projects proliferate as incumbents seek to make their cases for reelection. Guatemala's dozens of political parties make their presence felt as well, with long lists of campaign promises, food and trinkets, construction materials and even projects of their own.

Cohesion Social in Ciudad Peronia

As noted above, the UNE government offered its *Cohesion Social* programs across the country. In Peronia, *Bolsa Solidaria* was the most visible such initiative and reached nearly every one of the community's neighborhoods. *Bolsa* had an overall coordinator for the Ciudad area and neighborhood-level *promotores*, front-line administrators, selected for their community leadership roles; many were members of their local COCODE or MDC.

My evidence from Peronia suggests that the program faced issues of corruption and political manipulation. During an interview (August 24, 2011) Carolina, the *Bolsa* coordinator for Peronia, said that corruption was a problem (although she claimed she kept scrupulous records so she could refute any allegations that might be made against her) and that she had investigated and removed several individuals assisting with the effort for that reason. Carolina described situations in which *promotores* charged families to keep them on the *Bolsa* list or tried to steal program resources⁷⁰ or to divert them to family members or supporters. She said she had no tolerance for such behavior and she asserted that she had become very unpopular as a result. She went on to explain that some *promotores* tried to remove her on multiple occasions and that she had received anonymous threats that her son would be abducted, which she also attributed to the same group of disaffected individuals.

⁶⁹ Notably, the government of Alvaro Colom (2008-2012) paid special attention to Peronia and carried out a number of initiatives in the community. Those are discussed below.

⁷⁰ At the time of the interview, *Bolsa* in Peronia had recently distributed more efficient stoves to families using firewood for cooking

The UNE party did not try to hide the fact that the *Bolsa* was a political project. Indeed, in his official campaign brochure, the UNE mayoral candidate in Villa Nueva mentioned as one of his achievements the 58,000 families benefiting from the program.⁷¹ The majority of individuals I interviewed said the party was offering the program in an attempt to manipulate thousands of recipients in the community by threatening to end their eligibility if they did not attend rallies to support its candidates⁷² or if they were seen at another party's event. According to the director of a community center in Peronia:

The current UNE government yes (is trying to buy votes), they have the *Bolsa Solidaria*, they have [other *Cohesion Social* programs] ... they have even tried to manipulate the community center with their programs, but haven't been able to because I won't put up with it. ... I would say that there is a situation of clientelism with the central government ... the government is using every strategy to try to infiltrate community networks through payments and projects (Salvador, personal interview, July 25, 2011).

Community leaders I interviewed recounted that the first *Bolsa* coordinator in Peronia so blatantly politicized the program that the community demanded her removal. Yet, when Carolina assumed the position, she did not change the political orientation of the program. When I interviewed her, she clearly stated that *Bolsa* was an initiative of UNE, not the state, because no previous president had instituted such a program to help the poor. Thus, Carolina insisted that *Bolsa promotores* support the party and any who did not were removed from their posts, although she also said that program recipients were not forced to attend campaign rallies or other party events (personal interview, August 24, 2011).

Carolina told me in her interview that the campaign was difficult because the program's neighborhood representatives were simply looking for opportunities for personal gain. She (who had served as a paid political operative for a different party during the previous national elections) said that competing parties were trying to "buy" *promotores* by offering them up to \$2,000 for their support.⁷³ This situation led to her zealous monitoring of her staff's political

⁷¹ The campaign brochure also mentioned numerous other projects carried out by the UNE-led national government as well as housing projects the mayoral candidate oversaw as the head of the government's low-income housing agency.

⁷² This threat represented a common clientelist mechanism obligating individuals to display their support for a politician or political party openly. Lists passed around at such events served as proof of an individual's participation and qualified them to access patronage resources and other favors.

⁷³ Several of the *Bolsa promotores* whom I interviewed mentioned other political parties seeking their support in return for monetary or other compensation, although none mentioned a specific sum they had been offered.

allegiances. She told me that even individuals assisting her whose neighborhoods received projects from the municipal government, which a different party controlled, came under suspicion (personal interview, August 24, 2011).

Two of the *Bolsa promotores* whom I interviewed provided additional insights into the role of the program and its coordinator during the election period. The first, Maria, a prominent member of her neighborhood's MDC,⁷⁴ told me in an interview (September 26, 2011) that she was removed as a *promotor* because, although she supported the UNE presidential candidate, she was also campaigning for the reelection of then-mayor Gandara. Maria said she was "unwilling to deceive" her community, i.e., force them to attend UNE campaign activities and, as a result, Carolina cut her off from the program. Soon other *Bolsa* activists were making the rounds in Maria's neighborhood and telling recipients they had to support UNE candidates or lose their benefits. Maria noted in her interview that many other neighborhood committees were linked to the UNE party via *Bolsa promotores* (personal interview, September 26, 2011). She also suggested that Carolina had been using projects, such as providing improved wood cook stoves, to channel resources to UNE supporters.

Maria said representatives of several other parties had attempted to buy her assistance and endorsement offering her local government jobs if they won, but she supported the mayor because the municipality had carried out several improvement projects in her community. According to her, if she took a public sector job it would be obvious to everyone in her community that she had been "bought" and she would lose her credibility as a leader. However, she would gladly accept any resources a party might wish to contribute to her neighborhood. During the second round of the presidential elections, supporters of one of the candidates again sought Maria out, hoping she would back their party. She reported that she had again rejected the offer of a government job, but would accept resources for her community (personal interview, September 26, 2011). In the end, however, the party never delivered.

Another *promotor*, Fernando,⁷⁵ the president of his neighborhood's MDC, said in an interview (July 26, 2011) that he came under Carolina's suspicion when the municipal government agreed to install a new sewer pipe in his community in the months before the

⁷⁴ See Table 4 below for the perceptions of residents of Maria's neighborhood (Nuevo Amanecer) of their community leaders and their linkages with political parties.

⁷⁵ See Table 4 below for the perceptions of residents of Fernando's neighborhood (Anexo) of their community leaders and their linkages with politics.

elections. Fernando said she accused him of having defected to Gandara's party and having received materials for the sewer project in return. Fernando did speak of feeling pulled between the two parties (as well as a third that had contacted him to solicit allegiance), as all expected his support during the campaign. This leader's case will be explored in greater detail below.

Julia, a long-time member of Fernando's MDC, told me in an interview that she refused to get involved with *Bolsa* program activities because of their political nature, insisting that the committee should remain independent. She pointed out the damage that a politicized program such as *Bolsa* did to the social fabric of the neighborhood, arguing that community leaders who became involved with the initiative did so at their own risk:

This (electoral) period monopolizes, absorbs attention; ... a [community leader] who is ambitious and wants a government job commits errors, disappointing the community. Then afterward that person wants to go back to the way things were, but people aren't going to believe in him anymore (Julia, personal interview, August 3, 2011).

Thus, community leaders who became involved in politics or even programs that brought benefits to area residents, such as *Bolsa*, were routinely exposed to opportunities for personal gain. The result was often a tainted reputation and a loss of credibility as a leader, regardless of whether they accepted such offers.

Yet the *Bolsa* program was also a means of access to resources from the central government and UNE party. I accompanied one local leader, Carlos, the principal facilitator of the *Mesas Tématicas*, when he met with Carolina to discuss a potential deal.⁷⁶ Carlos requested metal roofing sheets for a community center, material to which Carolina indicated the UNE mayoral candidate had access. In return, Carlos would arrange a visit for the candidate to the youth soccer league that he helped to organize. When I asked him if getting involved with a political candidate would hurt his reputation as a leader among his neighbors, Carlos responded that there were no other options for obtaining the resources for the proposed facility, so this was worth a try.

Perceptions of Clientelism and Vote Buying in Ciudad Peronia

Interview participants and survey respondents in Ciudad Peronia reported that vote buying and other forms of political manipulation were common occurrences in their community. Table 3 indicates how individuals surveyed in seven neighborhoods in Ciudad Peronia responded

⁷⁶ This meeting occurred in late August, 2011, approximately 2.5 weeks before the general elections.

to questions about the activities of political parties during the 2011 electoral campaign. The table suggests that promises of community improvements and offers of personal benefits predominated, while the actual contribution of tangible resources for the neighborhood was the least reported. This evidence suggests that political parties engaged in vote buying practices in Peronia, while confirming the findings of previous national surveys that concrete offers of patronage resources are often limited in scope.

	Promises/ Commitments of Community Improvement	Offers of Personal Benefits	Clothing/ Food/ Trinkets	Materials/ Project
Gran Mirador	49%	82%	49%	55%
Villas Amanecer	43%	52%	29%	10%
Nueva Amanecer	95%	75%	55%	80%
Jerusalen	95%	66%	66%	14%
La Selva	73%	41%	45%	23%
Anexo	83%	83%	83%	17%
Regalito	10%	90%	25%	10%
AVERAGE	64%	70%	50%	30%

Table 3: Perceptions of Vote Buying

The community leaders and representatives of external organizations I interviewed stated that vote buying and manipulation were widespread in Peronia (Fernando, personal interview, July 15, 2010; Carlos, personal interview, July 20, 2011; Claudia, personal interview, July 27, 2011; Luis, personal interview, September 7, 2011). They noted the many promises made by each candidate every four years and how quickly, in their view, the winner forgot their community on reaching office. Several neighborhood representatives I interviewed said their area was particularly susceptible to this kind of political manipulation due to its high levels of poverty and prevalence of social divisions and distrust. Vote-buying patronage, in the words of one long-time community leader with whom I spoke, was part of an ongoing cycle of political marginalization and entailed “bread today, hunger tomorrow” (Claudia, personal interview, July 27, 2011).

Despite the perception among both Peronia residents and community leaders that elected officials and political party representatives lied to and manipulated citizens in search of votes, the majority of the neighborhood leaders I interviewed for this inquiry claimed that most of their colleagues across the area had linkages to one political party or another. Many reported that one or more parties had contacted them or their group members. Most claimed they had rejected any political involvement because they believed it was inappropriate for community leaders to be involved in politics and stated that such relationships generally had a negative impact on the areas they served (examples included, Julio, personal interview, July 24, 2011; Enrique, personal interview, July 19, 2011; Julia, personal interview, August 3, 2011). Others had a wider view of politics, “I believe we are being political the moment we begin to represent the community” (Lorena, personal interview, September 6, 2011).

Those local leaders involved with a political party generally claimed in interviews that their partisan activities were separate from their community leadership or organizational affiliation. Yet the majority of their fellow organizers rejected this idea and asserted that the neighborhood representatives involved with a party had used their position in the community and the promise of influencing their fellow residents, to obtain personal benefits, such as payments or a government job.

In spite of the low opinion expressed by most community leaders of political parties and the criticisms they leveled at their colleagues directly involved in partisan politics, the individuals I interviewed acknowledged that it was difficult to ignore the potential resources available during the electoral period. According to one young leader,

There is almost an inundation of promises and possible resources, thus community leaders who are trying to improve their sector or possibly all of Peronia, they feel a bit obliged to try to secure some of those resources for the community, otherwise the resources go somewhere else and they have to wait another four years (Lorena, personal interview, September 6, 2011).

This observation points to a principal dilemma for Peronia’s community leaders. They are often unable to secure resources for development from the government, NGOs or by mobilizing residents’ assets. Thus, they face the temptation to seek such assistance from political parties once every four years. Yet, given that Guatemalans hold those entities in such

low regard and in light of the fragile reputation of most local leaders, especially as concerns corruption, any association with a political party generally damages their reputations.

Neighborhood	Community leaders supported a political party	Motivation: community resources	Motivation: personal gain	Honest	Work for the good of the community
Gran Mirador	49%	45%	55%	12%	24%
Villas Amanecer	24%	24%	43%	19%	29%
Nueva Amanecer	100%	95%	95%	5%	15%
Jerusalen	62%	71%	48%	33%	43%
La Selva	59%	45%	18%	64%	77%
Anexo	72%	28%	72%	44%	39%
Regalito	60%	50%	5%	65%	95%
AVERAGE	61%	51%	48%	35%	46%

Table 4: Perceptions of Community Leaders

Data from the surveys I conducted in Peronia provide insight into this situation. Table 4 displays the results of survey questions regarding respondents' perceptions of the involvement of their neighborhoods' representatives with a political party during the 2011 electoral period and whether those answering believed that such engagement was motivated by the search for the community good or for leaders' personal benefit. The survey also included respondents' assessments of their neighborhood leaders' honesty and commitment to working for the good of the community. Table 4 indicates that most who undertook the survey believed that their local representatives had been involved with a political party during the campaign. Roughly half of those responding said that their leaders were involved in politics to obtain resources for the community and a nearly equal proportion believed that their motivation for that engagement was personal gain.⁷⁷ The survey results also indicate that respondents had relatively low opinions of their leaders' honesty and commitment to work for the good of the community, with only about

⁷⁷ As the table indicates, these two categories were not mutually exclusive. Many respondents believed that community leaders were involved in politics for both community and personal benefit. Other interviewees chose not to speculate about their leaders' motivations.

one third reporting that their leaders were trustworthy. Meanwhile, less than half suggested that their local leaders were working for the good of their neighborhood.

Table 4 demonstrates that there is no direct relationship between residents' perceptions of local leader involvement in politics and their assessment of those individuals' honesty and commitment to the community. The neighborhood with the highest level of perceived political engagement of its leaders also scored lowest on perceptions of honesty and broader civic commitment, while survey respondents from the area with the lowest perceived political involvement did not hold their representatives in much higher esteem.

Overall, household survey respondents perceived a generally high level of political involvement by their community leaders and had low or mixed opinions of their honesty and commitment. In short, each neighborhood had its own context and dynamic related to its residents' perceptions of their local leaders.

Political Linkages of Neighborhood Representatives

As noted previously, a diversity of linkages existed among community leaders and political parties in Peronia during the time of my field work. Many individuals were involved in the *Bolsa Solidaria* program and linked to the UNE party. Other leaders not connected to the *Bolsa* program were also affiliated with one party or another. A member of one COCODE (along with a member of a local women's cooperative) was on the candidate list for municipal council with a small political party. In two other neighborhoods, one *Consejo* openly supported mayoral candidate Edwin Escobar and another campaigned for the PP. When I interviewed community leaders affiliated with a political party, some spoke of ideological affinity while others pointed to projects for their community. All denied seeking personal benefits in return for their political support. However, the president of one COCODE who had supported Edwin Escobar accepted a municipal job after that candidate took office.

Yet most community leaders I interviewed said they were cautious in their dealings with political parties, hoping for resources but unwilling to commit themselves or their organizations to a particular party. A deeper investigation of three communities demonstrates the complexity and unpredictability of the interplay of politics and local leaders.

Anexo

It is helpful to return to the case of Fernando, the *Bolsa promotor* and MDC president, to understand the pressures the UNE party exerted on these leaders and how they responded.

Fernando and approximately 70 additional families originally occupied the area they named El Anexo in 2001. The community's residents still lacked legal land title and prior to the 2011 electoral campaign the government had invested little in the neighborhood's infrastructure, providing only some bricks residents had used to pave Anexo's only street. When I first interviewed Fernando in 2010, some 15 months prior to the elections, he shared with me his thoughts about the obstacles and opportunities that politics presents. Fernando told me how during the previous elections in 2007 he and his MDC had supported then-mayor Gandara's bid for a third term, because of personal visits and promises to legalize the neighborhood's land status if he won. The community responded and went to rallies and Fernando represented Gandara's party as an auditor⁷⁸ at an election station in Peronia. Gandara won his reelection bid, but nevertheless continued to ignore Anexo during his third term.

In short, Fernando described in his interview politicians' broken promises and the problems they caused his community. He explained that two members of the MDC were then currently involved in party politics and the strains it was causing for relationships among those on the committee. These individuals were trying to gather support for their party and bring neighborhood residents along to campaign rallies and events. Yet Fernando said he did not entirely discard the idea of the MDC supporting a political party, given the right conditions:

[If a party came to the committee soliciting support] that would be different, because they came to the whole group and not just one by one [with individual committee members] trying to convince them. This would be different because we would evaluate before making a decision ... we would say "let us think about it for a couple of days and we will let you know our decision" ... it would be different if a political party comes with a project for the community, then you don't have to think about it, you just act (Fernando, personal interview, July 15, 2010).

I interviewed Fernando again two months before the elections. He said he was now under pressure to support the UNE because of his role as a *Bolsa promotor*, a position he had accepted since our last conversation. He said he was thinking hard about whom to support in the upcoming balloting. He had managed to avoid significant political involvement with the UNE

⁷⁸ This is a volunteer position. Each political party has the right to place an auditor at each voting station to observe the process and report any irregularities.

thus far, because he told the *Bolsa* coordinator that he was very busy with church activities, leaving him some room to maneuver. Fernando said he had ruled out supporting Gandara:

Gandara has already come to ask for our vote, but we have supported him and he has not helped us with our [land legalization] request, which we have sent him several times. ... We've supported him and he's abandoned us, and now he wants our support again (Fernando, personal interview, July 26, 2011).

Consequently, he was trying to decide between the UNE and the party of the vice-mayor (who was on the ballot with a different party than Gandara), whom Fernando had known for a long time. He told me that the deputy executive had been more helpful than Gandara had proven to be.⁷⁹ He said he had discussed the issue with the rest of the MDC, but they had not yet reached any conclusions.

I spoke to Fernando again a few weeks later when his situation had changed significantly. The municipal government had agreed to extend a section of the sewer in the neighborhood, providing access to many households. Municipal workers were there digging holes when I visited and Fernando was supervising the effort. Fernando reported that Carolina, the *Bolsa* coordinator, had begun accusing him of having abandoned the UNE for Gandara's party in return for the project. Indeed, Fernando said that he felt torn between the two parties, but had refrained from openly supporting either, refusing to wear the hats and shirts he was given, even when pressured to do so (personal notes, meeting with Fernando, August 14, 2011).

Two weeks later, just three weeks before the elections, the situation was still evolving. Another mayoral candidate had contributed tubing and cement to extend the sewer project and a fellow community leader from another neighborhood, who was openly supporting that candidate, called Fernando to seek his support for the party. Fernando told me this leader made a personal offer to him,⁸⁰ which he indicated he could not accept, because he was already pulled between two parties. The two leaders agreed to support each other after the elections, no matter who won (personal notes, meeting with Fernando, September 14, 2011).

⁷⁹ The vice mayor had actually served as acting mayor for 2 years during the past term, while the mayor had served a function in the central government. Yet during those two years, there had been no further advance (aside from the usual vague promises) in Anexo's legalization process. Given this situation, it is unclear exactly what activities Fernando perceived as "helpful."

⁸⁰ Fernando did not specify the exact nature of the offer, because he knew that I was familiar with the leader to whom he was referring. He only said that it was personal in nature, rather than something for the community. The leader who made the offer received a municipal job several months after his candidate took office.

Thus, as the elections approached, Fernando was faced with decisions. He had not openly supported any party up to that point. Few community members had talked to him about the upcoming election, and he had not tried to convince those that had to support one party or another. He had received tangible support from three parties, but not enough, he felt, to throw his full support behind anyone of them. Additionally, he said he worried about his reputation, knowing that clear support would likely lead to rumors that he had been bought.

I had some very difficult days of decisions because I had to think not just about myself, but also about the whole community. So I tried to analyze the situation well before deciding to give a yes [to support a particular candidate] to those who were asking for my support and define to what point I would support them. Better to not support one [candidate] completely, but several a little bit. So I said to them that if they wanted to give some support to the community, people would know who it was that gave it. I didn't commit myself too much with them or tell the community that they had to all vote together for one candidate....I mentioned a few names, but nothing more, I didn't say I was directly supporting anyone (Fernando, personal interview, January 10, 2012).

As the days to the election counted down, Fernando said he knew that any more material support was unlikely. Each of the three parties requested that he serve as an auditor for their party at an election station in Peronia, as he had done in the past. He told me his fellow residents would view this post as a show of support for a party and although it was too late for any more resources or a project, it might help him obtain access to the government should that party win. The day before the elections, Fernando called me, still undecided, and asked for my advice.⁸¹ He said he had considered all the options, but knew it was now just a matter of luck to pick the right party. He ended up claiming to have fallen ill, thus avoiding supporting any of the parties. As it turned out, one of the three parties did win the mayoral elections, but Fernando told me that he did not regret how he handled the situation; he simply did what he thought was best, given the circumstances.

⁸¹ I simply advised him to think about the scale of any potential benefits versus the potential costs and to consider if, in six months or a year, he would regret the decision.

Gran Mirador

Judging by physical appearance, Gran Mirador has been one of the most successful neighborhoods in the area. This part of Peronia was settled several years after the community was first founded by several hundred families who occupied the hillside below the urban center. The families that first arrived built shelters from whatever they could find, mostly wood or metal scraps and plastic tarps. There was no improved infrastructure and the settlement turned to mud every time it rained. Residents organized themselves and illegally tapped into Peronia's water main bringing water to each block and eventually each family. They did the same with electricity. Among other improvements, they built a church and a school. Most importantly, they negotiated with the BANVI to purchase their lots. The result was that during its first decade, the community evolved from a squatter settlement to a formal neighborhood.

However, according to several local leaders I interviewed, many cases of corruption emerged during this flurry of collective activity and improvements. Community leaders and groups (many, self-proclaimed) requested, or demanded, contributions from residents for community initiatives, many of which never emerged. As a result, interviewees informed me, many inhabitants lost faith in those who claimed to be leaders and refused thereafter to contribute to or participate in neighborhood projects or activities. Table 4 demonstrates the extent of this suspicion: only one in eight Gran Mirador residents surveyed reported the community's leaders were honest and only a quarter expressed the view that these individuals worked for the good of the community.

The members of Gran Mirador's COCODE whom I interviewed demonstrated acute awareness of the distrust of their neighbors and went to great lengths to emphasize how they had avoided dealing with money, neither requesting it from the community nor directly managing funds for projects (Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011; Gabriela, personal interview, August 16, 2011). One individual said he even withdrew from a local church group because it was handling donations for needy families (Julio, personal interview, July 24, 2011). Additionally, most of the *Consejo* members I interviewed repeatedly stated they had no involvement with the campaign or political parties (Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011; Julio, personal interview, July 24, 2011). Yet several COCODE representatives and other community leaders I interviewed were involved in politics in some manner during the 2011 electoral period, as I discuss below.

Mirador residents were aware of these political linkages. Table 4 shows that half of those I surveyed stated their community's leaders were involved with a political party, with 55% observing they believed they were so engaged for personal gain. Gran Mirador represents a case in which community representatives' real and perceived association with political parties likely exacerbated the already low levels of confidence residents had in their leaders.

Roberto, the long-time president of the COCODE in Gran Mirador, had been involved in politics in diverse circumstances during his many years as a local leader. When I interviewed him, Roberto said that he had agreed to promote a political party during the 1996 electoral campaign in return for promises that the party would improve Ciudad Peronia if elected (July 7, 2011). However, after the party won the presidency and majority in congress, representatives ignored Roberto's requests that they fulfill their pledge. According to Roberto:

And that's how I learned what politics is ... and that's the error that you make when you don't know about politics, you end up fighting with your fellow community members ... so I told my *compañeros*, 'I'm never going to work on political campaigns like that again. I'll go and vote, because that's my obligation as a citizen, but be involved in politics like that, never again' (Roberto, personal interview, July 7, 2011).

Roberto told me that several times in the past municipal authorities had offered him a government salary to generate support for Mayor Gandara in Peronia, proposals he said he had refused. He said that another party had even asked to use his house as its local campaign headquarters and offered him a spot on its candidate list for municipal council.⁸² The COCODE president indicated he turned down all of these requests and offers, because politicians "are like a broken record," always promising to improve the neighborhood and provide government jobs to those that support them during the campaign (personal interview, July 7, 2011).

Yet Roberto suggested he did not believe that community leaders should necessarily abstain from politics all together. He informed me that he told his fellow *Consejo* members the following:

If they individually want to work with a party, they can do it, as a personal commitment.

But not involving the COCODE. Because the name of the COCODE has to stay clean, so

⁸² When mayoral candidates register with the elections commission, they submit an ordered list of candidates for municipal council members. Parties receive a number of councilors according to their share of the vote in the municipal elections, starting with the top candidates on the list.

they shouldn't get up on stage [at a political rally] and say that they support the candidate and they are part of the COCODE (personal interview, July 7, 2011).

Indeed, the *Consejo* leader said he had served as an auditor for political parties on election day during previous years and that Gandara's party (and one other) had requested that he again serve in that capacity during 2011.

Roberto suggested that the COCODE should accept any project that a candidate wants to do in the neighborhood. Indeed, he noted that the municipality had begun a sewer upgrade project in Gran Mirador several months before the 2011 elections. The community development group had initially been involved in the initiative, but its president said he distanced himself when the project began to be politicized (personal notes, meeting with Roberto, September 28, 2011). He indicated that his decision had been fortuitous because some people had been selling the sewer pipes provided by the municipality and he would have been accused of corruption had he continued to be involved in the project. Roberto noted that other parties had been active in Gran Mirador in the months leading up to the elections as well. One candidate, for example, had sent machinery to repair streets in the neighborhood and had also constructed a new building for the community's volunteer firefighters, who were now supporting his political campaign.

Other members of Mirador's COCODE had contact with political parties as well. Two long-time members of the community development group whom I interviewed said that political parties had contacted nearly all of the group's members seeking support (Julio, personal interview, July 24, 2011; Vicente, personal interview, July 24, 2011). Neither individual claimed to have been offered money or any other form of payment, but they reported that party representatives had tried to convince them that their candidate offered the best option for Gran Mirador. However, both of these COCODE members asserted that community leaders should not be involved in politics and emphasized they had refused to support any party. However, one of these individuals did note that he would be serving as an auditor for the UNE party at one of the election stations in Peronia.

Two other *Consejo* members were directly involved in *Cohesion Social* activities, one as the Peronia coordinator for *Tortilla Chapina* (Guatemalan Tortilla), a program to provide support to the many woman who make tortillas as a small business out of their homes, and the other as the neighborhood's *Bolsa* agent. Both told me in interviews that they were part of the *Cohesion Social* team and thus would not betray the UNE by supporting a candidate from another party

(Gabriela, personal interview, October 25, 2011; Lucia, personal interview, October 26, 2011). Gabriela, a *Bolsa promotor*, explained matters this way after describing the donations that the UNE mayoral candidate had made in Peronia (improvements to a school and metal sheeting for families whose roofs had been damaged by a recent tropical storm): “From my perspective, if someone supports me, helps me, I’m going to back them. I’m going to be grateful to them, and if I can be of help to them, then I will” (Gabriela, personal interview, October 25, 2011).

Gabriella recognized that such partisan politics causes divisions at the community level, but said that if candidates come with a community project, “[if a political candidate] brings me a project for my community, we’ll get it done, we’ll make a deal. But I want a project” (personal interview, October 25, 2011). This was her rationale for her support for the UNE candidate. Gabriella also noted that due to her position as a *Bolsa promotor* other community leaders, affiliated with political parties, had approached her with offers of money and government positions to mobilize her *Bolsa* recipients for their candidates. Gabriella said that one of these leaders told her, “It’s not every day that these offers come along, so I take advantage of them.” But Gabriella told me that she remained firm, “I compare it to this: you can’t be getting something from someone with one hand, and stab them in the back with the other” (personal interview, October 25, 2011).

Regalito

Regalito is exceptional for the significant support and levels of trust the residents have in their neighborhood’s leaders. The community was established by an illegal invasion in 2005 on a narrow strip of land between one of Peronia’s largest primary schools and a steep embankment, previously a trash-dumping site. Regalito residents live in shacks made of metal or plywood sheets and the neighborhood has little in the way of improved infrastructure, apart from a paved walking path (the community lacks street access).

Alejandro, the president of Regalito’s MDC, reelected each year for the past six years, also serves as the *Bolsa promotor* for the neighborhood. According to other Committee members I interviewed, the group did not support any particular candidate. As discussed above, the UNE expected Alejandro to back the party because of his role with the *Bolsa* program. According to other neighborhood residents I interviewed, several other political parties also sought the leader’s endorsement, but he turned them down. Alejandro said he did not actively advocate for the UNE despite his position as a *promotor*:

I was working as a *Bolsa Solidaria Promotor* and they asked us to support the UNE candidate, but I didn't throw myself behind that candidate, nor did I work with the *Partido Patriota* ... here everyone is free to make their own decision, we don't force people in that sense ... on political matters, everyone is free to make their own decision (personal interview, November 29, 2011).

In fact, Alejandro said in the interview with me that he did not actively promote the UNE mayoral candidate in the neighborhood, arguing that residents should be free to make their own choices of individuals for office.

Other MDC members sought to affiliate with other political parties. But according to the group's vice president, far from causing divisions, this was a specific strategy (personal notes, January 7, 2012). Members hoped to get involved with several leading parties, so that no matter which one prevailed, they would have contacts in the new municipal and central governments. Further to this approach, the MDC organized community meetings so that various candidates could present their proposals to Regalito residents. According to Alejandro, several aspirants offered support or made some kind of contribution:

Only three mayoral candidates came to visit us. From the central government, Sandra Torres came before she was a candidate ... Edwin Escobar was the last candidate to visit and he said he would send a water truck⁸³ and he did, but just once ... Escobar said that he would see if he could build a retaining wall or the water system or see what else he could do for us [once he was elected] (personal interview, November 29, 2011).

In other neighborhoods, even such modest political involvement might have been cause for rumors that committee members had made deals with politicians in return for payment or a government job. Yet such was not the case in Regalito. Only 5% of those responding to my survey in the settlement believed that their community's leaders were involved with a particular party or were supporting it for personal benefit, this despite the fact that UNE gave Alejandro metal sheets to improve his house. Half of the respondents, however, believed that their community leaders were supporting a party in order to bring resources to the neighborhood. More generally, not one of the 20 Regalito survey respondents stated that the community's leaders used their positions for personal gain and 95% indicated they believed their leaders were working for the good of the neighborhood.

⁸³ Regalito is not connected to Peronia's water system. Residents pay for water to be delivered by truck.

This uncharacteristically strong support (for Peronia) for an MDC, and particularly its president, was no accident. Regalito's Development Committee had instituted a number of practices in previous years that had earned the trust of the community. Every week, the neighborhood's residents gather and the MDC brings information about initiatives the group is currently undertaking or for which they are seeking government financing. In these meetings, local leaders not only discuss potential projects or programs that will be carried out by outside institutions, but also organize actions to be implemented by residents. These activities are generally simple, such as community cleaning days or digging small diversion ditches to channel rainwater away from houses. The MDC has also organized residents to pursue more complex projects, such as paving a walkway through the neighborhood. In that case, the development council expected citizens to contribute both money for materials and labor to carry out the construction. The committee organizes such initiatives and the entire community provides money and labor to bring them to fruition.

Regalito residents surveyed and interviewed gave the committee high marks for its work (see survey results in Table 4, above; personal interviews with neighborhood residents, March 20-22, 2012). Only one survey respondent expressed the view the community was poorly organized. Four-fifths of those polled stated the committee shared sufficient information with the community. For their part, all four of the Regalito residents interviewed had positive perceptions of the committee, suggesting the group's leadership had helped unite the community and brought them together to make specific improvements in the absence of significant support from the government (personal interviews, March 20-22, 2012). None of the interviewees perceived that committee members had pressured them in any way during the elections.

This account suggests that the MDC's consistent openness, transparent communication and participatory practices in the six years since the neighborhood's foundation had allowed community leaders discretion to engage political parties without earning the distrust of fellow residents. All of the neighborhood residents I interviewed had come to trust their leaders and suggested that any involvement that MDC members might have with political parties was for the good of the community, rather than for personal gain.

Conclusion: Politics and Community Organization

Scholars have long studied citizen-politician linkages in Latin America, often highlighting the pervasive phenomenon of clientelism. Yet that term encompasses such a broad

range of practices and interactions that it has lost much of its descriptive and explanatory power. In consequence, more recent scholarship has pointed to the need to distinguish between more durable clientelist relationships and one-time vote buying exchanges.

In fact, the weak institutionalization of political parties in Guatemala favors vote buying rather than clientelism. The nation's political parties lack the longevity, ideological foundations and credibility to form the significant and long-lasting networks and relationships that constitute clientelist relationships. As a result, the nation's parties seek to create transactional ties with voters. However, vote buying is fraught with uncertainty, due to the lack of mechanisms to ensure that citizens will respond to the material inducements offered in return for voting for the contributing party. This insecurity encourages Guatemalan politicians to be wary of providing assistance, given the potentially poor return on their investment. Instead, most channel a disproportionate share of their resources into media (especially television) advertising. Political party leaders in power are often exceptions to this rule and there is substantial evidence that incumbent officials at the national and municipal levels have often politicized state resources in attempts to generate votes, although with varying results. The UNE's *Cohesion Social* is the most recent example of such an initiative. Had the party won reelection, these programs might have become the basis for the more durable patronage networks necessary to develop clientelist relationships between the party and citizens.

The uncertainty of vote-buying practices has induced political parties to pursue a diversity of tactics to mobilize voters in poor urban communities. This article has described these practices in Ciudad Peronia prior to the 2011 general elections. In that time period, the incumbent parties at the national and local levels made use of state resources, in the form of *Bolsa Solidaria* and municipal infrastructure investments respectively, to generate political support. Non-incumbent parties, however, invested relatively few resources in vote-buying efforts, instead soliciting assistance through alternative appeals.

Survey respondents confirmed this situation reporting campaign promises, both of community projects and personal favors and paraphernalia (food, apparel, etc.) as the most frequently deployed electoral persuasion tactics. Those surveyed noted that political parties delivered very few tangible resources for community improvement. In several cases, non-incumbent political party representatives distributed materials to specific individuals or groups. The most substantial project carried out by an aspiring political candidate in Ciudad Peronia

prior to the elections was a modest two-room wooden building Edwin Escobar constructed for the volunteer firefighters in Gran Mirador. The limited volume of vote-buying resources deployed in Peronia by parties not directly controlling state resources suggests that these organizations were unwilling to commit significant assets to such transactions, given the lack of certainty that voters would follow through on their end of the proposed tacit bargain.

As an alternative to investments in vote buying political parties sought to attract the interest of community leaders who desired resources for their neighborhoods (and in some cases, personal opportunities as well). According to many grassroots leaders I interviewed, political party representatives made offers to “buy” individual leaders whom they thought could deliver votes. Political party leaders appeared to perceive this tactic as an alternative to investing in tangible resources, such as community projects, which did not guarantee a return on investment in terms of votes. The majority of the community leaders I interviewed reported having received a personal offer of money or a government position in exchange for supporting a particular political party and making efforts to influence the votes of their neighbors. However, all denied accepting such offers. The *promotores* of *Bolsa Solidaria* appeared to be particularly sought after by party representatives, given the lists of potential voters and specific mechanism of inducement they had at their disposal.

Peronia residents perceived this “buying” of community leaders by political parties as widespread with nearly half of survey respondents reporting that their neighborhood’s representatives had sought or received personal benefits in order to support a political party. Yet, despite the seeming popularity of this practice, the tactic of attempting to “buy” community leaders’ support was based on a flawed premise. By making such efforts, political party representatives demonstrated little understanding of the complex and fragile social fabric and dynamic of Peronia. Neighborhood leaders often lacked credibility in their communities, thus limiting the possibilities that they could have secured any significant share of their fellow residents’ votes for a party or candidate.

Local leaders I interviewed expressed a negative perception of political parties. These representatives generally believed that these entities exploited Peronia by promising to bring improvements only to forget the area’s citizens when they won office. Nevertheless, many grassroots leaders were open to facilitating political investment in their communities and still others actively sought such arrangements, despite the risk to their reputations that an association

with a party would likely entail. This situation was driven by a lack of options to finance improvements available in most neighborhoods in Peronia, due to the scarcity of state and NGO resources, as well as the distrustful attitudes of most citizens.

Thus, although most community leaders I interviewed publicly distanced themselves from any involvement with political parties, many expressed willingness to accept resources from them when opportunities to do so arose. Many other local leaders were tied to the UNE through their position as *Bolsa promotores* although this relationship was often complex, as several examples described above highlighted. The interaction between community leaders and political parties was often one of mutually unmet expectations. Leaders sought tangible resources for neighborhood improvement, but these were limited. Political parties aimed to secure local leaders' support to mobilize votes, yet few such individuals were willing to commit to help and fewer still could actually rally voters' support for specific candidates in their neighborhoods.

This article has presented a scenario of citizen-politician linkages very different from classical depictions of clientelist politics in Latin America. Guatemala's weak party system is not conducive to the development of durable relationships and networks of patronage that would constitute clientelism. Nor are one-time vote buying transactions prevalent in Peronia. Guatemalan political parties' focus on generalized appeals through advertising appears to be based on a calculation of expected return on investment, which vote buying exchanges cannot guarantee. Yet political parties have not abandoned the pursuit of votes through more direct contact with voters, they have just stopped putting their money where their mouths are, instead relying on promises of personal and community benefits. As a part of this approach, parties sought to recruit neighborhood leaders to mobilize votes. Although many community leaders were interested in the potential resources that such relationships might provide, very few were willing to associate openly with a party. Political parties in turn financed very few actual projects. In consequence, both politicians' and community leaders' expectations went largely unfulfilled.

Finally, I turn to the impacts of these political practices and linkages in Peronia. The strategy that political parties employed in the area, promising benefits (individual and collective) along with some vote-buying incentives, was aimed at securing electoral victory, but those tactics neither contributed to a sustainable base of electoral support nor altered the population's

negative perceptions of political parties. Community residents and civic leaders I interviewed consistently pointed to elected leaders' broken promises and manipulation as proof that they had no real interest in addressing Peronia's needs. The result of this widely shared perception is that, parties remain disconnected from the reality and interests of most Guatemalans and the population continues to view them with justifiable suspicion.

The second negative impact of political practices in Peronia related to the credibility of community leaders. As discussed, a majority of the area's residents I interviewed and surveyed expressed suspicion of neighborhood organizers, often claiming that many were seeking to take advantage of their position to gain personal benefits. Similarly, six of 10 survey respondents and numerous interview participants expressed a belief that local representatives were involved with a political party, often for personal gain. Indeed, many grassroots leaders did have contact with one or more parties, although the nature of those interactions was varied and often ambiguous. The perception, and reality, of the involvement of community representatives in politics, along with significant suspicion among residents that many of those individuals were pursuing personal gain via their association and the disdain with which most Guatemalans viewed political parties, further eroded leaders' public credibility. In many instances, with Regalito a notable exception, this combination of perceptions and attitudes in turn fueled apathy and disengagement among community members, undermining the already fragile possibilities for organizing collective action for neighborhood improvement.

In the case of Regalito, despite the fact that the MDC president was a *Bolsa promotor* and that most neighborhood residents believed the committee had linkages to political parties, opinions of the community's leaders remained quite positive. In Regalito, the development committee had instituted practices of transparency, information sharing and collective decision-making that had increased the trust and involvement of the community's inhabitants in its activities. As a result, residents were much more likely to believe that the group's political involvement was motivated by a search for resources for the neighborhood, rather than personal gain.

The Regalito scenario⁸⁴ offers a measure of hope within an otherwise gloomy landscape. The credibility of political parties is low in Guatemala and that standing colored Peronia

⁸⁴ The situation in Regalito was not unique in Peronia. In one other neighborhood I investigated, the COCODE had implemented similarly open and inclusive practices, resulting in community residents holding more positive views

residents' perceptions of community leaders, who were often assumed to be involved with such entities to profit personally. Nonetheless, the reality of local leader interactions with political parties was much more varied and complex. Yet in most neighborhoods low trust in community leaders both fueled and was quickened by suspicion about the nature of the interactions between those individuals and political parties. The result was deepening resident distrust of their local organizers. Yet this situation was not inevitable. Local development groups embrace practices of transparency and inclusion improved residents' perceptions of their leaders, even when they were engaged with a political party.

of the group, despite some degree of political involvement during the electoral period. See La Selva in Tables 1 and 2 for survey results from that community.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion: Agency and Citizenship in Ciudad Peronia

The preceding chapters have explored varying aspects of the social and political dynamics present in the interrelated processes of community organization and local development in Ciudad Peronia. The essays surveyed the complex array of contextual features that influence local outcomes while also highlighting the important decisions of key actors. Ultimately, this research investigated the interplay between context and agency in Peronia and in doing so provided insight into the efforts of individuals and groups to construct meaningful citizenship despite ongoing exclusion. Community residents' struggles for citizenship rights, especially to basic living conditions, has involved diverse approaches to self-organization and engagement with the state. Despite the many obstacles examined in this inquiry, this analysis also found many individuals making a concerted effort to secure dignity, agency and inclusion for themselves and their communities.

I now draw together the themes I have explored in the four preceding chapters as well as offer some additional ideas related to the concepts and content of my research. First, I briefly discuss the broader ideas and patterns revealed by the individual investigations. Thereafter, I offer several policy recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Key Themes

I found a number of obstacles that impeded community organization and local development in Peronia. These were driven by both internal and external influences. Notable among these impediments was a lack of interpersonal trust among residents and insufficient mechanisms of citizen participation in government decision-making. Yet I also encountered many individuals and groups, including neighborhood committees and residents gathering in the *Mesas Temáticas*, COCODEs and MDCs, who strove to overcome those barriers. Documenting the successes and failures of their efforts constituted the core of this analysis.

Taken together, the four essays have explored the relationships between the processes and dynamics of individual participation, collective organization, partisan politics and development in Peronia. Community initiatives in that urbanized area, although they may have involved organizing spaces for citizen participation or engaging with political party representatives prior to recent elections, were consistently oriented to local development. Local

organization, citizen participation and political engagement were all, in general terms, means to the end of achieving neighborhood improvements.

The largest-looming challenge community actors faced in their pursuit of development was unresponsive and unaccountable government institutions. The lack of transparency and meaningful participation by residents in municipal decision-making processes concerning budget allocation and investment choices led to the provision of few public resources to meet Peronia's needs. Furthermore, some neighborhoods benefited from several municipal projects, while others were ignored; often independent of their relative needs. Instead, local government resources were used not as part of a strategy to provide services and improve the quality of life in Peronia, but to generate political support prior to elections. In the absence of public institution transparency, citizens could not effectively access information concerning local public budgets and investments in order to hold municipal authorities accountable. Further, the lack of any forum for collectively voicing their views⁸⁵ led to the isolation of neighborhood populations and those groups representing them, despite common challenges.

Communities that fared the worst were those whose residents lacked legal title to the land on which they lived. The municipal government has simply ignored several such settlements, for more than a decade in some cases. Local authorities generally refused to invest public resources in informal communities and even rejected petitions by their residents to connect to Peronia's privately owned and operated water system, perhaps believing this would lead to further demands. The case of Anexo suggests that politicians, particularly the former mayor of Villa Nueva, often used the issue of property titles as a bargaining chip at election time, promising legalization in return for political support. The absence of a transparent, routinized process for addressing legalization, or a more successful effort to organize a space for communities to organize collectively, left these neighborhoods at the mercy of the political calculations of municipal authorities.

Internal factors posed other challenges. Community organization in the neighborhoods I studied was generally weak, with some exceptions. Numerous development groups existed at the neighborhood level, yet they often garnered little citizen support due to a history of local leader and group corruption as well as continuing instances of manipulation and fraud. Many

⁸⁵ The COCODE law stipulates that a Municipal Development Council (COMUDE) be formed in order to share information and make decisions about development, including a quarterly report on the municipal budget. However, the former mayor never implemented this structure, nor has his predecessor, despite public commitments to do so.

Peronia residents informed me that community leaders were most interested in their own gain. The involvement of COCODE and MDC members in politics, even with the objective of pursuing resources for the community, reinforced this perception according to interview participants and survey respondents. Most grassroots leaders I interviewed lamented this fact, but reported they could only win their neighbors' trust by ensuring tangible improvements, such as visible infrastructure projects.

The weakness of neighborhood level organization presented an obstacle to efforts to organize Peronia-wide spaces for participation, as local groups generally lacked the capacity and vision to address challenges beyond those of their immediate environs. Unaccountable or inactive local organizations also limited the possibility of development, particularly through the mobilization of community resources (weak neighborhood organizations also struggled to take advantage of outside support as well).⁸⁶ Finally, corrupt and manipulative grassroots leaders and groups (or those perceived to be so) have contributed to the fraying of the social fabric in many of Peronia's neighborhoods, along with other factors, such as high levels of violence, heterogeneity (due to in-migration from many parts of Guatemala City and the rest of the country), and social, economic, cultural and political exclusion and marginalization.

In the face of the weakness of community organization and the strong distrust and disinterest among Peronia neighborhood residents, few actors made any effort to develop community resources and strengthen organization and participation. The municipal government provided a minimum of orientation for members of new COCODEs and (especially) MDCs in Peronia, yet did little to ensure the representativeness of these groups or to promote practices of transparency and inclusion. Further, many local leaders I interviewed said municipal authorities had used manipulative and divisive tactics⁸⁷ that weakened local organization efforts. During the Peronia Development Initiative, the central government supported the formation and training of three new COCODES, as well as providing a single facilitator for the *Mesas Temáticas*. This effort, however, was limited and temporary. Furthermore, only in exceptional cases have outside NGOs working in Peronia invested in strengthening the community's organizational and leadership capacity. The most consistent organization promoting such initiatives was the local

⁸⁶ The failure to complete the sewer extension project in Anexo and the street paving project in a neighboring sector are just two of numerous examples.

⁸⁷ These included resistance to allowing communities to form COCODEs, a refusal to recognize or participate in the *Mesas Temáticas*, and dealing with neighborhoods individually rather than recognizing the common nature of their challenges in Peronia.

Catholic Church parish, and its most vocal advocate was long-time priest Padre Elias.⁸⁸ Yet even the Church's social capacity building efforts were often episodic and restricted in scope.

In sum, local actors have not undertaken any comprehensive and sustained attempts to strengthen community organization in Peronia. In consequence, neighborhood entities and leaders faced difficult circumstances with little or no support. Similarly, residents of neighborhoods with corrupt, manipulative and/or unrepresentative leaders had virtually no options for external assistance to seek changes.

Just as the obstacles faced by grassroots leaders and organizations have been multiple, both internal and external, their efforts have taken many forms while seeking to address those needs. Local organizations in the four neighborhoods I closely examined pursued development objectives through diverse approaches and strategies. Community groups seeking neighborhood improvements dominated the improvement-efforts landscape of Peronia. The COCODEs and MDCs were the most numerous and visible of these. These groups sought physical upgrades in their neighborhoods by mobilizing community assets, labor and funds or obtaining external resources (or both).

Efforts to create spaces for citizen participation in Peronia have been motivated foremost by the goal of promoting local development. This was true for the original neighborhood association, the Catholic Church-sponsored federation of community groups and most recently, the *Mesas Tématicas*. Grassroots leaders and representatives gathered in these spaces to propose projects, share information about ongoing initiatives and strategize concerning how best to engage with external actors in the pursuit of resources.

In Peronia, politics is development and development is politics. Community leaders knew well that once every four years, prior to elections, opportunities for potential projects and resources would emerge. During the most recent electoral cycle both the municipal and central government invested more, and more visibly, in Peronia. Additionally, political parties and candidates seeking election at the municipal or national level spent resources in Ciudad Peronia in order to build political support.⁸⁹ Community leaders and representatives were key actors in

⁸⁸ Padre Elias was transferred to a community in Honduras in early 2011. His replacement has not played nearly as significant a role in promoting community organization.

⁸⁹ While parties invested relatively few resources in seeking votes in Peronia, the resulting improvements were often quite visible (the building of a new building for the volunteer firefighters or improvements to a school). This may have contributed to the impression on the part of many Peronia residents I interviewed that the community was being "flooded" with resources.

the governance process. While some individuals likely sought to benefit personally from increased attention and resources, the vast majority of local leaders I interviewed said they were seeking projects or other benefits for their neighborhoods. These organizers clearly knew the risks to their reputation that political involvement entailed. Yet the opportunity to bring scarce resources to their communities often led them to, at the very least, be open to the possibility of entering into an arrangement with a political party. A minority of local representatives actively sought resources from parties and openly supported parties or candidates in exchange for benefits for their area. But for most grassroots leaders political involvement was a means to the end of community development.

On a positive note, it is important to highlight the encouraging cases of Regalito and La Selva for the lessons they provide for possibilities for progress in Peronia. These two communities share few characteristics. La Selva is a rural village that has existed for generations and is now suffering encroachment from Peronia's expansion. Regalito is an informal settlement established in 2006 on a former dump site. Yet local leaders in each neighborhood have instituted positive practices of transparency, inclusion and collective decision-making that have had significant impacts. Both development organizations in these communities have high legitimacy with area residents in contrast to most other neighborhood groups in Peronia and have mobilized citizens to contribute their time and money to improvement projects. Furthermore, residents of both areas told me in interviews they trusted that their representatives were involved in politics in an effort to seek benefits and resources for their fellow citizens, rather than for personal gain. If community leaders and organizations in other parts of Peronia could replicate the positive practices that have been instituted by leaders in these two neighborhoods, such an effort might begin to rebuild the trust and collaboration with citizens that has been lost in them.

This brief summary highlights the interrelated character of the challenges and processes of organization and neighborhood upgrading in Peronia as well as their impact on the possibilities for development and change in the community. Local actors had to maneuver within this complex environment and have done so with varying degrees of success, with accomplishment understood as improving access to services for residents of their neighborhoods

Finally, the four chapters presented here provide many examples of the individual and collective exercise of agency. Community organization participants I interviewed said they imagined a better future for their neighborhoods and for Peronia as a whole. They argued this

capacity to aspire drove them to spend their evenings at COCODE or *Mesas Tématicas* meetings or to spend money to go to the municipal office with a project request. They also expressed a shared belief that collective organization was the key to sustained improvement for their communities. On this view, they attempted (with decidedly mixed results) to push, pull and cajole their fellow residents into action. Despite many setbacks and frustrations (and just as many asides to me in interviews that they were probably fools wasting their time), along with a few concrete advances, many of these same individuals continue to work towards the realization of their dream of a more prosperous Peronia. If this aspiration does become a reality, such will occur, to a large extent, because of the efforts of these men and women as they have sought to realize development projects in their community.

Context, Structure and Agency in Peronia

The tensions between the agency of individuals and collectives and the limitations imposed by the structures present in the context of Ciudad Peronia are at the heart of this research. In exploring these social dynamics, I have sought to highlight the actions of local actors as well as the obstacles they faced in seeking to achieve their objectives, including economic discrimination and political marginalization. I made explicit reference to the duality of structure and agency in my discussion of participation and empowerment in Chapter 5. There I presented a conceptualization of empowerment that integrated an understanding of the role of opportunity structures as well as multi-dimensional individual and collective capacities, with an emphasis on empowerment as an emancipatory process. However, these same tensions are present throughout the other chapters as well, as I describe how actors exercised their agency under varying circumstances.

Thus, my research has sought to further explore the fundamental leitmotif of the social sciences, the struggle to understand the dynamic tension of structure and agency in the human experience. The multiple structures that formed the context in which Peronia residents found themselves presented numerous limitations on the exercise of agency, even as they also opened specific opportunities. Individuals and groups navigated this environment in pursuit of their goals. Ultimately, the findings of my research confirm theories offered by scholars such as Giddens, Bourdieu and others that while human agency is circumscribed, the limiting structures are neither monolithic nor impenetrable.

Such a formulation of structure and agency fits within the conceptual framework emerges from my research. The process of emancipation and freedom for actors in situations of structural marginalization, such as most Peronia residents find themselves in, is a long struggle on many fronts, with small victories that bring about incremental progress even as they reveal more clearly the scale of the obstacles yet to be surmounted. Indeed, it was those Peronia residents most actively involved in pursuing neighborhood improvements who were able to most fully describe the character of the challenges faced by individuals and the community as a whole. Yet it was also these same citizens who were exercising their agency in multiple domains, particularly that of the public sphere. In so doing, they were securing their continued freedom to act as citizens. They also confirmed Michel Foucault's argument that, "Liberty is a practice... 'liberty' is what must be exercised... I think it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom" (1984, p. 245). The practice of action and the exercise of agency are the only guarantee of the continued possibility of such. Citizens of Peronia demonstrated this when they gathered in the *Mesas Temáticas* or when they petitioned the government for resources to upgrade needed services.

Policy Implications

The challenges and dynamics outlined here suggest a number of policies that Guatemalan governmental actors, local and international civil society organizations and donors active in the country could undertake to improve the prospects for citizen organization and civic development in Peronia and communities like it. The first is political support for strengthening and fully instituting the *Ley de Consejos Urbanos y Rurales de Desarrollo* (Law of Urban and Rural Development Councils). The statute that provides the legal framework for citizen participation in Guatemala has several interesting features including a COMUDE (municipal development council) that serves as a mechanism for citizen involvement in municipal investment decision-making related to community development. However, the participatory system the law mandates is essentially voluntary, to be instituted to the extent that local authorities desire, or not at all. Until this gap in the legislation is addressed, some mayors will continue to ignore the law or implement it selectively. Guatemala's congress should amend this statute to provide incentives for municipalities to comply with all aspects of participation and accountability outlined in the

law. Perhaps the most effective inducement would be to tie these governments' receipt of resources from the nation⁹⁰ to full compliance with the *Consejos* legal framework.

In the absence of such a reform, or to complement it, civil society organizations should focus their attention on citizen participation, transparency and accountability at the municipal level. NGOs and other organizations could play a significant role in monitoring municipal transparency and inclusion using Guatemala's Freedom of Information Law as one tool. These entities should also seek to help to strengthen local groups to play a prominent role in demanding and participating in democratic governance practices. Although there are local civil society organizations that focus on these areas, their reach is limited. International donor organizations could leverage their resources by investing in strengthening and supporting grassroots actors to expand and improve their work on inclusive and accountable governance.

This research also makes clear the need for local government officials and civil society organizations to devote resources to strengthening community capacities in areas such as Peronia. Together, these articles provide evidence that actors promoting local development initiatives in poor areas of Guatemala City often assume that neighborhood groups are representative, inclusive and capable. Municipal government efforts to promote transparency and inclusion must be complemented by similar actions at the community level. The cases of Regalito and La Selva demonstrate the potential of information-sharing and collective decision-making practices for increasing the credibility and legitimacy of local groups and thereby their capacity to mobilize the community for development. Strengthening democratic practices and organizational capacity at the grassroots will require a commitment to longer-term processes of facilitation and accompaniment, particularly in those communities in which resident distrust and passivity have become deeply entrenched.

Local governments committed to promoting development have a vested interest in strengthening community organizations as well. The kind of partnership for development articulated by Villa Nueva's new mayor, for example, requires capable and credible organizations at the neighborhood level. However, in addition to working to improve local capacities, municipal authorities should also strengthen channels for citizen participation in decision-making processes, thus ensuring the legitimacy of such mechanisms. Establishing

⁹⁰ All municipalities in Guatemala receive a transfer of resources from the central government as calculated by a formula. Nearly all local governments are highly reliant on this transfer, which often accounts for substantially more half of their budget in most cases.

community organizations as key actors in municipal governance and development will also demonstrate the importance and relevance of those groups to residents in Peronia, encouraging them to engage more directly with their neighborhood representatives rather than passively waiting for those individuals to bring about development on their own.

Evidence from exemplary cases in Latin America demonstrate that promoting democratic and participatory practices at the local level can have multiple benefits, including breaking habits and networks of patronage and securing improved development outcomes for the poorest (Abers, 1998; Hordijk, 2005; Peruzzotti & Selee, 2009a). Such impacts are hardly guaranteed, yet evidence from Peronia and Villa Nueva suggests that specific points of intervention do exist, upon which a foundation of improved participatory practices at the community and municipal levels could be built. Such changes, if reinforced through continued practice and institutionalization, could result in both immediate and long-term improvements in the well-being of residents of Peronia.

Suggestions for Further Research

The inquiry I carried out in Peronia was largely exploratory. However, it did draw upon a solid foundation of research on citizen participation, democratic governance and empowerment carried out in similar communities in Guatemala, Latin America and across the globe. The results of my investigation suggest several questions and avenues for future study.

- My data indicate that there is a rather stark divide between participants (leaders and members of community organizations) and non-participants (all other residents). These two groups shared many attitudes, yet differed dramatically in their willingness to contribute time and energy (and their own money, in some cases) in the struggle for community improvement. Neighborhood organization participants had varied backgrounds and reported different paths that led them to become engaged. This calls for more thorough investigation of who engages and how and why they began (and continue) to be involved in community development efforts. Such evidence would allow for a better understanding of the dynamics of participation at the community level and suggest means of broadening it beyond the activities of a small core group. A key question to be explored is whether participation is more related to individual characteristics (education level, family income, gender, etc.) or to processes (elected to leadership position, prior position in school or church committee, etc.)?

- Those I interviewed reported many stories of corruption and manipulation by community actors in Peronia and these had tainted the reputation of neighborhood leaders more generally. This situation generates several questions. To what extent do residents' perceptions of current leaders reflect those individuals' actions and behaviors or those of prior leaders? Would more transparent and inclusive practices by community groups reestablish trust between residents and neighborhood representatives?
- I investigated the cases of Regalito and La Selva, where practices of transparency and inclusion appear to have had positive impacts. Are there other neighborhoods in Peronia with higher levels of community involvement and trust in groups and leaders? What similarities and/or differences do they share with the two communities I investigated? What further insights could be gained concerning overcoming distrust, dependency and apathy in communities such as Peronia from these other cases (if such in fact exist)?
- Determining the actual levels and character of political involvement by community actors proved difficult. Many of the leaders I interviewed claimed to have very little or no engagement, but also stated that nearly all community leaders and groups were affiliated with one or more parties or candidates. Those few neighborhood leaders who did admit to some level of affiliation or support were adamant that their only interest was in securing benefits for their community. In no case did any leader admit to any kind of personal advantage. Are the widespread perceptions of these leaders personally benefitting from political involvement mistaken? Or did my sample not include those individuals who had been bribed? Or were those leaders who had received personal benefits (understandably) simply reluctant to reveal such?

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APPENDIX A

Research Methods

In each substantive part of my dissertation, I discuss the manner in which I collected the data relevant to that chapter. Here I present a more complete description of the research and information collection methods I employed throughout my investigation.

I carried out the data collection for this research in two specific phases. The first occurred from May to August 2010 and the second from June 2011 to June 2012. During the initial period of study, I collected information from multiple sources using several distinct methods. Primarily, I attended twice-weekly meetings of the *Mesas Temáticas* as a participant observer. During those gatherings I played a facilitative role, supporting Jacobo Gramajo, the central government staffer charged with coordinating the *Mesas*. In addition to observing the MT meetings, I spoke informally with many community members who participated in the *Mesas* process, as well as with Jacobo and other external actors involved.

In May 2010, I attended a meeting of the *COCODE Multisectorial* in the neighborhood of El Anexo. During that gathering I met members of the community's MDC. In July 2010, I interviewed five Anexo residents using a semi-structured format. Two interview participants were then-members of the MDC and three did not participate in any community organization or process. The interviews took place in a building used by the Anexo neighborhood as a community space. I recorded the conversations and later transcribed them. I also carried out 44 individual surveys with Anexo residents. The topics covered in the interviews and surveys related to community organization and development.

When I returned to Ciudad Peronia in June 2011, I once again attended the MT meetings, now once a week, as a participant observer. I continued my engagement with the *Mesas* until June 2012. I began to carry out semi-structured interviews with MT participants in July 2012. These conversations took place in the interviewee's home or a public place of their choosing. I recorded and later transcribed the interviews. My initial contacts suggested other community leaders to interview. I also sought out and interviewed external actors from NGOs and government agencies (national and municipal) that were active in Peronia.

My initial research in Peronia introduced me to a number of neighborhoods in the community, each with its own history and micro-dynamics. Of these, I selected four that

demonstrated characteristics related to community organization and development that, on the basis of my review of the relevant academic literature, I thought would be worth investigating further in my research. In each of the four neighborhoods, I interviewed between two and four residents who were active participants in community organizations or processes. Initial contacts in each area were through individuals connected to the *Mesas Temáticas*, and they introduced me to other participants in the community. I also interviewed between 3 and 4 residents who were not engaged in community organizations at that time. A community leader in each neighborhood accompanied me and facilitated the interviews with non-participants; I selected a house at random, and the leader introduced me to the occupant and then left while I performed the interview. I carried out each of the semi-structured interviews in the interviewee's home and I recorded and later transcribed them. Finally, in each neighborhood I chose two blocks at random and surveyed approximately 10 individuals I encountered in each, for a total of 20-25 surveys. I surveyed the individual who answered the door (if they were 18 or older), and in a small number of cases I surveyed one additional household member. I carried out identical surveys in three additional neighborhoods for a total of 154 surveys.

Appendix B

Interview Participant Key

(* denotes real name used; all others are pseudonyms):

2010 Interviews

July 15: Fernando/Anexo participant man 1, MDC Anexo

July 15: Julia/Anexo participant woman 1, MDC Anexo

July 15: Anexo non-participant man 1

July 15: Anexo non-participant man 2

July 15: Anexo non participant woman 1

2011 Interviews

July 2: Carlos, Mesas Temáticas

July 2: Enrique, COCODE Multisectorial

July 2: President, COCODE Multisectorial

July 7: Roberto, COCODE EL Mirador

July 19: Enrique, COCODE Multisectorial

July 20: Carlos, Mesas Temáticas

July 24: Vicente, COCODE El Mirador

July 24: Julio, COCODE El Mirador

July 25: Ernesto, member of Mesas Temáticas

July 26: Fernando, MDC El Anexo/Bolsa Solidaria

July 27: Claudia, Mesas Temáticas/Woman's group Colectivo Nazaret

July 28: Member, Mesas Temáticas

August 1: Member, Peronia Youth Organization

August 2: Community Leader, Gran Mirador

August 3: Julia, MDC Anexo

August 4: Jorge, COCODE El Calvario

August 7: Pastor Mardoqueo Fuentes*, Tierra Deseable Church

August 8: Liliana, COCODE Multisectorial

August 9: Ana Maria, member of Mesas Temáticas

August 10: Woman's group Colectivo Nazaret members

August 15: Woman community leader
August 16: Gabriela, COCODE Mirador/Bolsa Solidaria
August 17: Pastor, Peronia Evangelical Pastors Association
August 24: Carolina, Coordinadora Bolsa Solidaria, Ciudad Peronia
September 5: Rokael Cardona*, NGO Poder para Todos
September 6: Lorena, Peronia Youth Organization/Mesas Temáticas
September 7: Luis, NGO Instituto de Investigacion y Servicio Social (Institute for Social Service and Research)
September 8: Maria Gonzalez*, Researcher University of San Carlos
September 26: Maria, MDC Nuevo Amanecer/Bolsa Solidaria
October 17: Andres Ramirez*, Government of Guatemala, Cohesion Social Coordinator for Ciudad Peronia
October 17: Mirador participant man 1, COCODE Gran Mirador
October 18: Member, Woman's Group Colectivo Nazaret
October 25: Gabriela/Mirador participant woman 1, COCODE Gran Mirador/Bolsa Solidaria
October 26: Lucia/Mirador participant woman 2, COCODE Gran Mirador
October 29: La Selva participant man 1, COCODE La Selva
November 5: Mirador participant woman 3, COCODE Gran Mirador
November 8: Member, Woman's Group Colectivo Nazaret
November 9: Herber Leal*, Community Organization, Municipality of Villa Nueva
November 28: La Selva participant woman 1, COCODE La Selva
November 29: Alejandro/Regalito Participant man 1, MDC Regalito de Dios
November 29: Anexo non-participant woman 2
November 29: Anexo non-participant woman 3
November 29: Gran Mirador non-participant man 1
November 30: La Selva Participant man 2, COCODE La Selva
December 5: La Selva non-participant Man 1
December 5: La Selva non-participant Woman 1
December 6: Regalito participant man 2, MDC Regalito
December 6: Regalito participant woman 1, MDC Regalito

2012 Interviews

January 8: Anexo non-participant man 3
January 9: Anexo non-participant man 4
January 9: Anexo non-participant woman 4
January 10: Fernando/Anexo participant man 1, MDC Anexo
January 18: Gran Mirador non-participant woman 1
January 30: Luis, NGO Instituto de Investigacion y Servicio Social (Institute for Social Service and Research)
March 8: Jacobo Gramajo*, former Government of Guatemala Mesas Temáticas facilitator
March 14: Gran Mirador non-participant woman 2
March 20: Regalito non-participant woman 1
March 21: Regalito non-participant woman 2
March 22: Regalito non-participant man 1
March 22: Regalito non-participant woman 3
September 6: Jose Sical*, Former Vice Mayor of Villa Nueva

Appendix C

Individual Interview Schedule for Participants

1. Perceptions of Participatory Spaces
 - a. When did you start to participate in the (COCODE or other group)?
 - b. What led you to start to participate in the (COCODE or other group)?
 - c. How would you define citizen participation?
 - d. In what way do you think that the (COCODE or other group) is or is not a space for citizen participation?
 - e. What other spaces for citizen participation exist in the community?
 - f. Do you think that the (COCODE or other group) has been able to achieve important advances for the community? Like what?
 - g. Do you see any differences from before the (COCODE or other group) was formed?
 - h. Are the participants in the (COCODE or other group) representative of the community as a whole or are there some groups underrepresented?
 - i. There are some people in the community who are not participating with the (COCODE or other group), why do you think that is?
 - j. Have you heard of any other groups in the community?
 - k. Do you know of people who participate in these groups?
 - l. Do you think these different groups benefit the community? Or just the people who are participating in them? Or do they not make any difference at all?
2. Perceptions and Characterizations of Participation and Outcomes of Participation
 - a. How would you describe your role in the (COCODE or other group) that you participate in?
 - b. How would you compare your participation in the (COCODE or other group) to other members?
 - c. Do you think that your opinion is taken into account in decisions made by the (COCODE or other group)?
 - d. Do you think your participation contributes to the success of the (COCODE or other group)? In what ways?
 - e. How are decisions made in the (COCODE or other group)?

- f. Do you think that everyone has equal influence on the decisions made?
 - g. Do you think this represents the most democratic manner of making decisions?
 - h. Does everyone in the (COCODE or other group) share the information, contacts and resources they have, or do some people use their access to those things to gain influence?
3. Views of Efficacy and Expectations for the Future
- a. Do you think that life for you will be different in 10 years? In what ways do you think it will be better or worse?
 - b. Do you think that you will make this change happen or will it be due to actions of others beyond your control?
 - c. Have your opinions changed since you have been involved with the (COCODE or other group)?
 - d. Do you think that each person or group of people has equal opportunities to prosper?
 - e. If no, why do you think that some people or groups have less opportunity?
4. Perceptions and Characterizations of Individual and Collective Learning and Adaptation
- a. Over the years that you have been living in this community, have you learned any important lessons?
 - b. How did you learn these lessons, just by yourself or collectively with others?
 - c. Has your participation in the (COCODE or other group) led to any lessons learned?
 - d. Did these lessons occur to you alone or did they result from discussions with your other (COCODE or other group) members?
5. Perceptions of Marginalization
- a. What do you think of the term “marginalized” and how would you define it?
 - b. Do you think this term fits some people in this community? Which?
 - c. Do you think that it fits for yourself and people like you?
 - d. If so, in what ways do you feel that you are marginalized in society, the community and elsewhere?
6. Perceptions and Characterization of Interactions with Community Elites
- a. Tell me about your experiences with community leaders, both those who have formal positions and those who do not
 - b. What do you think about your interactions with these leaders?

- c. Have your interactions with community leaders changed at all due to your participation in the (COCODE or other group)?
 - d. Do you think community leaders take the (COCODE or other group) into account and respond positively to the decisions made by this group?
7. Proactive Versus Passive Community Development Stance
- a. How do you think that you could get ahead, by taking actions to make change happen or by luck or actions beyond your control?
 - b. What kinds of actions have you undertaken to improve your lives?
 - c. What about in the community, how will this community become more prosperous?
 - d. What kinds of actions have you undertaken to improve the community?
 - e. Have your opinions about how you and the community can improve their situation changed because of your participation in the (COCODE or other group)?
8. Perceptions and Characterization of Interactions with State Actors
- a. Tell me about your experiences with local elected officials
 - b. What do you think about the interactions you have had with these officials?
 - c. Tell me about your experiences with government workers
 - d. What do you think about the interactions you have had with these workers?
 - e. Have your interactions with elected officials and government workers changed at all due to your participation in the (COCODE or other group)?
 - f. Do you think elected officials and government workers take the (COCODE or other group) into account and respond positively to the decisions made by this group?
 - g. What about the recent political campaigns, have any candidates showed an interest in this community? If so, how have they appealed to voters here? Have you had specific contact with any candidate?
 - h. Have any candidates approached the (COCODE or other group) for support? How did they appeal to the group members?
 - i. Do you think candidates are more interested in community leaders or those connected to groups such as (COCODE or other group) than other members of the community? If so, why do you think this might be the case?
9. Perceptions of Instances of Organization, Mobilization, and Connections

- a. Have there been times when the residents of this community got together and organized?
- b. Were you involved? In what way?
- c. Have you or others in this community been able to make connections with other community leaders, groups or organizations outside of this community?
- d. Has the (COCODE or other group) facilitated community organization in any way?
- e. Has the (COCODE or other group) facilitated connections outside of the community in any way?

10. Perceptions of Access to Resources

- a. How would you describe the relationship between the community and elected officials?
- b. Has this relationship changed since the (COCODE or other group) was created?
- c. How would you describe the relationship between the (COCODE or other group) and elected officials?
- d. What kinds of resources from the local government have come to this community in the last few years?
- e. How have these resources come? As a response to a petition from the community? During a political campaign? Due to the connections of a community member?
- f. Have any other resources come to the community from the national government, an NGO, a political party, a church or any other source?
- g. How have these resources come? As a response to a petition from the community? During a political campaign? Due to the connections of a community member?
- h. What kinds of benefits has your participation in the (COCODE or other group) brought to you and your family?
- i. What kinds of benefits has your participation in the (COCODE or other group) brought to the community?
- j. Has your participation in the (COCODE or other group) given access to resources for you and your family?
- k. What about resources specifically from the local government, has your participation in the (COCODE or other group) brought more resources from the local government to the community? How has this occurred?

1. What about resources from any other source, has your participation in the (COCODE or other group) brought more resources from the local government to the community? How has this occurred?

11. Community organization and citizen participation

- a. When you first arrived in Ciudad Peronia, what were your initial impressions of the level of social organization and citizen participation?
- b. What brought about the original spaces for participation and organization (COCODE and Mesas Temáticas)? Who were the protagonists in organizing those spaces? What was the relationship between those working to promote citizen participation and local and national government actors?
- c. What kinds of advances in social organization and citizen participation have there been since you have been involved in Ciudad Peronia? To what do you attribute these advances?
- d. What setbacks or failures have you seen in the social organization and participation? To what do you attribute these setbacks or failures?
- e. During the political campaign, what has happened to the spaces for social organization and citizen participation in Ciudad Peronia? Are they still open? Do they meet regularly? Are the dynamics different?
- f. How do candidates generally appeal to voters in Ciudad Peronia? Do they make general promises? Do they try to get support by offering more tangible benefits?
- g. Many people don't think they can trust political candidates, that they will say and offer anything to get elected. Do you think there are benefits to be gained for the community during the election season?
- h. Have any candidates approached the (COCODE or other group) for support? How did they appeal to the group members? What kind of support did they request from the (COCODE or other group)? How does the (COCODE or other group) evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of supporting one candidate or another (or none at all)?
- i. Has the way that candidates approach community leaders and community organization differed in this electoral campaign from past elections?

Appendix D

Interview Schedule for Non-Participants

1. Views of Efficacy and Expectations for the Future
 - a. Do you think that life for you will be different in 10 years? For better or for worse?
 - b. Do you think that you will make this change happen or will it be due to actions of others beyond your control?
 - c. Do you think that each person or group of people has equal opportunities to prosper?
 - d. If no, why do you think that some people or groups have less opportunity?
2. Perceptions and Characterizations of Individual and Collective Learning and Adaptation
 - a. Over the years that you have been living in this community, have you learned any important lessons?
 - b. Have you learned these lessons by yourself or collectively with your neighbors or in some kind of group?
3. Perceptions of Marginalization
 - a. What do you think of the term “marginalized” and how would you define it?
 - b. Do you think this term fits some people in this community? Which?
 - c. Do you think that it fits for yourself and people like you?
 - d. If so, in what ways do you feel that you are marginalized in society, the community and elsewhere?
4. Perceptions of Participatory Spaces
 - a. Have you heard about the COCODE in this community?
 - b. What have you heard about it?
 - c. Do you know of people who are participating with the COCODE? A friend or neighbor? Why do you think they participate?
 - d. Do you think the COCODE is working for the good of the community or just for the members of the COCODE?
 - e. Do you think it makes a difference having a COCODE in this community or does it not lead to anything? Why?
 - f. Is there a particular reason that you have not been participating with the COCODE?
 - g. Have you heard of any other groups in the community?

- h. Do you know of people who participate in these groups? Why do you think they participate?
 - i. Do you think these different groups benefit the community? Or just the people who are participating in them? Or do they not make any difference at all?
 - j. Tell me about your perceptions of the COCODE and other community organizations during the political campaign
5. Perceptions and Characterization of Interactions with Community Elites
- a. Tell me about your experiences with community leaders, both those who have formal positions and those who do not
 - b. What do you think about your interactions with these leaders?
 - c. Do most community leaders belong to groups like the (COCODE or other group)?
 - d. Do you think community leaders take the (COCODE or other group) into account and respond positively to the decisions made by this group?
 - e. Tell me about your perceptions of community leaders during the political campaign.
6. Proactive Versus Passive Community Development Stance
- a. How do you think that you could get ahead, by taking actions to make change happen or by luck or actions beyond your control?
 - b. What kinds of actions have you undertaken to improve you live?
 - c. What about in the community, how will this community become more prosperous?
 - d. What kinds of actions have you undertaken to improve the community?

Appendix E

Survey for Non-Participants

1. Opinion of community leaders
 - a. Community has effective leaders
 - b. Community has honest leaders
 - c. Leaders work for good of own community
 - d. The community leaves everything up to the community leaders
 - e. Leaders work for their own benefit
 - f. Leaders share sufficient information with the community
 - g. The community should support its leaders more
 - h. Leaders should involve the community more
2. Political Campaign
 - a. Politicians ignored this community during the campaign
 - b. Politicians came and made promises but did nothing else
 - c. Politicians came and gave t-shirts and other little things but nothing else
 - d. Politicians carried out some kind of project to benefit the community
 - e. Politicians offered jobs or other benefits in return for support
3. Politicians and Community leaders
 - a. Community leaders were involved with a specific party
 - b. Community leaders were involved in a party to bring benefits to the community
 - c. Community leaders were involved in a party to get personal benefits
 - d. Community leaders stopped working for the community during the electoral season
4. Perception of future
 - a. Next Municipal administration will be better than the last
 - b. Next municipal administration will be the same as the last
 - c. Next Municipal administration will be worse than the last
 - d. Next Central gov administration will be better than the last
 - e. Next Central gov administration will be the same as the last
 - f. Next Central gov administration will be worse than the last

Neighborhood:

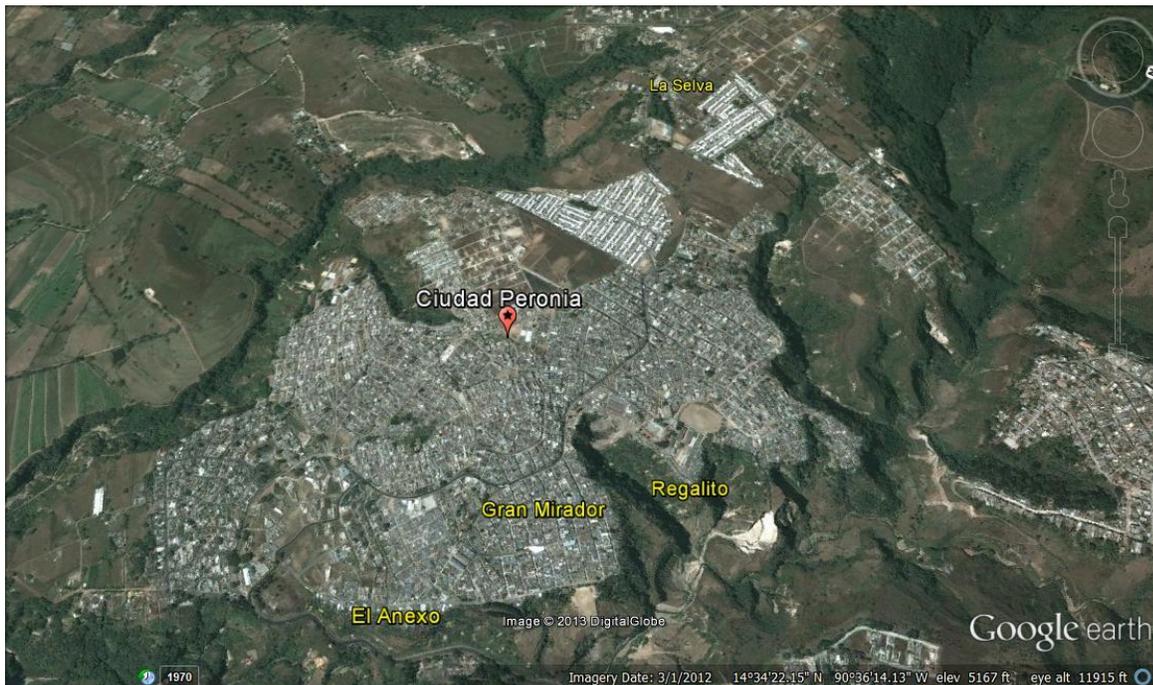
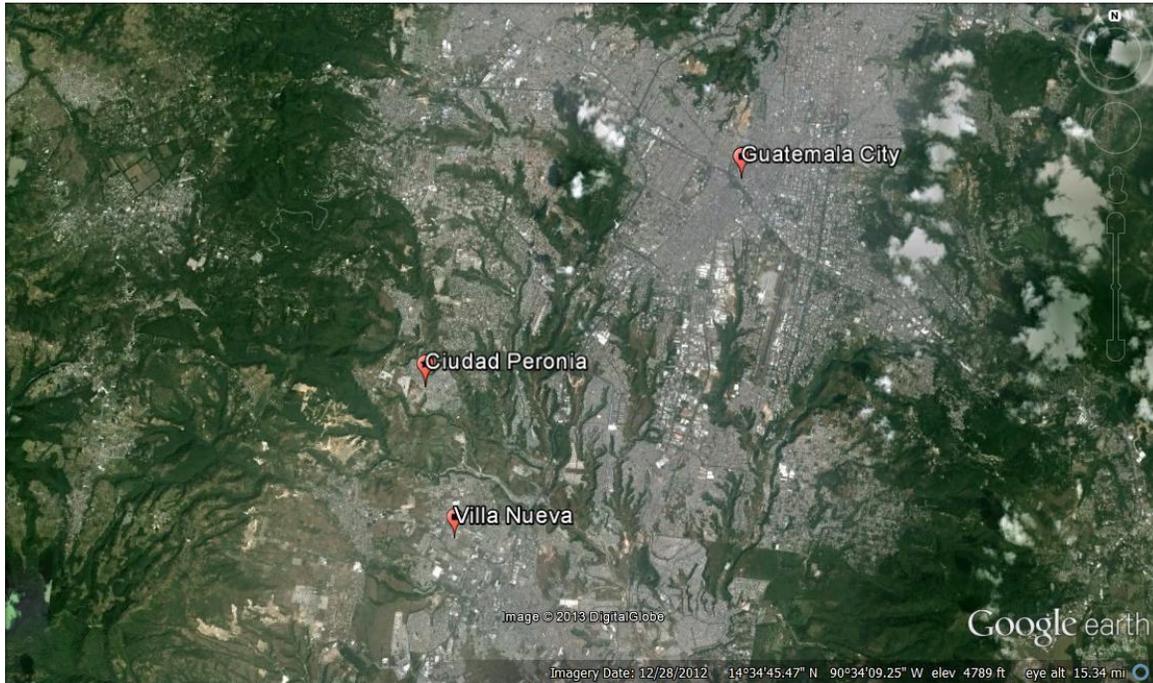
Age:

M/F:

Appendix F

Maps and Pictures of Peronia

Maps of Peronia and the four study neighborhoods:







A Photo of Ciudad Peronia



A photo of the Gran Mirador neighborhood



Photos of the El Anexo neighborhood

