Factors Influencing Community Recovery Decision Making: A Case Study of Recovery from the 2016 Fort McMurray Wildfires

by

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COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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Abstract

When large-scale disasters impact entire communities, entire communities must in turn collectively negotiate the recovery process and the associated recovery decisions. While these decisions affect the recovery outcomes of the community as a whole, they also impact on each of the community's constituent members. How resources are allocated and which interests are privileged during recovery can directly contribute to the varying recovery outcomes experienced by different members of a community. In this context, the process of deciding who gets what, when and how during disaster recovery becomes especially relevant.

With this in mind, the following case study explores the recovery decision-making process in light of recovery from the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires. The study asks: Which factors influenced whether and how the values, perceptions, needs, and interests of community groups in Fort McMurray were identified, solicited and prioritized in the community recovery decision-making process following the 2016 wildfires?

For this purpose, a single-case, exploratory case study was undertaken, with data collected through semi-structured interviews with 16 participants representing a variety of community groups from Fort McMurray one-year after the fires. From the study, three factors emerged as influential to the recovery decision-making experiences of these community groups: organizational relationships, organizational capacity and the perceived value of non-profit organizations. Overall, this study suggests that these factors may influence how disaster-impacted communities solicit, identify and prioritize the competing interests of their constituent members during recovery, and therefore highlights potential areas for further research into community participation during recovery from disasters.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On May 1st, 2016, what would become one of Canada's worst disasters began as a wildfire southwest of the city of Fort McMurray, Alberta. By May 3rd the fire had rapidly spread to become a 2,600-hectare wildfire that threatened to consume the city, prompting the mandatory evacuation of 88,000 residents and the subsequent declaration of a provincial state of emergency. After the fire had moved through the community, destruction was widespread; 2,400 homes and businesses had been destroyed, and the entire population of the city was displaced to communities across the province and country. Phased re-entry to the least-damaged neighborhoods did not begin until June 1st, 2016, nearly a month after the original evacuation order, and re-entry to the worst-impacted neighborhoods did not begin until as late as October 2016. Taking into account the extensive damage to both private and public infrastructure, the extraordinary resources deployed in response, and the overall disruption to the lives and livelihoods of the residents of Fort McMurray, the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires will not soon be forgotten.

Recovery from the wildfires continues today, and given the scope and magnitude of the disaster, necessarily involves significant resources, capacity, and coordination. For the first year after the fire, the Wood Buffalo Recovery Committee, a committee developed and mandated by the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo City Council to oversee recovery, led the City's recovery efforts. The Wood Buffalo Recovery Committee was further supported by the Recovery Task Force, a working business unit of the municipality. Since the fires, other governance structures have been developed, team leaders appointed, and committees established to oversee and contribute to the recovery from the wildfires. At first glance, the recovery governance

process within Fort McMurray appears organized and clear; theoretically, such structures dictate who makes which decisions regarding recovery and how such decisions are made.

However, empirical knowledge of the disaster recovery process has demonstrated that community recovery is a complicated process that is rarely orderly, knowable or predictable (Berke, Kartez & Wenger, 1993). Research indicates that disaster recovery is characterized not simply by reconstruction and the reestablishment of community infrastructure and functions, but also by necessary adaptation to new realities and decision-making regarding such adaptation (Mileti, 1999; Berke, Kartez & Wenger, 1993). With a view towards decision making and adaptation, it is increasingly recognized that "Decisions on adaptation are made by individuals, groups within society, organizations and government on behalf of society" (Adger, 2003, p. 388) and "all decisions privilege one set of interests over another and create winners and losers" (p. 388). This characterization recognizes both that disaster recovery is an inherently political process (Olson, 2000; Berke, Kartez & Wenger, 1993) and that the underlying social, economic and political structures of a community impact the ability of individuals and groups to not only reduce their risk prior to disaster, but also assert their values, perceptions, needs and interests after disaster.

With this complexity in mind, and taking into account lessons learned through previous research related to community recovery, the magnitude of the Fort McMurray recovery process offers a potentially invaluable opportunity to explore disaster recovery community decision-making in practice. This study, therefore, sought to examine how the recovery interests of community groups in Fort McMurray were identified, solicited and prioritized in the public decision-making process during recovery from the 2016 wildfires. It further sought to understand

the factors underlying how the interests of diverse community groups are prioritized in relation to one another during the recovery process.

Research into the political dimensions of disasters is less well developed than other branches of disaster recovery literature (Olson, 2000), with few studies explicitly directed towards understanding the public, post-disaster decision-making environment. As such, an exploratory case study can help contribute to the comprehension of relevant factors impacting recovery decision-making and can form an essential basis for future research on participatory planning and post-disaster policy development. Case studies are preferred when the researcher "has little control over events being studied" (Yin, 2004, p. 29). Given the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of disasters, disaster researchers have embraced case studies as an empirical research method allowing for the flexible study of emerging situations. Flexible approaches to disaster research allow researchers "to capture new ideas and to allow fresh perspective to emerge from the data being collected" (Phillips, 1997, p. 186). Therefore, for this research, a single-case, exploratory case study methodology is employed, with data collected through interviews with both key informants and representatives from community groups. Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data produced. Through this analysis, themes emerged indicating the factors which influenced how the values, perceptions, needs and interests of community groups were sought and prioritized during Fort McMurray's recovery decision-making process. Overall, the study aims to provide a case example of issues that are of interest in understanding how disaster-impacted communities balance, prioritize, and ultimately endorse the competing interests of their constituent members during community recovery.

Rationale

Within the field of disaster and emergency management, increasing attention is being paid to both the mitigation and recovery phases of the disaster cycle, as well as proactive rather than reactive management (Pearce, 2003). This has led to the recognition that increased study of disaster recovery not only improves recovery outcomes but also contributes to an understanding of how to enhance mitigation initiatives and increase resilience towards future disasters. While many areas of disaster recovery remain under-studied, few studies explicitly focus on how different interests are represented and prioritized in the recovery decision-making process. This lack of research may be due to a lack of academic and practical focus on the politics of disaster in general. As explained by Olson (2000), the relative inattention to the politics of disaster may stem from the fact that "only in the last decade has disaster research begun accepting disasters as political occasions" (p. 265).

Decision-making that occurs during the recovery period is inherently political. Almost all disaster recovery decision-making includes some element of deciding who gets what, when and how, highlighting the importance of bridging the disciplines of political science and emergency management in the study of the recovery period (Olson, 2000). As Olson (2000) explains "in the longer term recovery and reconstruction phases, the political system is allocating opportunities or 'life chances'" (p. 158). This allocation of life chances is visible after almost every disaster, where resources are scarce, time is limited, and the safety of large populations is in jeopardy; in these situations, it is inevitable that communities will face the challenge of prioritizing need. What is becoming more evident through the increased study of disasters is that through this allocation and prioritization, post-disaster opportunities are "seldom if ever allocated on an even handed basis between classes or racial/ethnic groups" (Olson, 2000, p. 270). This

disproportionate allocation impacts, in particular, a variety of groups commonly lacking access to, or control of, essential resources. In the Canadian context, these often include seniors, low-income residents, transient populations, persons with disabilities, medically dependent persons, children and youth, women, and persons with low literacy levels (Enarson & Walsh, 2007).

Social vulnerability, the concept that "social systems generate unequal exposure to risk by making some people more prone to disaster than others" (Bankoff, 2003, p. 6), has become a focal point in disaster research for its well-documented role in the production of risk. The concept holds not only that social systems contribute to unequal exposure, but that such inequalities in exposure are primarily a function of power relations (Bankoff, 2003). While the concept of social vulnerability explains instances of disproportionate disaster risk, it also serves to highlight the opportunities available to address such inequalities and future vulnerabilities through the recovery period, as "Disaster recovery presents a significant, albeit limited, window of opportunity to … reshape the existing social, political, and economic landscapes" (Smith & Wenger, 2007, p. 240). Considering that community recovery creates both winners and losers, prioritizes some and not others, and offers opportunities for improvement, it is meaningful to identify factors influencing the participation of various community groups in the recovery decision-making process.

It is with this in mind that the following case study seeks to explore the factors influencing the inclusion of various community interests, needs, perceptions and values in the recovery decision-making process for community groups following the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires. Within this purpose, sub questions seek to explore how groups most effectively asserted their interest during recovery and which factors most significantly limited the engagement of community groups in the community recovery decision-making process. Overall,

this research aims to shed empirical light on previously documented instances of disproportionate recovery between groups within disaster impacted communities, as well as inform future research into equitable and sustainable community disaster recovery.

Research Question

Which factors influenced whether and how the values, perceptions, needs and interests of community groups in Fort McMurray were identified, solicited and prioritized in the community recovery decision-making process following the 2016 wildfires?

Within this question, sub-questions include:

- How have groups most effectively asserted their interests during recovery?
- What were the most significant factors that limited groups' engagement in the recovery decision-making process?

Study Outline

The following report contains six chapters. Chapter Two presents a review of literature related to the research topic and outlines both leading theoretical concepts that guide disaster recovery research and practice, and available research related to community participation in recovery decision-making. Chapter Three details the research design and methodological approach undertaken and includes a discussion of the case study context, data collection, research participants, data analysis, ethical considerations, and limitations. Chapter Four presents the results of semi-structured interviews with participants and subsequent thematic analysis. Chapter Five offers a discussion of the results, organized by themes, and connects the results to previous disaster recovery-related theory and research. Finally, Chapter Six concludes the report with a summary of the study and presents considerations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review relevant literature and concepts related to the current understanding of the process of disaster recovery, with a particular focus on community decision-making in the post-disaster period. It begins with an overview of the concepts of social vulnerability and disproportionate recovery and continues with an outline of theory and research related to sustainable disaster recovery. The chapter then explores the idea of social capital, before concluding with a discussion of the role of public participation in disaster recovery.

Social Vulnerability and Disproportionate Recovery

Disaster-related research has frequently and consistently demonstrated that disaster risks, impacts, and rates of recovery are disproportionately distributed among individuals, groups, and communities, and that this distribution is influenced to a large extent by social, political and economic contexts (O'Keefe, Westgate & Wisner, 1976; Bolin & Stanford, 2006). Through the lens of social vulnerability, disaster risk is conceptualized as the product of a physical event or process and the factors which impact the degree to which an entity or individual is put at risk (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon & Davis, 2003). The Pressure and Release model, an explanatory model which holds that disaster vulnerability originates from root causes arising from historical, interrelated and diffuse socio-economic processes, has further developed this premise. Through this model, Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon & Davis (2003) argue that economic, demographic and political root causes "affect the allocation and distribution of resources, among different groups of people" (p. 52). In turn, root causes produce dynamic pressures, defined as distinct and contemporary manifestations of root causes, which themselves produce the unsafe conditions which define disaster risk. The Pressure and Release model exemplifies the relationship between historical, political, economic and other social structures which define daily life and the

vulnerabilities that influence disaster risk. This understanding of disaster risk represents a

notable departure from early understandings, which conceptualized disasters as the "result of

extremes in geophysical processes" (Hewitt, 1983, p. 5), and which emphasized the physical and

environmental nature of hazard, risk and vulnerability, the need for technocratic management

and structural mitigation, and the sharp distinction between everyday social processes and

disaster events (Hewitt, 1983; Fordham, Lovekamp, Thomas & Phillips, 2013).

Accordingly, recovery research has increasingly recognized the process of recovery as a

social problem, rather than as an exclusively technical problem (Nigg, 1995). The

disproportionate distribution of resources, power, vulnerability, and social capital within

communities is not confined to any one stage of the disaster cycle, and therefore translates into

the recovery period where such conditions directly impact the ability of certain groups to recover

in relation to other groups. As Pyles (2009) explains, "Communities with significant social and

economic disparity tend to be more vulnerable to the effects of disasters ... [and] marginalized

populations face greater challenges than their privileged counterparts in terms of disaster

recovery" (p. 1). It is important to note that the conditions which facilitate the marginalization of

certain groups in a society do not spontaneously emerge post-disaster. Therefore, "the

community recovery process must include a consideration of pre-disaster intergroup dynamics

and relationships" (Nigg, 1995, p. 83). In particular, several studies have documented the role

power relations play in the recovery process.

As Berke, Kartez, and Wenger (1993) note of previous disaster research, studies have

begun to "point to the structure of community power and influence as keys to understanding the

timing and outcomes of redevelopment" (p. 97). For example, research demonstrates that

traditionally powerful and well-connected groups, such as those from the business community,

are better able to advocate for, and influence, decision-making in favor of their own political and

economic interests (Gotham & Greenberg, 2008; Berke, Kartez & Wenger, 1993). In their study

of Miami post-Hurricane Andrew, Enarson and Morrow (1998) found that through the

appointment of a recovery committee composed predominantly of male, Anglo, and elite

business community members, and "Many felt there was excessive focus on business and long-

term economic recovery at a time when thousands were still suffering from lack of basic

necessities" (p. 174). Similarly, during analysis of New Orleans recovery post-Hurricane

Katrina, Gotham and Greenberg (2008) discovered that recovery leadership was

"overwhelmingly tied to business interests" (p. 1045), which they argue was influential in the

removal of the public benefit requirements tied to post-disaster reconstruction tax-exemption

benefits. This decision, in turn, ensured that tax-exemptions were "made available to all

developers regardless of the 'public benefit' of their projects" (Gotham and Greenberg, 2008, p.

1045).

Politically influential and socially connected individuals and groups may also advance or

exclude gender, racial and ethnic interests during recovery. For example, through their analysis

of post-Hurricane Mitch reconstruction, Delaney and Shrader (2000) outline the needs of women

being forgotten, subsumed or rejected because of multiple barriers to their participation in

recovery decision-making and aid distribution, including the predominance of men and neglect

of women in the groups engaged regarding local recovery needs. Further, Morrow (1999) has

documented that belonging to a devalued social category can directly impact the rate of recovery

of certain communities or groups, and therefore rates of recovery can be "directly tied to [a

group's] position in the local political power structure" (p. 8). For example, rural communities

and politically marginalized or disenfranchised "groups will require advocacy and support if they

are to recover" (Morrow, 1999, p. 8). Overall, such studies indicate that both social structure and power relations play a significant role in the post-disaster period, and demonstrate how the interests that dominate recovery can, in turn, contribute to the disproportionate recovery of subordinate individuals and groups.

Sustainable Disaster Recovery

The pre-existing conditions that facilitate social vulnerability, and render some more vulnerable to the effects of disaster than others, can either be ameliorated or aggravated by actions taken during recovery. Emerging in the 1990's, concepts of sustainable development have been increasingly integrated into disaster recovery research and practice (Smith & Wenger, 2007). A sustainable approach to recovery acknowledges "that people, groups, and institutions are affected differently by disasters, and as a result …. often recover at differing rates, and in some cases fail to reach their pre-disaster condition" (Smith & Wenger, 2007, p. 238). However, sustainable recovery also offers a method to address inequalities and the root causes of social vulnerability by advocating for the improvement of pre-disaster conditions rather than simply "restoring communities to their previous conditions" (Pyles, 2009, p. 2). These concepts stand in contrast to earlier conceptions of recovery, which focused to a greater degree on restoration of the built environment and a return to pre-disaster normalcy, as well as emphasized the predictable nature of recovery (Smith & Wenger, 2007). In comparison, sustainable recovery can instead be defined as "the differential process of restoring, rebuilding, and reshaping the physical, social, economic, and natural environment through pre-event planning and post-event actions" (Smith & Wenger, 2007, p. 237). This definition recognizes not only the need to restore and reshape the physical environment, but also places emphasize on the socioeconomic components of recovery.

Within a community context, sustainability refers to "the ability to or the capacity of a community to maintain itself over time" (Eadie et al., 2001, p. 1-2) and implies a balance between the economic, environmental, and social spheres of a community. Adapted from Mileti (1999), Eadie et al. (2001) describe six principles that define sustainable disaster recovery: participatory processes, ensuring quality of life, economic vitality, equity, environmental quality, and the incorporation of mitigation to achieve disaster resilience. Sustainable recovery further considers the opportunity disasters present to move beyond the status quo. Through this lens, the post-disaster period offers communities an opportunity to increase their level of development, reduce vulnerability to future disasters, improve the overall quality of life for citizens, remedy inequalities, enhance local economies, and improve environmental conditions (Smith & Wenger, 2007; Davidson et al., 2007).

A sustainable recovery process additionally recognizes that preparation for the next disaster begins at the end of the previous disaster, creating a cyclical relationship between the phases of disaster: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery (Olson, 2000). More recent discussions of the relationship between sustainable development and disaster recovery have emphasized the importance of striving for long-term adaptation as well as shorter-term disaster risk reduction (Schipper, 2009). The concept of adaptation typically relates to the context of climate change, yet can be broadly defined as "strategies of a sociocultural nature adopted by individuals and groups ... to cope with the conditions presented by the physical and cultural environments in a way that enables them to survive and/or prosper" (Oliver-Smith, 1999, p. 25). This definition reinforces the idea that the process of achieving sustainable recovery is inherently an exercise in collective decision-making, in that "the sociocultural system is seen as the primary means by which a human population adjusts to its environment" (Oliver-Smith, 1999, p. 26).

Overall, from the perspective of adaptation, recovery from disasters which focuses too narrowly on short-term outcomes, without taking into account long-term sustainability, can inhibit adaptation and instead contribute to disaster risk in the long run (Schipper, 2009).

While sustainable disaster recovery offers "a robust and meaningful framework to synthesize the majority of existing disaster recovery research perspectives" (Smith & Wenger, 2007), this approach is not without critique. While in theory the various pillars of sustainable recovery are discussed as simultaneously achievable, in practice, when these pillars conflict, important questions arise as to which pillar should be prioritized, and under which circumstances (Passerini, 1998). Further, research demonstrates that both structural and cultural barriers may inhibit the achievement of sustainable recovery in practice (Passerini, 2001). For example, through an examination of failed sustainable reconstruction projects in post-disaster communities, Passerini (2001) found that the failure of communities to realize sustainable projects was not necessarily due to communities' unwillingness or lack of capacity, but instead was the result of structural barriers, such as pre-existing subsidies to unsustainable projects, and cultural barriers, such as disagreements between planning professionals and local community members.

Social Capital

Analysis of social vulnerability has detailed not only the conditions through which vulnerability is produced, but also the conditions through which resilience, or "the ability of a social system to respond and recover from disaster" (Cutter et al., 2008, p. 598) is developed. In particular, social capital, or "the trust, social norms, and networks which affect social and economic activities" (Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004, p. 7), is gaining recognition as an important factor of effective disaster recovery, in part because social capital determines access to resources

and other forms of capital, both of which are crucial components of recovery themselves (Grootaert, 1998). Put another way, Kapucu (2006) describes social capital as "society's capacity for self-organization – its capacity to promote and coordinate efforts for collective action" (p. 209). Case studies have demonstrated the positive influence of social capital on the recovery process, for example, through findings that "people with strong networks and relationships fare better in all phases of the hazard cycle, from planning to reconstruction" (Murphy, 2007, p. 302). Similarly, "Communities with more trust, civic engagement, and stronger networks can better bounce back after a crisis than fragmented, isolated ones" (Aldrich, 2010, p. 4). Thus, various forms of group or community membership can impact an individual's resilience or vulnerability to a variety of disaster situations (Murphy, 2007).

Berke, Kartez, and Wenger (1993) further delineate the impact of social capital on the community disaster recovery process through their description of horizontal and vertical community integration. Within this framework, horizontal integration describes the relationships within a community's social units and systems, while vertical integration refers to the relationships between a community and larger, external, social systems. Communities with high degrees of horizontal integration are composed of tight-knit social units which frequently and consistently interact with the community decision-making process, while communities with low degrees of horizontal integration lack "the ability to act with collective unity to solve local problems" (Berke, Kartez & Wenger, 1993, p. 100). Further, communities with high degrees of vertical integration have strong connections with larger political, economic and social entities, in turn increasing communities' access to such resources, while communities lacking vertical integration are "powerless, subordinate, and dependent on outside forces" (Berke, Kartez & Wenger, 1993, p. 101).

This framework has been influential to the study of disaster recovery. Kapucu (2006) illustrates that "There is a great deal of evidence in the literature that horizontal networks help to develop social capital, and that social capital fosters a healthier society" (p. 209). Similarly, horizontal and vertical relationships are positively associated with the attainment of sustainable disaster recovery by Smith and Wenger (2007), who hold that "Communities that have strong local or horizontal relationships between their constituent social units and systems should be able to achieve sustainable recovery more easily than those communities that lack such cohesion" (p. 247-248). In general, when applied to the disaster recovery context, the concepts of horizontal and vertical integration within the framework of social capital provides an explanatory model through which to better understand and analyze how social structure and power relations work to impact unequitable recovery.

In practice, several studies have examined the role of social capital in disaster recovery. In their review of community-based disaster management after the 1997 Red River flood in Manitoba, Buckland and Rahman (1999) found that communities with higher levels of civic engagement prepared for and responded better to the flooding than those with low levels of civic engagement. Through their analysis of citizen participation in recovery planning in two communities impacted by the same 1997 flood, Kweit and Kweit (2004) discovered that citizens' perceptions of their own involvement in public disaster recovery planning impacted community evaluations of recovery. These findings reaffirm Berke, Kartez and Wenger's (1993) assertion that members of communities with high degrees of horizontal integration "have opportunities to define and communicate their needs, mediate disagreements and participate in local organizational decision-making" (p. 100). Further, such studies indicate that a relationship exists

between participation in recovery decision-making and community members' perception of recovery outcomes.

It is important to note, however, that social capital is not equitably distributed within and between communities, nor does its presence necessarily have a positive impact on all members of a community. Conceptions of social capital that fail to acknowledge community diversity risk distorting the benefits of social capital. Communities are not necessarily geographically or politically bound; as explained by Murphy (2007), "the concepts of municipalities and communities are often conflated" (p. 300), when in fact the term "community" is also frequently used to describe "networks of people tied together by solidity, a shared identity and set of norms that does not necessarily reside in a place" (Bradshaw, 2008, p. 5). Further, as Nigg (1995) points out, "Although we do sometimes characterise cities by their major demographic and social trends, this tends to give the false impression that other social groups do not exist or, at least, are not significant" (p. 82). Analysis of resilience and community development which only takes into account the aggregate presence of social capital in a geographically bound community may overlook the importance of horizontal and vertical social linkages within that community. As explained by Pelling (1998), taking into account the diversity of social units within a community is essential since "Unequal distributions of power are as prevalent within community structures, as between the community and other political actors" (p. 473).

Public Participation

As touched on above, the process of collective decision-making necessarily involves the trust, norms, and networks that embody social capital. For Adger (2003), "collective action requires networks and flows of information between individuals and groups to oil the wheels of decision-making" (p. 389), where social capital describes these networks. In this way, social

capital attempts to explain how the relationships between individuals and within society impact

both individual and collective negotiation processes and outcomes. With respect to sustainable

recovery, which emphasizes adapting to new realities rather than returning to the status quo,

social capital plays a primary role in facilitating the collective action required for societies to

achieve adaptation (Adger, 2003).

The importance of involving the public in all stages of the disaster management cycle is

well-established, and an important component of sustainable recovery. As Smith and Wenger

(2007) explain, "To bridge the gap between maintaining the status quo and taking advantage of

post-disaster opportunities to enact beneficial change, including actions taken on behalf of less

powerful groups, it is incumbent on planners and others to involve all relevant stakeholders" (p.

240). Community-based models of disaster management are increasingly cited for their ability to

sustainably reduce local vulnerability and increase resilience to future disasters (Allen, 2006;

Shaw, 2012). The focal point of such models is the acknowledgment that the local community

has both the most to lose when facing disasters and "the most to gain if they can reduce the

impact of disasters on their community" (Pandey & Okazaki, 2005, p. 3). With this in mind,

community-based models of disaster management aim to affirm and develop the internal

capacities of local communities, in contrast to top-down approaches in which "decisions come

from higher authorities based on their perception of the needs …. [and] the communities serve as

mere 'victims' or receiver of aid" (Pandey & Okazaki, 2005, p. 3). Such capacity-affirming

approaches are beneficial for two primary reasons. First, sustainable disaster recovery requires

local community commitment and investment, and the meaningful involvement of the

community in recovery decision-making results in better reflections of local needs and increased

community support of recovery initiatives (Kweit & Kweit, 2004; McKnight & Kretzmann,

1996). Second, capacity-affirming approaches recognize that communities are often the first to

help themselves after disaster and therefore emphasize the development of local disaster

management capacity, rather than reliance on external resources (Shaw & Goda, 2004).

Capacity-affirming approaches are also beneficial for their ability to harness local knowledge

and adaptive strategies which are important elements of disaster resilience (Allen, 2006).

Participatory processes stem from the concept that equally distributed resources and

opportunities in society will only arise from the meaningful participation of all members of said

society in the decision-making and distribution process (Smith, 1973). Attention to participatory

processes in the recovery phase, then, becomes essential if "in the longer term recovery and

reconstruction phases, the political system is allocating opportunities or 'life chances' …. [and]

these opportunities are also seldom if ever allocated on an even handed basis" (Olson, 2000, p.

270). Accordingly, several studies have noted the importance of participatory processes and

public participation in disaster recovery decision-making. Through their study of recovery from a

1993 earthquake in the Maharashtra region of India, Yonder, Akcar, and Gopalan (2005) found

that involving beneficiaries of disaster recovery aid in decisions related to the management of

this support increases the probability that recovery resources, programs, and plans will address

the needs of those it is intended to benefit. Further, people's perceptions of their opportunity to

participate in recovery decision-making have also been shown by Kweit and Kweit (2007) to be

"strongly related to their evaluation of policy and of the legitimacy of government" (p. 421).

Alongside facilitating the integration of local knowledge, public participation during recovery

can improve overall evaluation of recovery efforts. As explained by Kweit and Kweit (2004),

public participation can reduce political conflicts during and after disaster recovery, increase

community satisfaction with recovery outcomes, and increase buy-in and legitimacy of

community recovery policies.

However, while in practice various forms of participatory planning have been

documented, not all participatory processes can be considered meaningful. As Pearce (2003)

argues, "how citizens are invited to participate in disaster management is critical to the success

of that participation" (p. 218). Arnstein's (1969) "ladder" describes a popular categorization of

citizen participation, where "delegated power" and "citizen control" are considered the highest

and most meaningful forms of participation that can be undertaken. Within the context of

disaster management, Pearce (2003) argues that while informing citizens of disaster management

initiatives in their communities is necessary, it is not sufficient as a form of public participation.

Instead, communities must "make active efforts to directly involve community residents in the

planning process" (Pearce, 2003, p. 219) through meaningful participation methods, such as

citizen advisory committees, if they wish to capitalize on the benefits public participation offers

for disaster management and community development.

While many advantages of public participation in public decision-making can be listed,

the practice is not without challenges, especially in the post-disaster context; in practice,

meaningful and collaborative participation during recovery is not always achieved. For example,

through their analysis of community participation in post-disaster reconstruction, Davidson et al.

(2007) "determined that, in the majority of cases, community participation does not occur;

demonstrating a significant gap between theory and practice" (Hayles, 2010, p. 109). On one

hand, the time required, the possibility of unrepresentative views gaining precedence, and the use

of participatory decision-making venues for self-serving initiatives are often cited as potential

disadvantages of participatory processes (Kweit & Kweit, 2007). Further, the post-disaster

decision-making environment is arguably incompatible with these constraints, given the speed at which recovery decisions are required and resource constraints that follow from disaster. However, top-down approaches which fail to involve beneficiaries can seriously constrain community recovery, and the benefits of public participation in recovery decision-making may outweigh the costs, in terms of facilitating sustainable recovery, given the detrimental consequences of poorly designed recovery policy. As Ingram, Franco, Rumbaitis-del Rio and Khazai (2006) explain, in the recovery period, "The pressure to urgently address complex, difficult decisions can result in reactive policies that may increase the long-term vulnerability of affected populations" (p. 607). For example, in a survey of housing reconstruction in post-tsunami Tamil Nadu, Barenstein (2008) found that the reconstruction of housing units that did not meet the minimum requirements were "products of flawed reconstruction processes based upon a lack of local insight and beneficiary participation" (p. 255). Considering the repercussions of hastily applied post-disaster policy, both in terms of prolonging recovery and increasing the risk to future disasters, the benefits of public participation in community recovery decision-making have been shown to be worth the potential costs (Ingram, Franco, Rumbaitis-del Rio & Khazai, 2006).

Conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed relevant theory and research related to disaster recovery and public participation in recovery decision-making. It began with a discussion of the influence of social vulnerability on disaster risk and detailed how the disproportionate distribution of resources, power, and vulnerability within communities can result in disparate recovery outcomes between individuals and groups. It then presented the concept of sustainable disaster recovery and discussed how sustainable recovery practices offer communities the ability

to reduce vulnerability to future disasters. Research related to the role of social capital in the recovery process was then outlined, demonstrating that networks within and between communities impact recovery. Finally, the chapter concluded with an overview of literature related to public participation in disaster recovery decision-making. Overall, while research related to disaster recovery is gradually expanding, a review of the current literature, along with its critiques, demonstrates the continued need for studies which focus on the process of decision-making in the disaster recovery period.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

The purpose of this case study is to explore the factors influencing the inclusion of various community interests, needs, perceptions, and values during the recovery decision-making process for community groups following the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires. This purpose, and accordingly, the subsequent research design, are primarily influenced by a social constructionist paradigm. This chapter begins by outlining the philosophical and methodological approach of the study, and then provides an overview of the case study context and community recovery decision-making structure. It then outlines the rationale underlying the case selection, the unit of analysis, and the data collection methods. Further methodological discussion follows, including a description of the selection of participants, their invitation, interview procedures, and data analysis. Finally, this chapter concludes with an outline of ethical concerns associated with the study, a discussion of trustworthiness, and limitations. This chapter begins with a restatement of the research question.

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this case study is to explore the factors influencing the inclusion of various community interests, needs, perceptions, and values during the recovery decision-making process for community groups following the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires. With this purpose in mind, the research question asks:

Which factors influenced whether and how the values, perceptions, needs, and interests of community groups in Fort McMurray were identified, solicited and prioritized in the community recovery decision-making process following the 2016 wildfires?

Within this question, sub-questions include:

- How have groups most effectively asserted their interests during recovery?

- What were the most significant factors that limited groups' engagement in the recovery

    decision-making process?

Methodology and Philosophical Orientation

An exploratory case study was chosen as the most appropriate research methodology, taking into account the philosophical orientation of the study, the context of the study, the nature of the research question and practical considerations. As defined by Yin (2004) "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). In this way, a case study seeks to explore particular instances or events to both produce an in-depth understanding of a specific case and to generate knowledge from the case (Simons, 2009).

Since a researcher's "view about the nature and production of knowledge … underlies the inquiry project they conceptualize and operate" (Yazan, 2015, p. 137), it is important to clarify that a constructivist approach influenced the methodological orientation and design of this particular case study. A key pillar of this paradigm involves the idea that "knowledge of the world and self finds its origins in human relationships" (Gergen & Gergen, 2011, p. 462). Thus, subjective meanings are developed through contextual experience. This orientation aligns with both Stake (1995) and Marriam's (1998) approaches to case study research, which hold that "knowledge is constructed rather than discovered" (p. 99) and that "reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (p. 6), respectively. As such, the study focuses mainly on the experiences of participants, their opinions, and views on recovery decision-making, and employs data collection and analysis methods which align with an inductive approach to knowledge generation. This constructivist position is informed not only by the

researcher's own worldview, but also by an orientation to disasters, and disaster recovery, which

emphasizes the socially constructed nature of such events and processes (Nigg, 1995).

Case studies, in general, are valued for their ability to capture the holistic context within

which complex social phenomena occur, contributing to a deep understanding of such

phenomena (Yin, 2004). From a practical perspective, Grynszpan, Murray and Llosa (2010)

explain that case studies used in disaster research can be particularly "useful for sharing

information across disciplinary boundaries" because they are "familiar to many professionals

involved in preparing for and responding to emergencies" and "can be a powerful means to bring

the reality of disaster risks and the value of prevention and preparedness to an audience" (p.

203). Moreover, for their ability to capture the holistic context of extreme situations, which often

include a variety of factors and variables of different natures, case studies have stood out

amongst the many methodological approaches to disaster research (Grynszpan, Murray, Llosa,

2010).

Exploratory case studies, in particular, are defined by their use of inductive reasoning,

allowing theory to develop from an in-depth analysis of specific cases (McLaren, 2012) and are

useful for investigating phenomena lacking preliminary research (Streb, 2012). The exploratory

nature of this case study reflects the lack of current literature aimed at understanding the

influences that drive, or constrain, the participation of various groups in the recovery decision-

making process. Of the research that comes closest, the conceptual boundaries of these studies

focus specifically on the post-disaster housing reconstruction domain (Davidson et al., 2007;

Hayles, 2010, Sanderson & Sharma, 2008), on the role of local officials in recovery (Rubin &

Barbee, 1985), and on the role of social capital on recovery outcomes (Nakagawa & Shaw,

2004). Each of these and other similar studies offers essential lessons for improving recovery

outcomes. However, the exploratory nature of this study, rooted in the experiences of those living the process, provides an opportunity to explore factors impacting the inclusion of the various and often competing perspectives on the recovery process through a wide lens.

Case Study Context

As outlined in the introduction, the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires, also known as the Wood Buffalo wildfire, represents one of the most significant natural disasters in Canadian history. Over the course of May 2016, the fire consumed over 5,000 square kilometers of land in Northern Alberta, and continued to burn into Saskatchewan (Government of Alberta Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2016). While the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo covers several rural communities, and is home to approximately 125,000 residents, this case study specifically focuses on the experiences of community groups located in the Municipality's urban centre, as bulk of the damage was sustained within Fort McMurray.

After the wildfires, a formal recovery decision-making structure was established within the Municipality. Understanding this structure is important to place the experiences of the participants in context. While the experiences of participants occasionally reference interaction with provincial levels of government, most focus on interactions with the municipal level of government, and therefore this overview concentrates exclusively on the local recovery decision-making structure.

In June 2016 the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, which governs Fort McMurray, established the Wood Buffalo Recovery Committee (Recovery Committee) to lead, develop and coordinate local recovery activities in the aftermath of the wildfires (Government of Alberta Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2016). Membership of the Recovery Committee consisted of three municipal councilors, who were elected by their fellow councilors, and six members of

the public at large who were chosen by committee after an application process. The Recovery Task Force, a working business unit of the Municipality composed of municipal staff, was established to execute the recovery work of the municipality and provide administrative and technical support to the Recovery Committee. The Recovery Task Force reported directly to the Task Force team lead, who was hired by the Municipality shortly after the fire to oversee the Municipality's recovery work. The Task Force Team Lead reported and was accountable to the Recovery Committee. Overall, leadership and accountability for local recovery efforts was the responsibility of city council, and therefore, the Recovery Committee made recommendations to the municipality through council. In June 2017, council voted to dissolve the Recovery Committee, and subsequent recovery issues and concerns have been managed by council directly.

Several issue-specific sub-committees were created through the Recovery Committee to provide advice and support to the Recovery Committee. Of particular interest to this case study is the creation of the Social Recovery Task Force, the subcommittee responsible for addressing issues related to the "people pillar" of the Recovery Campaign Plan established by the Recovery Committee. The Social Recovery Task Force grew out of efforts initiated within the Regional Emergency Operations Centre, and participants of this case study acknowledged this subcommittee as the primary venue for recovery issues related to social recovery. A variety of actors participated in the Social Recovery Task Force, from provincial and municipal staff to representatives from the community and non-governmental organizations. Overall, for representatives from community groups who participated in this case study, the Social Recovery Task Force was identified as the primary venue for groups seeking involvement in community-recovery decision-making in a formal manner.

Case Selection

As described by Stake (1995), in case study research, cases can be classified either as intrinsic, instrumental or collective. In the case of this study, an instrumental approach primarily guided the selection of the case. Instrumental case studies are driven first by the desire to understand a particular phenomenon, and in such cases, the focus of the study often precedes case selection (Grandy, 2012). This type of case study stands in contrast to an intrinsic study, where an interest in the case itself drives an approach to research (Grandy, 2012). It is worth noting that a case can be motivated through both intrinsic and instrumental purposes, as "researchers often have multiple research interests and thus engage in both intrinsic and instrumental case research" (Grandy, 2012, p. 474). In the context of this case study, I was first motivated by preliminary interest in the recovery decision-making process, when the opportunity to study a recovery process in action originated. The concept of opportunity itself is an important consideration when opting to undertake case study research during or after disasters, as the "comparative rarity of well-reported disasters" (Grynszpan, Murray, Llosa, 2011, p. 203) needs to be considered when selecting an appropriate methodology. For this reason, while a preliminary interest in further studying the disaster recovery decision-making process initiated this study, the opportunity to explore these concepts within the relatively rare bounds of a contemporary and accessible recovery setting significantly contributed to the choice of case.

Further practical considerations were taken into account during the selection of the case. The magnitude and scope of the Fort McMurray wildfires has resulted in a situation in which large-scale public recovery initiatives are required, making it an ideal case through which to study differential engagement in the recovery decision-making process. A further advantage of the selected case is the accessibility of recovery process documentation. As discussed above, a

formal recovery committee with established goals, mandates, and members was established to

oversee community recovery. Weekly information sessions were held, and agendas, minutes and

videos were made publicly available. Formal disaster recovery plans were also published,

documenting goals, processes and major milestones of the intended community recovery. The

formally-established and documented recovery process provided the advantage of recording

recovery as it occurred across the recovery timeline. The availability of these materials primarily

assisted in the identification of participants and aided in building an understanding of the

recovery decision-making context before a site visit was conducted, allowing for a better

understanding of the experiences of participants during the interview process.

The timing of the study is designed to coincide with the one-year anniversary of the

disaster. This allows for analysis that is firmly rooted in the recovery period, while being close

enough in proximity to capture current recovery activities, sentiments, and organizations as they

stood. Interviews took place over the course of a ten-day period in May 2017. First-hand

observations made in the community during the site visit also contributed to the researcher's

understanding of the community recovery context.

Unit of Analysis

The primary focus on the experiences, perspectives, needs and values of community

groups themselves was undertaken for several reasons. First, while early studies in the area of

disaster management have documented the behaviour of individuals in crisis, a major research

gap exists with respect to group behaviour and experience (Quarantelli, 1997). Organizations

play a central role in the planning and management of responses to, and in the aftermath of,

disasters. As Quarantelli (1997) emphasizes, "even in the pioneering days of disaster

research" (p. 48) that the critical functions of planning and managing disasters "would have to be

primarily carried out by organizations and could not be done by individual households" (p. 48).

This observation recognizes that work undertaken by organizations and groups, both formal and

informal, is often greater in scale and scope than work undertaken by individuals across the

disaster management cycle. Second, research undertaken in the aftermath of disasters offers

significant challenges in terms of sampling, as from a research standpoint, disasters create "an

unknown universe of participants" (Quarantelli, 1997, p. 48); in contrast, "the universe of most

organized groups in a community is known and finite" (p. 48).

 Further, community groups play an important role in community decision-making

processes, especially with respect to the involvement of the most vulnerable members of a

community in such processes. As LeRoux (2007) explains, "Non-profit organizations have a

long-standing tradition of advocacy on behalf of their clients, particularly those that comprise

underrepresented groups" (p. 410). Non-profit organizations and other community groups play

an important role in facilitating the political participation of the most marginalized members of a

society, and directly interact with and provide services to the most vulnerable members of a

community. They are often "the only organizations that have an incentive to organize, mobilize,

and advocate on behalf of such constituencies" (Berry, 2005, p. 571). However, it is further

known that in disaster situations, a variety of groups participate in response activities beyond

simply established non-profit organizations (Kreps & Bosworth, 2007). Therefore a specific

decision was made to expand the unit of analysis in this study to allow for the participation of

representatives from a variety of groups that may participate in recovery activities. With this in

mind, the use of the term "community group" in this study is used to encompass non-profit

organizations, professional associations and grassroots groups. The selection of community

groups as the primary unit of analysis aligned with the research goal of exploring how the

interests of diverse groups were identified, solicited and prioritized in the community recovery

decision-making process.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were selected as a primary data collection tool. This interview

method provides "thick descriptions of a given social world" (Warren, 2011, p. 85) and aligns

with the goal of social constructivist oriented research to "rely as much as possible on the

participant's view of the situation being studied … so that the participants can construct the

meaning of a situation" (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Semi-structured interviews are characterized by

the use of predetermined yet open-ended questions and allow for questions to emerge and evolve

as the interview progresses (Ayres, 2012a; Barlow, 2012). As explained by Galletta (2012), "A

key benefit of the semi-structured interview is its attention to lived experience while also

addressing theoretically driven variables of interest" (p. 24). Further, qualitative interviewing

seeks to "derive interpretations, not facts or laws" (Warren, 2011, p. 84) from participants'

discourse. In-person interviews were selected, as in-person formats are preferred for their ability

to build rapport with participants, develop trust, and make observations about non-verbal cues

(Plano Clark, 2012). The building of trust and rapport was considered particularly important in

the context of this case study, as it was expected that due to the political nature of the research

topic, some unease may be present, considering tensions that exist within a community

recovering from disaster.

Selection of Participants

In particular, this study sought to evaluate the experiences of two sub-categories of

participants to develop a thorough understanding of the factors influencing whether and how the

values, perceptions, needs, and interests of community groups were identified, solicited and

prioritized in the recovery decision-making process: those involved directly in the Recovery

Committee (councilors and public-at-large members) and representatives from community

groups, networks and organizations. Overall, selection of participants was guided by the aim of

capturing a diversity of experiences and representation from a variety of organizational types to

develop the most comprehensive understanding of recovery decision-making experiences.

First, key informants from the Recovery Committee were invited to participate. As

explained by Fetterman (2011), "In research on communities and large organizational studies

where there is a paucity of relevant archival documentation, particularly concerning vested

interests and power dynamics, key informants are especially valuable" (p. 477). These interviews

were intended to generally solicit information related to the establishment of the recovery

decision-making process, the role of community groups and members in the decision-making

process, and the overall functioning of the community recovery planning process. As described

by Fetterman (2011), key informants are those individuals who have a "special vantage point" (p.

478) within a community and "provide an understanding of cultural norms and responsibilities"

(p. 478). From this perspective, the nine members of the community directly involved in the

Recovery Committee, along with the one ex-officio member, were considered key informants for

their particular vantage point and potential to provide insight into the particular norms and

responsibilities of this primary decision-making body. As membership of the Recovery

Committee consisted of both elected members of council and appointed members of the public-

at-large, selection of these participants sought to represent both positions. Applying these aims,

seven members were invited to participate in the case study initially. Overall, three members

accepted and were available to participate in the study, two of which were public-at-large

representatives and one was a council representative.

Second, participants representing a variety of community groups were invited to participate in the study. Consideration for diversity amongst the community groups themselves was initially guided by the range of disaster organizations described through the Disaster Research Center (DRC) organizational typology of organized responses (Kreps & Bosworth, 2007). This typology details four types of organized responses to disasters: established, expanding, extending and emergent (Kreps & Bosworth, 2007).

The DRC organizational typology represents a framework for understanding the distinct types of organizational adaptations that occur in response to disasters. It acknowledges the intricacies of how "existing groups and organizations restructure to meet disaster demands, new groups and organizations emerge, and both existing and new entities become parts of broader social networks of collective action" (Kreps & Bosworth, 2007, p. 299). The typology details four distinct organizational types that emerge or adapt in disaster situations. The typology was used to guide selection of participants with the goal of achieving organizational diversity and to ensure the inclusion of perspectives and experiences from a variety of community groups, and not simply formal, pre-existing organizations. At the outset, it was intended that it might be desirable to oversample Type 4 "emergent" organizations as some research suggests that neglected populations are predominant in emergent groups. As Drabek and McEntire (2003) explain, "emergent phenomena are most likely to occur when demands are not met by existing organizations" (Drabek & McEntire, 2003, p. 99). For example, the emergence of several grassroots organizations has been documented post-Hurricane Katrina with goals of building reconstruction movements that "would organize Black, low-income New Orleanians to challenge a looming State- and corporate-driven recovery" (Luft, 2009, p. 503); these would include those individuals who had been previously "excluded from many of the formal planning and recovery

channels" (Luft, 2009, p. 503). Consideration for diversity of mandate was also sought, largely

taking into account what previous literature on disaster recovery has demonstrated with respect

to the inequitable recovery of those most socially vulnerable to disasters. As outlined in the

literature review, in the Canadian context, these often include seniors, low-income residents,

transient populations, persons with disability, medically dependent persons, children and youth,

women, and persons with low literacy levels (Enarson & Walsh, 2007). Therefore, selection of

participants specifically sought community groups with mandates to serve and advocate on

behalf of these traditionally vulnerable residents.

Taking into account these objectives, I first drafted a list of community organizations

located in Fort McMurray, and then reviewed mandates, organizational structures, and surveyed

publicly available media and recovery documentation to build a basic understanding of how each

organization was engaged in the recovery decision-making process, if at all, to ensure

representation across the DRC typology, as the classification is based primarily on how

organizations adapt in disaster situations. I subsequently sent invitations to 29 community

groups. Overall, 13 representatives accepted and were available to participate in the study.

While 13 representatives participated in interviews, it is important to note that several of

these participants were members of multiple community groups, and some held formal roles

within the Social Recovery Task Force in addition to their group positions. Therefore, the

experiences of participants may represent more than 13 community groups, and participants were

invited to share their overall experiences even where these experiences spanned multiple roles.

Given the makeup of community groups in Fort McMurray during the study period, non-profit

organizations represent a more substantial portion of the participants than other group types.

Invitation of Participants

Contacting each organization by email, I introduced the study and requested the participation of one representative who had either primarily represented the organization in community recovery processes or forums, or who would primarily represent the organization in recovery decision-making should they have (or have had) the opportunity.

Interview Procedure

For both key informant and community group interviews, a semi-structured, in-person interview format was employed, with one interview taking place over the phone after the community visit due to scheduling conflicts. As a telephone interview was unanticipated during the design of the research, permission was sought from the Research Ethics Coordinator with Royal Roads University prior to the interview. Following a discussion and confirmation of informed consent, each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed by myself for analysis. The length of each interview was approximately 60 minutes and was conducted in a neutral central location or one identified by the respondent. Accordingly, the majority of the interviews took place in private interview rooms at the Wood Buffalo Regional Library, however other locations included private interview space in Keyano College and the community group offices of participants when it was identified by the participant that the latter was preferable.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was subsequently applied to analyze interview transcripts and field notes from all interviews. As described by Lapadat (2012) thematic analysis describes an approach to qualitative data "that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning; coding and classifying data … and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking commonalities, relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs, or explanatory

principles" (p. 927). Thematic analysis was chosen for its focus on the reintegration and connection of themes to the case studied, which is especially important for case study research. While the exploratory and emergent nature of the data precluded the generation of specific codes and concrete questions to be posed during interviewing, a tentative semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the literature reviewed and the researcher's knowledge of the study site. Qualitative data management software was used to assist with the management of codes during thematic analysis and management of the analysis and data.

An inductive approach to coding was first applied, consistent with the goal of an exploratory case study. This approach describes the process of coding from the case up, where categories and themes are not developed beforehand, avoiding "the rigidity and premature closure that are risks of a deductive approach" (Lapadat, 2012, p. 926). Therefore, after transcripts were produced from the audio-recordings, I began the process of reviewing the transcripts to develop preliminary codes based on recurrent themes and participant-emphasized situations, words, and feelings. During the first round of coding, in vivo coding was used primarily, which describes the process of "assign[ing] a label to a section of data … using a word or short phrase taken from that section of data" (King, 2012, p. 473). After an initial round of coding, in which all transcripts were analyzed individually in the order in which they were recorded, I began the process of revisiting all codes and transcripts to determine relationships, patterns, differences and similarities between the codes that had been initially devised. After several rounds of analysis, through arranging individual codes into related groups, themes began to emerge from the codes. By using data management software during the coding process, I was able to quickly and easily pull excerpts of transcripts associated with a given code and view these

sections in context of entire transcript, which aided in ensuring that codes remained grounded within the original contexts.

Ethical Concerns

Prior to the commencement of the study, an ethical review by Royal Roads University's (RRU) Research Ethics Board was required as the proposed research involved data collected from human participants. In accordance with the RRU Research Ethics Policy, the proposed research was obligated not to disseminate information volunteered by a participant without free and informed consent. Of particular concern to the proposed study was the issue of deductive disclosure, which "occurs when the traits and experiences of individuals or groups make them identifiable in research reports" (Kaiser, 2012, p. 457). Further, issues of confidentiality within the community and between groups arises as "Social groups are often identifiable to outsiders because of their unique geographic, cultural, religious, occupational, or other characteristics" (Kaiser, 2012, p. 458). With this in mind, I gave special consideration to the possibility of deductive identification of the participants both when conducting the research in the community and in the write up of this study, and therefore confidentiality takes precedence over the disclosure of potentially identifying information, such as demographics or the specific mandate of the organizations represented by participants.

Further, I have committed to ensure that no identifying information will be included in the dissemination of the findings alongside individual responses. Data from participants reported here does not reference the direct identity or organization to ensure confidentiality.

Trustworthiness

While the processes and criteria for evaluating qualitative research projects differs from those used in the evaluation of quantitative projects, establishing a base on which to judge

trustworthiness is no less important. The concept of trustworthiness, as explained by Given and

Saumure (2012), "has become an important concept because it allows researchers to describe the

virtues of qualitative terms outside of the parameters that are typically applied in quantitative

research" (p. 896). Commonly defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the concepts of

transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability represent key components of

trustworthiness in qualitative research.

First, the concept of transferability implies that the results of a study "can be transferred

to other contexts and situations beyond the scope of the study context" (Jensen, 2012, p. 886)

and is often compared to the quantitative concept of generalizability. From Lincoln and Guba's

(1985) perspective, the responsibility of determining transferability lies largely with the

individual seeking to transfer the conclusions of a study to another context. However, to do this

effectively, a qualitative study must first present descriptive data to allow for comparison

(Krefting, 1990). Taking this into consideration, special attention has been taken in this study to

provide sufficient detail regarding, in particular, the case study context and selection of

participants. This aligns with Houghton, Casey, Shaw and Murphy's (2013) recommendation to

adequately describe the original context of the research and research methods so that appropriate

judgements can be made by readers as to transferability of the study's findings. However, it

should also be noted that in determining the transferability of this study, readers should take into

account the constructivist approach, the limitations of this study, and the multiple and complex

variables that contribute to the uniqueness of disaster situations.

Second, credibility, similar to its quantitative counterpart internal validity, refers to the

"extent to which a research account is truthful" (McGinn, 2012, p. 243). One method useful for

strengthening credibility in a case study is the use of triangulation, which describes the process

of approaching a study from multiple (at least two) points (Flick, 2007). While triangulation can

be achieved through multiple strategies, methods such as investigator triangulation (the use of

multiple researchers) and between-method triangulation (the use of multiple research methods)

were beyond the practical scope of this study. However, the study did employ the concept of data

triangulation to strengthen credibility. Data triangulation describes the process of studying the

same phenomenon at various times, in various locations or with different people, which "allows

the researcher to reach a maximum of theoretical profit from using the same methods" (Flick,

2007, p. 42). In this particular study, participation was sought from a broad range of

organizations, and from across the spectrum of participation, from those directly involved in the

Recovery Committee, to professional associations, non-profits and emergent groups, in order to

solicit experiences from a wide range of informants.

Dependability and confirmability are two additional aspects of trustworthiness in

qualitative research which can be compared to the quantitative concepts of reliability and

objectivity. Closely related, dependability refers to the ability of data to be replicable, while

confirmability describes the process of establishing neutrality and accuracy. Transparency, in

particular, is an important component of ensuring dependability. Two methods common to

graduate-level research projects which ensure transparency and dependability can be found in

this study: a thorough description of methodological information and the use of methodological

experts (my supervisor and committee) to evaluate the research plan and implementation

(Krefting, 1990). While other methods of ensuring dependability exist, such as stepwise

replication (which requires the use of multiple researchers or research teams) and code-record

procedures (which requires additional time to be built into the analysis phase) these methods fell

outside of the practical scope of this study. Confirmability, in its own right, can be described as

"the degree to which the results of the study are based on the research purpose and not altered due to researcher bias" (Jensen, 2012b, p. 112). Credibility is similar to dependability in the sense that transparency and clarity are key to ensuring that an independent reviewer can follow the research process and the researchers' interpretations of the data (Jensen, 2012b). However, reflexive analysis can form another important aspect of credibility, and as an important aspect of a case study, will be discussed in its own right below.

Subjectivity Statement

While the process of reflexivity in qualitative research can take on a variety of forms, it broadly defines the practice of a researcher "being self-aware of their own beliefs, values and attitudes, and their personal effects on the setting" (Payne & Payne, 2011, p. 191). One method through which to engage in reflective practice is through the inclusion of a subjectivity statement, as "Reflexivity, or researchers' contemplation of their influences on their research, can be considered the process for which subjectivity statements are the product" (Preissle, 2008, p. 845). Therefore, below, I will briefly present my own statement of subjectivity.

From a personal perspective, I was drawn to this research question and context through both my previous educational and professional experience. Having previously studied political science during my undergraduate degree at the University of Alberta, I have consistently been interested in issues related to decision-making, power-relations and public policy which has continued into my disaster studies. From a professional standpoint, I was previously immersed in the Fort McMurray wildfires through my professional involvement with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. During the month of May, 2016, I was employed with the Agency and actively worked in the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre to assist in the coordination of a provincial response to the fires. For the purposes of objectivity, it is worth mentioning that I

ceased employment with the Agency in June 2016. Therefore, I am no longer employed with the

Agency or the Government of Alberta, and now reside in Ontario with no ties, formal or

informal, to the city of Fort McMurray.

Limitations

While many qualitative methods face the critique of researcher bias, the inductive nature

of exploratory case studies invites the specific criticism of verification bias, as iterative processes

allow for the adaptation of research during the study (Stjelja, 2013). However, as Flyvbjerg

(2011) explains, "the question of subjectivism and bias towards verification applies to all

methods, not just to the case study" (p. 399). Case studies, especially exploratory studies, are

focused on developing new ideas, theory, and knowledge using a variety of methods which seek

to describe both the context and variables at play in a particular case; in this context, researchers

are more concerned with describing learnings than confirming pre-existing hypotheses

(Flyvbjerg, 2011). A primary limitation of the proposed case study was the relatively short

amount of time spent at the case location. This limitation is primarily logistical, in terms of

funding and distance from the research site. In an attempt to mitigate this constraint, all

interviews were pre-arranged to maximize interview time and number of participants. Extensive

document analysis was also undertaken prior to travel to the site in order to develop an

understanding of disaster impact, context, recovery activities, structure and results in the period

preceding this study.

The choice of a single-case study represents a limitation within itself. However, the

research design promised to yield data that provides preliminary insight into an under-

investigated area of disaster research, and is not designed to produce its own causal explanations

or test predetermined hypotheses, but to contribute to future research. Other limitations include

that only English language interviews were conducted, the number of participants interviewed, the self-selection by those representatives of chosen community groups for interviews, the primary reliance on publicly available documents, and the proximity of the timing of the study to the event itself. In particular, the self-selection of representatives from community groups may have limited the diversity of the sample of interviewees; however, pre-determining the diversity of the sample of interviewees was largely beyond researcher control in this context.

Conclusion

Overall, the purpose of this case study was to explore the factors influencing the inclusion of various community interests, needs, perceptions and values during the recovery decision-making process for community groups following the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires. An exploratory case study was chosen as the methodological approach to guide the design and practice of this research. Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection, and subsequent thematic analysis was employed to analyze results of the study. Finally, this chapter outlined study limitations, considerations of trustworthiness, and ethical concerns.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents findings which emerged from 16 semi-structured interviews that explored participants' community recovery decision-making experiences and perspectives. The primary research question driving this study asks:

> Which factors influenced whether and how the values, perceptions, needs and interests of community groups in Fort McMurray were identified, solicited and prioritized in the community recovery decision-making process following the 2016 wildfires?

This chapter begins with a brief overview of participants to provide context while maintaining confidentiality. The discussion then presents findings organized by three primary themes which emerged from the interviews. First, findings related to organizational capacity are presented, including those regarding staffing, workload, knowledge, and funding. The chapter then presents findings concerning the role of personal and organizational relationships in disaster recovery, and concludes with a findings related of the perceived value of non-profit organizations.

Participant Characteristics

Overall, this study reports findings obtained from semi-structured interviews with 16 participants representing a variety of community groups and members of the Recovery Committee from Fort McMurray, Alberta. As discussed in Chapter 3, taking into account the size of the City of Fort McMurray and the context of this study, particular attention is paid to the possibility of deductive disclosure of participants. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that given ethical concerns, the confidentiality of participants takes precedence over the disclosure of potentially identifying information in this report. However, given the importance of transparency and clarity for the future transferability of the results of this study, a general overview of the characteristics of the participants is provided for context.

Of the 16 total participants, three represented members of the Recovery Committee, and are considered key informants primarily due to their unique vantage point within the primary public recovery decision-making body. Of these three members, two were appointed from the public at large and one was a current council member. Classifying these participants within the DRC typology presents a challenge, as the Recovery Committee itself was unique to the disaster. However, the definition of Type II organized responses in the DRC tradition holds that "Type II organized responses are called expanding because while much of what they do is expected as well, their core structures change from a small cadre of professional staff to a much larger unit of volunteers" (Kreps & Bosworth, 2007, p. 299). Taking into account the Recovery Committee originated out of the municipal government, contained membership from council, yet expanded to include the membership of several volunteer public representatives, representatives from the Recovery Committee appear to fit within the bounds of a Type II organization.

The remaining 13 participants represent a variety of community groups, each with varying levels of experience related to participation in community recovery decision-making activities. Given that a significant portion of community groups in Fort McMurray are registered non-profits, the selection of participants reflects this trend, and non-profit organizations, therefore, represent a more substantial number of participants than other group structures. However, the mandates and levels of participation remain varied even among these groups, and each brings a unique perspective regarding community recovery decision-making to this study. Overall, nine participants represented non-profit organizations.

Of these groups, seven represented client-serving non-profits whose mandates aimed to provide services to a variety of populations, including, but not limited to: children, families, parents, youth, young adults, and newcomers, and the socioeconomically vulnerable. The

remaining two represent non-profit advocacy organizations. Together, the non-profit organizations which participated in this study take on mandates related to: providing basic needs to members of the community, including shelter, health, emergency support and mental health resources, food, education and advocacy. Notably, as the needs and level of vulnerability of the community increased after the fires, so too did the scope, work, services, and mandates of these organizations. Placing these mandates and the roles enacted in the recovery period within the DRC typology of organized responses, two fall into the category of Type I organized responses as these groups existed before the fires and much of what they undertook was expected (Kreps & Bosworth, 2007). The remainder represent Type III organized responses in the DRC tradition, as while they existed prior to the fires, much of what they undertook was not predetermined (Kreps & Bosworth, 2007).

Of the remaining four community groups, two represented emergent organizations, as their existence and activities were ad hoc and unique to the disaster (i.e. grassroots movements, newly established volunteer corps) (Kreps & Bosworth, 2007). When analyzing the relatively low number of emergent participants in context, it is important to look at previous research on emergent organized responses. As observed by Kreps and Bosworth (2007), "both researchers and practitioners are well aware that emergent organized responses represent only a small albeit important part of what goes on during a disaster" (p. 303) as within their own research, "only about 13% of the well over 400 cases ... were emergent (type IV) in the original DRC typology" (p. 303). This holds true from the viewpoint of emergent participants in the current study, as it was found during participant selection that emergent organizations were sparse in comparison to other organizational formats.

Organizational Capacity

The majority of participants identified factors related to organizational capacity as influential to whether, and to what degree, they were able to participate in community recovery decision-making. Factors influencing the organizational capacity of groups included: staffing, workload, knowledge and financial challenges. Overall findings suggest that groups which experienced reduced organizational capacity during the recovery period also experienced reduced ability to participate in recovery decision-making activities.

Staffing Capacity. Accordingly, staffing capacity challenges were highlighted more frequently by participants representing organizations which employed staff. Participants discussed both staffing constraints, and staffing supports, as a significant component of their ability to advocate, collaborate and meaningfully engage in the disaster recovery decision-making process. For many groups, managing recovery work required "doing more with less" and represented a three-fold strain workload: first as a result of the work required to recover the organization, then as a result of work associated with increased community demand for services, and last as a result of work necessary to actively participate in decision-making processes. In this way, each additional pull during recovery required a considerable investment of time, staff, and resources from the impacted organizations themselves. Staffing capacity emerged as a primary factor impacting groups' abilities to meet the needs of the recovering community, while at the same time constraining their ability to advocate for and address the needs of the individuals they served and the needs their organizations required.

First, several participants pointed to the loss of leaders, staff, and volunteers, together with an increase in demand for the services and work of their groups, as crippling to their ability to maintain a functional level of operation during recovery and to participate in recovery

decision-making. This situation emerged during the invitation of participants, where several

responses indicated that no representative was available to speak to the recovery experiences of

the organization since staff were new to both the organization and the community, as the

previous leaders had left. In some instances, participants explained that within their groups, only

a few members chose to return to the community after the fire. As one non-profit participant

explained "I was left alone to function and keep everything afloat [although] we probably had

300 [clients] and other expectations" to address. Others described situations where staff faced

financial barriers which prevented them from returning to the community post-fire, where

members left to pursue opportunities in newly established recovery positions, or where burnout

and extenuating personal situations prevented staff from returning to the organization. While

participants provided other examples, all tie back to the reduction in staffing capacity that

influenced overall operational capacity post-fire.

Post-disaster mental-health implications also contributed to the staffing capacity

challenges experienced by groups. Many participants discussed fatigue, stress, and concern for

the health and wellbeing of staff as key factors impacting their overall staffing capacity.

Proactively, some participants explained that their organizations provided longer breaks, paid

time off and reduced workloads for their staff in the aftermath of the fires, weighing the fact that

this hindered their overall ability to provide services to the rest of the community due to reduced

staffing capacity. Conversely, some participants, notably those representing smaller groups,

discussed not having the ability to prioritize their own and their staff's health and well-being

post-fire, at the risk of failing to provide essential services or advocacy for their clients. This in

turn impacted staffing capacity when fatigue and burnout led to staffing absences, both

temporarily and permanently. As one participant representing a client-serving non-profit shared,

"I sit here today, and I'm burnt out, like I feel like I could cry … so that's the reality, I'm strong, so I keep and kept it going, but I need a break." Further, while discussing their perspectives on the engagement of their organization in community recovery, another non-profit participant recalled, "Another barrier is that we assume everybody is okay, and we're moving forward, but there are people on our staff teams that are affected by trauma." Staff trauma associated with the disaster was pointed to by participants as the cause of increased sick days, short-term leaves of absence, job changes, failure to return to the community, and high levels of turn-over experienced by community groups. As a result, these staffing capacity constraints particularly impacted the ability of community groups to work during the early stages of the recovery period and cope with the increased recovery workload once returned to the community.

While discussing organizational capacity, several participants explained that many community groups faced challenges during recovery specifically as a result of losing group leaders. As one participant representing a client serving non-profit described, "We've watched a number of leadership positions turnover, and a number of employees just haven't come back, so on top of trying to deal with increased clientele you're doing it with fewer people." When reflecting on the experience of a colleague, another participant recalled that "One of the brightest, smartest [leaders], running a very important organization, just said 'I have to leave, I'm burnt out, I can't take another minute,' and so she's leaving the community." In the experience of another participant representing a client-serving non-profit, loss of leadership meant that "We could have better supported [our clients] upon returning, but we didn't have the leadership there to know how to support them." Losing a group leader negatively impacted staff post-disaster, by increasing confusion amongst staff in the immediate aftermath, reducing organizational knowledge, and increasing the time it took to resume operations upon reentry.

For non-profit participants, in particular, staffing capacity impacted their ability to reopen and resume services in the early stage of recovery, to address the increased demand for their services, and to apply for and secure funding to sustainably operate their groups after the fire. This challenge resulted in the delay and reduction of services to the community including those which aimed to support the most financially impacted residents, homeless and transient community members, food insecure residents, those requiring employment counseling and more. The increased workload felt by community groups after the disaster, compounded by the loss of staff, was identified as a barrier to participation in community recovery decision-making by participants. In one case, a participant representing a client-serving non-profit explained that while their organization had undertaken a post-fire needs assessment of the group they served, that assessment was "not being shared with the rest of the community because of capacity." Sharing this sentiment, several participants described having to turn down meeting requests, being unable to attend recovery workshops, and being unable to pursue recovery advocacy efforts as a result of reduced staff levels and increased workload.

Conversely, several organizations described staffing supports received through the recovery period as an aid to organizational capacity. Such supports included the hiring of temporary employees, receiving staffing support from sister and partner organizations, and re-assigning staffing roles. Explaining their ability to hire an interim staff member through a federal grant program, one non-profit leader remarked, "From my perspective, that was absolutely huge ... from a capacity perspective, I would have had my summer student writing grants for me so I could fill full time positions too." Other participants described receiving staffing support from partner and affiliate organizations outside of the community as especially helpful to maintaining operations during evacuation and the early recovery phase. As highlighted by one non-profit

group's leader, having a partner organization in another community provide support "for the first few days" was especially meaningful so they then had time to deal with their personal evacuation and recovery. However, it should be noted that fewer organizations described receiving staffing supports than described experiencing staffing capacity constraints.

Workload. Alongside staff capacity challenges, many participants similarly discussed managing increased workloads during recovery, both as a result of increased demand for services and as a result of the time required to participate in community recovery decision-making activities. In the words of one participant, having "an increase in clientele to serve" went "two-fold" for groups who experienced other capacity constraints during recovery, such as a reduction of staff. Having to handle material clean-up, providing services to an influx of recovery workers, and the increased work of having to manage insurance claims and apply for additional funding were all cited by non-profit groups as examples of increased workload that came along with community recovery.

Participants acknowledged that the increased workload associated with recovery impacted their groups' ability to participate in community recovery decision-making. One participant recalled: "I just think that everybody is incredibly busy, and nobody takes a moment to breathe or to have those really important conversations that we need to have before making decisions." Another participant specified that "problems with engagement" for groups after the fire resulted from decreased capacity as a result of increased workload. Workload increases for groups occurred due to physical recovery obligations, the increased number of community members requiring services and advocacy, and in many cases, reduced staff and volunteer numbers and capacity. Further, participating in community-recovery decision-making activities,

advocating for the needs and interests of their groups, and working on collaborative recovery initiatives represented another aspect of recovery work.

Summarizing how increased workloads impacted groups' abilities to participate in recovery decision-making meetings specifically, a non-profit staff member explained: "People are trying to deal with day-to-day stuff and additional programs, and the thought of adding three other meetings to [their] plate is too much." Participants reported having to miss and decline involvement in recovery meetings due to competing organizational priorities. When describing an event designed to promote collaboration amongst community groups, a non-profit leader reported: "Things like that are very difficult to engage in, they require that you take two days off work." Noting the consequences of certain organizations being unable to attend decision-making meetings, another non-profit participant explained "You certainly miss a lot of what's happening in the community, and the picture that you're painting is not very representative." Another participant similarly explained: "Sometimes the right decisions aren't being made simply because you don't have that voice there identifying what the problems are and assumptions are being made." For these representatives, the inability to participate due to workload challenges was directly associated with lack of representation in community recovery decision-making.

Knowledge. Both expertise and experience of staff, group members and overall organizations emerged as components of organizational capacity which influenced the relative ability of organizations to navigate the recovery period and decision-making structure. Some participants believed that decision-maker's pre-existing lack of knowledge about community group priorities and mandates influenced how community groups' input was solicited, as well as how these groups were engaged. For example, one non-profit participant explained that they had been invited to a formal recovery decision-making committee, specifically to represent a

perspective that they did not feel fell within their mandate. Another participant described that their organization was "pushed" to provide services well outside their mandate or capacity because others assumed they provided those services. Interestingly, one member of the Recovery Committee expressed the idea that, had communication around organizational mandates and priorities occurred "right at the outset, even right at the very beginning, you would have had a more inclusive way to have each other involved in [a] decision." Together, these perspectives indicate that lack of knowledge, specifically around the mandates of community groups, may have impacted the process of engagement in recovery decision-making.

Many participants, finding they lacked expertise themselves, described difficulty finding resources and information related to disaster recovery to help guide their organizational response. One non-profit participant, who was very involved in the Social Recovery Task Force, described struggling "to take learnings from other disasters" and having a tough time finding "actual, tangible tools." Another participant noted that, of the resources available, most were "glossy little one or two pagers, you know... there's no real meat." Summing up the impact inexperience and perceived lack of recovery guidance had on organizational capacity during recovery, a participant representing a client-serving emergent organization shared: "If what we know now, today, was implemented back in September, I'm sure all of these applicants wouldn't be sitting on my desk right now." Combined with other strains on organizational capacity, this factor added to the recovery challenge for community groups attempting to navigate the recovery period.

Participants also discussed expertise as a component of organizational capacity. For one participant representing an emergent organization, having skilled and professional members join their group supported their advocacy efforts by facilitating collaboration with government

technical staff. For another representative from a non-profit organization, with frequent involvement in the Social Recovery Task Force, the disaster expertise of affiliate groups who had previously experienced disaster recovery supported their organizational capacity by helping them navigate the recovery period locally. Additionally, as a representative from the Recovery Committee explained, a lot of the "more successful decisions, " from the Recovery Committee "happened because we had appropriate [technical] staff." Expertise was further discussed by participants of the Recovery Committee when describing how and to what extent community groups were engaged in recovery decision-making. As explained by one member, the expertise of staff was relied upon to "bring in the people with the right information" and determine "who needs to be talked to" during the decision-making process. Further, participants from the Recovery Committee described expertise as influential to determining recovery priorities. Discussing how recovery priorities were set, one Recovery Committee participant explained being "sold" on the recovery priorities determined by one individual early in the recovery period based on the individual's previous disaster and military experience.

Funding. Many participants discussed financial barriers, as well as financial supports, as components of organizational capacity which influenced their ability to maintain staff, hire additional staff, provide services, maintain operation during recovery and address the increased needs of the community post-fire. As a participant representing a non-profit noted: "With the government, you make a heck of a lot more than you do in the non-profit sector … If people don't have partners that are working [in the oilfield] they can't afford to be here, so that's definitely a barrier." In the experience of another non-profit leader, there emerged a "huge… huge demand within Alberta Health Services (AHS)" which resulted in staff from a variety of agencies "flocking to AHS … for the pay." For many community groups, of the staff who

returned post-fire, many pursued new jobs created as a result of the recovery work, such as within the healthcare and social services sector.

Of the non-profit participants, many explained that the financial supports available to organizations like theirs were inaccessible because such funding was tied exclusively to supporting newly developed wildfire recovery programs. However, participants also explained that the majority of their real funding needs during recovery centered on supporting and re-establishing their day-to-day operations, addressing gaps created by delayed insurance payouts, and providing general support to "just keep their doors open." In the experiences of one non-profit leader, "I can go out tomorrow and get a grant for a coordinator tied to wildfire-related stuff fairly easily, but to get my own salary paid for is a problem." For primarily client-serving non-profit organizations, lack of funding available to support pre-existing programs and general operations, combined with significant delays receiving insurance payouts where applicable, resulted in reduced services and delayed re-opening of their organizations. Organizations impacted by these constraints included those that provided psychosocial supports, assistance to those who lost homes in the fire, and emergency assistance to socioeconomically disadvantaged community members. For emergent groups, lack of funding also impacted their capacity. In the experience of one participant representing an emergent organization, funding "would have been really helpful for us … we didn't have as many meetings as we would have liked because if you want a community meeting you have to book a space somewhere." In their experience, "We did as many as we could afford to." Other funding challenges reported by representatives of non-profits included substantial waiting periods to receive grant funding from non-governmental organizations responsible for administering consolidated donations and recovery funding, and the hesitancy of other funders to provide funding when alternatives were perceived as available.

Some participants did describe receiving funding during recovery which clearly contributed positively to organizational capacity in the wake of the fire. Funding supports included donations from other non-profits external to the community, pro-bono legal services, recovery-specific grants from non-governmental organizations, provincial funding, and industry funding.

Inter-organizational Relationships

Beyond the organizational capacity factors described above, the role relationships played in the engagement process of community groups after the fires was well-noted by participants. Various types of relationships emerged as influential, including relationships with government, relationships with other community groups, and relationships supporting advocacy. Overall findings suggest that generally well-connected community groups were more likely to be frequently involved in community recovery decision-making than those which lacked contacts and pre-existing professional or personal relationships.

Relationships with Government. Organizational relationships with both municipal and provincial levels of government were found to be particularly important when examining which community groups were invited to participate in recovery decision-making meetings and the timelines for their involvement. Participants who described having working relationships with either municipal or provincial levels of government before the fires also described being invited early on to decision-making tables, such as the Social Recovery Task Force. For example, in response to the question of what advice they would give to other organizations about recovery decision-making, a non-profit leader explained that other community groups "need to understand where [they] stand with local governments and the provincial government, and need to have partners both within your community and outside your community." Similarly, for one emergent

organization which experienced difficulty engaging in formal recovery decision-making process, the representative explained, "The hardest thing is to cultivate those contacts and open those channels of communication with government."

As described by participants, community groups had varied experiences gaining entry to one of the prominent recovery decision-making tables, the Social Recovery Task Force. While the initial Recovery Committee had a clear membership structure, the Social Recovery Task Force, in the experience of multiple participants, did not have a clear-cut method through which community groups could join. While specific community groups were invited by the Municipality to participate at the outset, other groups were required to wait for a later invitation, often from the groups initially included. In addition, some groups actively advocated for their own involvement. One participant, who described gaining entry to the Social Recovery Task Force through their own efforts, rather than through receiving an invitation, described leveraging a pre-existing professional connection with a municipal official to gain entry when submissions through other channels failed.

Not all participants saw pre-existing relationships as beneficial to the community recovery decision-making process. Both representatives from a non-profit organization and a professional association shared negative sentiments regarding how the pre-existing relationships of government and decision-making officials contributed to the shutting-out of certain viewpoints. In one instance, one such participant explained that the Provincial government "has certain people that they work with all the time, that they know, that they can trust, that they can call up." They "just made those calls for ease of mind because they knew those people, and could trust them, and worked with them before … my cynical self always says, you know, there's probably some patronage there." One non-profit representative expressed that the pre-existing

relationships of some decision-makers seemed to influence which perspectives were considered earliest and most seriously during recovery decision-making. In his participant's perspective, the ability of certain Recovery Committee members "to focus on the people pillar as a whole was hindered" by their pre-existing relationships with certain organizations.

Relationships with Other Community Groups. Pre-existing relationships with other, non-governmental organizations and community groups also influenced involvement. As touched on above, participants invited to the Social Recovery Task Force at the outset explained that they in turn invited other community groups to the table when they noticed gaps in representation. Discussing how subsequent invitations to participate in the Social Recovery Task Force were distributed after its original formation, one participant who was involved "from the second meeting" on the Social Recovery Task Force explained, "Service providers like myself and several others around the table … knew what was being offered within the community and the social profit sector". In this way, new organizations would be invited when gaps in membership were realized, based on the perspectives of already included groups.

In general, organizations which described themselves as being well-connected within the community also described being frequently involved in the decision-making process. Explaining the involvement of their organization's membership, one participant explained: "Most of [our] people have been around for a while, everyone knows everybody, so there's lots of informal stuff, and I think that's probably why we got it - the seat at the table." Another participant who "felt great" about how their non-profit organization was engaged in recovery decision-making shared a similar experience, explaining that their organization "generally collaborates very well in our community" ensuring that they are a "very well-respected organization … and that certainly translated into our value in information sharing post-wildfire." Respondents in

organizational decision-making roles also highlighted how being well-connected as an

organization was important in stakeholder identification. Discussing how stakeholders were

initially identified early in the recovery period, one decision-maker explained that stakeholders

"were easily identified because they had already been set up in the community." The majority of

participants described, to some degree, experiences of being supported by pre-existing

relationships.

      Relationships and Advocacy Success. How effectively community groups asserted their

interests during recovery was linked by some respondents to the nature of their pre-existing

relationships with other groups. Those participants who described "having a seat at the table"

also described successful advocacy experiences during recovery. As one participant explained,

"Having a seat at the table was really good … I think we opened a lot of eyes." The importance

of formal representation and "being involved" was expressed by another participant who

explained, "If you're not in there and knowing what's happening with others it's very difficult to

make decisions." These successful advocacy experiences associated with "having a seat at the

table" suggests that pre-existing relationships contribute indirectly to successful advocacy by

facilitating involvement. This is consistent with the experience of a respondent who highlighted

the link between relationships and successful advocacy: "Well I think we were pretty relentless

in just making contacts and getting a seat at the table, like we were probably annoyingly so, but

we felt it was important to be involved so we kept sending letters and kept talking to people".

Further, citing joint advocacy initiatives as a catalyst for successful assertion of their specific

needs and interests, one participant recalled: "Having those connections and trying that together

gave us a broader voice and more power to try and get some of those meetings." This

demonstrates that certain organizations relied more explicitly on relationships with other community groups by undertaking joint advocacy efforts.

Overall, participants identified a lack of pre-existing relationships as a clear barrier when seeking involvement in community recovery decision-making. Describing their experience attempting to get a seat at a recovery decision-making table, one non-profit participant struggled with "Trying to find out how we could be involved... not having any specific contacts already established." In the end, "we didn't get any response." This experience was shared by a representative from an emergent organization, who learned that without pre-existing contacts, "The hardest thing is to cultivate those contacts and open those channels of communication with government." These experiences demonstrate that lack of relationships can also influence the ability of groups to influence recovery decision-making.

Perceived Value of Non-Profit Organizations

A final factor, identified primarily by non-profit participants, was that an overall disregard for the skills and services their organizations provided the community seemed associated with the lack of priority they were given during the recovery decision-making process. From this perspective, respondents discussed the historical undervaluation of non-profit organizations and the failure to consider certain organizations as essential during recovery as barriers to their involvement.

Several non-profit participants who experienced participation barriers pointed to a historical underappreciation for the non-profit sector as the root of these barriers. Non-profit participants explained this underappreciation resulted in the important community services provided by non-profits being taken for granted and disregarded, particularly during recovery. In the words of one client-serving non-profit participant:

"The social profit sector in most places is treated as the child. . . . . nice to have and a pat

on the head, but people don't recognize and validate the valuable work we bring to the

table. They want us to do our jobs and they want us to … do more for less every day. But

they don't want to give us - to equate the value that we bring into having us at the table."

Another non-profit participant explained this sentiment underlies the community's use of

the term "social profit sector" rather than "non-profit sector." In their words, "This town uses

'social profit' rather than' non-profit' because we don't like the fact that people think that we

don't make profit just because we don't make money - it doesn't mean we're not profitable." Non-

profit participants described providing what they perceived to be essential community services

post-fire, especially in support of traditionally vulnerable groups in the community. Speaking to

these essential recovery services, one non-profit participant explained, "We're going to be the

ones providing counseling, providing resources, providing... you know, we're who support the

people who are in recovery - there's not much thought given to that." Another participant

explained that during recovery, they thought there was a need to "talk about what are our

essential services" and that there needed to "be a reexamination of that and the social profit

sector needs to be at the table." In this way, alongside expressing that their services were taken

for granted, some non-profit participants perceived that the services provided by non-profit

providers were not considered essential during recovery to begin with, and this in turn impacted

the weight the values, perceptions, needs and interests these groups were given in recovery by

both decision-makers and the community at large.

In contrast, discussions with members of the Recovery Committee reveal that some

consideration was given to the inclusion of non-profit groups in community recovery decision-

making. In the words of one Recovery Committee member, "My message to anybody after this

disaster, is first of all, know your community … and make sure it's all inclusive, make sure you don't leave anybody out, especially your non-profits." From the perspective of another Recovery Committee member, "Diversity makes you much stronger". However, throughout discussions with Recovery Committee members, it appeared that non-profit organizations were referred to more as a type of stakeholder than as an essential recovery service provider.

Some non-profit participants pointed to "the order in which things opened" as a "message" about which services were prioritized early in the recovery period. In the experience of one client-serving non-profit, "two liquor stores and a bar opened, and were allowed to enter on the same day" as their organization. Other non-profit representatives expressed frustration over not receiving priority status during phased re-entry of the community: "From our perspective, trying to get in during re-entry would have been … it could have certainly helped move things along a lot sooner. By not being involved at that stage, we then had to chase [clients] down after the fact." Discussing overall community recovery decision-making, another participant noted "There's a real lopsided view of the role social profits play in a community in general compared to business." Additionally, as a representative from an emergent organization explained "of the six people who ended up on the committee, all are business people, and that's a pattern that keeps reoccurring." This perspective demonstrates that some participants perceived the financial support allocated specifically to business recovery as representative of the status and priority given to the needs and interests of the business sector over the non-profit sector during recovery.

Findings Summary

Overall, three factors were identified which appear to have impacted whether, how and to what extent the values, perceptions, needs and interests of various community groups were

identified, solicited and prioritized in Fort McMurray during community recovery. First, organizational capacity emerged as a primary factor through participants' discussions of how staffing, funding, workload and knowledge capacity challenges impacted their ability to dedicate time, resources and capacity to community recovery decision-making initiatives. Second, the relationships of organizations both with government and other community groups appeared significant in determining which groups were invited to participate in recovery decision-making tables and how their engagement was sought, if at all. Last, participants discussed how preconceived ideas about the role of non-profits in the recovery period might have influenced if they were considered as relevant organizations to include in the decision-making process. The following discussion examines these factors further.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to explore the factors influencing the inclusion of various community interests, needs, perceptions and values during the recovery decision-making process for community groups following the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires. Within this purpose, sub questions additionally sought to explore how groups most effectively asserted their interest during recovery and which factors most significantly limited the engagement of community groups in the community recovery decision-making process. The following chapter interprets the results obtained through semi-structured interviews with participants regarding their experiences with community recovery decision-making and engagement during the first year of recovery from the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires. It further interprets and describes the significance of these findings in context of the previous literature related to disaster recovery. The following discussion is organized by the themes which emerged from the findings. These themes in turn represent factors which were found to influence the identification, solicitation and prioritization of the values, perceptions, needs and interests of community groups in community recovery decision-making.

Theme 1: Organizational Relationships

Throughout discussions of recovery decision-making experiences, a variety of participants frequently referenced their relationships with other community groups and government as an important aspect, or impediment, to their involvement in the decision-making process. This emphasis placed by participants on the role of relationships in influencing if, when and how their organization were invited to participate, such as within the Social Recovery Task Force, reflects the increasing amount of attention paid by disaster management literature to the concept of social capital.

Social capital-focused research within the context of disaster recovery demonstrates that high levels of social capital within communities coincides with beneficial recovery outcomes. Such outcomes include increased local participation in recovery decision-making processes (Shaw & Goda, 2004), increased resilience of organizations in response operations (Kapucu, 2007) and both expedited recovery and increased satisfaction among impacted residents (Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004). Such literature is useful for placing the experiences of participants in the Fort McMurray case study related to the influence of relationships into a broader context.

Participant's descriptions of when, if and how they were involved in recovery decision-making activities demonstrates the influence of networks and relationships, which are critical aspects of social capital. As described by participants, the presence of active ties, both formal and informal, to other community organizations, affiliate organizations outside of the community, and branches of municipal and provincial government served to facilitate involvement in decision-making bodies. Conversely, some participants cited lack of relationships and contacts as a barrier to participation. Others described successful advocacy, such as successfully lobbying the municipal and provincial governments, as an outcome of leveraging political networks. The finding that well-connected community groups were more likely to be frequently involved in community recovery decision-making than those which lacked similar contacts demonstrates that social capital plays a critical role in facilitating collective action and participation (Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004).

While several levels of categorization are proposed to further analyze the role of social capital (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Uphoff, 2000), the experiences of participants related to the role of relationships in decision-making participation most closely aligns with the conceptual model for understanding local disaster recovery efforts presented by Berke, Kartez & Wenger

(1993). Based on the concept that the strength of horizontal (between groups) and vertical integration (between communities and larger entities) within the community pre-disaster influences post-disaster recovery efforts, the model explains that a high degree of horizontal integration within a community facilitates the frequent and sustained involvement of community members and groups in the decision-making processes (Berke, Kartez & Wenger, 1993). Both horizontal and vertical integration appears to have influenced community group involvement in disaster recovery decision-making in Fort McMurray. First, the impact of active horizontal relationships is visible through the finding that pre-existing relationships with other, non-governmental, organizations, individuals, and groups supported the involvement of specific community groups in the recovery decision-making process. Relying on pre-existing relationships and knowledge of the mandates and services of other organizations in the community, participants in more influential organizational roles described inviting other groups to the decision-making table when they recognized a gap in perspectives, for example, when the original members of the Social Recovery Task Force extended invitation to groups whose perspectives they felt were missing. Further, vertical relationships appeared prominent through the finding that previous working relationships with both municipal and provincial levels of government influenced when, and if, community groups were invited to participate in the Social Recovery Task Force.

In other cases, some participants pointed to the longstanding relationships between particular community groups and those in decision-making positions to explain the precedence of the views and interests of those groups in recovery decision-making. This is representative of the explanation by Berke, Kartez & Wenger (1993), that a high degree of vertical integration within the community "helps to expand resources … potentially available to the community" (p. 101)

and ensures that "issues of local concern have a greater chance of being communicated to central authorities." (p. 101) In this way, both horizontal and vertical relationships emerge as a factor which may have impacted which community groups engaged in the recovery decision-making process, and the degree to which they participated.

The case study also supports the model's explanation of the relationship between vertical and horizontal integration, where the usefulness of robust vertical ties depends on the strength of a group's horizontal integration. Some findings from this study suggest that how effectively community groups were able to assert their interests in a decision-making venue was a reflection of their prior relationships with other groups. Directly, some groups pointed to joint advocacy efforts with other community groups as influential to gaining a seat at the table. Indirectly, others credited their successful recovery decision-making engagement to the pre-existing relationships that facilitated their involvement in these tables, demonstrating how horizontal integration can establish and strengthen vertical integration. These findings help explain how horizontal relationships between community groups may facilitate the transmission of the perceptions, needs, values, and interests of community groups vertically, up through higher venues of public decision-making.

The conceptual model for understanding local disaster recovery efforts presented by Berke, Kartez & Wenger (1993) is helpful for understanding how various networks, both formal and informal, influence the engagement of community groups in the recovery decision-making process. However, the model tends to describe horizontal and vertical integration from a community wide perspective. Horizontal integration is defined as an overall community condition which characterizes the social ties between organizations while vertical integration refers to the strength and number of linkages between the whole community and "larger political,

social, and economic institutions" (Berke, Kartez & Wenger, 1993, p. 101). However, as the

findings of this study reveal, disparity in the integration experiences of different community

groups within Fort McMurray brings to light the potential importance of examining horizontal

and vertical integration from an intra-community level. Some groups described strong

relationships both with other community groups (horizontal integration) and various levels of

government and other governing bodies (vertical integration), while other community groups did

not experience the same levels of integration, were challenged by a lack of contacts and

connections, and therefore faced challenges participating in recovery decision-making. For

example, one participant who had a previous relationship with Alberta Health Services described

being "roped" into participating on the Social Recovery Task Force while another participant

specifically cited a lack of pre-existing contacts as a barrier to participation on the Social

Recovery Task Force at the outset. This disparity reinforces Nakagawa and Shaw's (2004)

critique of social capital, which holds that a "community seldom consists of a homogeneous

group of people" (p. 3) and failure to account for inter-community diversity fails to represent

"the true picture of the community" (p. 3). Therefore, as horizontal and vertical linkages may

impact engagement, it is important to consider these linkages may not exist consistently across a

geographically-bounded jurisdiction.

This finding may be further reinforced by its connection to previous literature on social

capital and recovery. In particular, the diverse participation experiences of the Fort McMurray

participants related to relationships is to some degree reflected in Nakagawa and Shaw's (2004)

study of the 2001 Gujarat Earthquake in western India. By examining the recovery experiences

of 25 small groups representing different religions and castes in the district of Bhuj, and

specifically evaluating their levels of social capital, the researchers discovered that the presence

of social capital differed between groups and across different types of capital (bridging, bonding, and linking). They further found that varying speeds of recovery, satisfaction rate, and participation rates in community activities are visible between groups within the same district and that these differences are based primarily on levels of social capital across types. Similarly, Pelling (1998) acknowledges that, while "participatory methodologies for urban development stresses the importance of involving grassroots actors" (p. 473), these methodologies often fail "to recognize that the community itself is not a homogeneous unit, and that information asymmetries and unequal distributions of power are as prevalent within community structures, as between the community and other political actors." (p. 473) Therefore, in relation to these previous findings, it appears that pre-existing relationships within a community may influence the unequal engagement of different community groups in the recovery decision-making process.

The Fort McMurray case study demonstrates how social capital might influence which community groups participate in community recovery decision-making, how they become involved, and how successful they are in their recovery advocacy efforts. However, further exploration is needed to address several questions regarding how these relationships form, why they develop, and when they originate.

First, some research in the area of disaster recovery has pointed to underlying factors, such as discrimination within and between communities, as impactful to groups' ability to participate in decision-making (Enarson & Walsh, 2007, Bankoff, 2003). While participants in this study did not explicitly describe discrimination as a factor impacting exclusion from decision-making, sentiments regarding the "non-essential" role of community groups in the recovery period may warrant further investigation into this area, as such situations are well-documented. For example, recovery literature describes explicitly biased reasons for the

exclusion of particular groups in decision-making activities, such as clientelism. Clientelism, as

described by Aldrich (2016), "involves the deliberate redistribution of economic benefits

('rents') to specific, politician-supporting groups" (p. 400). Again, while not explicitly discussed

by participants, it remains possible that clientelism may explain the formation of transactional

relationships of this nature in the political economy of recovery, and therefore participation in

disaster recovery decision-making. It is important to note, however, that participants were not

directly asked about exclusionary practices affecting vulnerable fire-affected residents.

Second, of the literature related to social capital in the recovery period, more work should

be done to determine if the facilitated development of social capital during recovery can function

as well as pre-existing networks and relationships in supporting improved recovery outcomes.

While the experiences of participants in the Fort McMurray case study reference various types of

relationships, including pre-existing and those which form in the recovery period, more directed

research would need to be undertaken to determine how the timeline for the establishment of

post-event social capital may impact recovery outcomes. Further exploring the distribution of

social capital within communities during recovery could enhance understanding of how to

address the social vulnerability that so often persists or increases community recovery by virtue

of the exclusion of the perspectives, needs, and interests of the most vulnerable groups in a

community.

Theme 2: Organizational Capacity

When participants were asked to describe their groups' experiences of whether, if and

how they were influential in community recovery decision-making, concerns related to

organizational capacity emerged. Staffing, workload, experience and funding components of

organizational capacity were all cited in various contexts as both supports and constraints to

groups' ability to influence recovery and engage in decision-making. The underlying theme between the experiences of participants suggests that community groups which had greater post-disaster organizational capacity were more likely to be involved in recovery decision-making. In contrast, when the capacity of groups was supported during recovery, primarily through receiving, or being able to access, staffing, experience, and funding supports, groups were better able to meet the basic, operational demands of their group and clients. In turn, groups who were able meet their own operational demands during recovery could devote greater resources to activities associated with community recovery decision-making, such as advocacy, collaboration, problem-solving, and securing funding. In contrast, when groups faced barriers to organizational capacity, including through the loss of staff, leaders and volunteers, lack of experience, overwhelming workloads and lack of funding and resources, their participation was equally constrained. When community groups were unable to meet their necessary operational requirements post-disaster, they in-turn had to reduce service to their vulnerable clients, were restricted in developing new programming, were unable to attend collaborative sessions, and in one case, were required to use personal resources to finance group activities.

As previously discussed, formal community disaster-recovery decision-making occurred primarily through the Recovery Committee and its subcommittees. While some participants were invited at the outset to formally participate in the decision-making and prioritization that occurred within these committees, others who wished to attend and were not invited initially, advocated for their involvement. Outside of the Recovery Committee and its subcommittees, participants described drawing attention to their group values, perceptions, needs, and interests through other means including, but not limited to, informal collaboration with other community groups, soliciting funding from industry and outside agencies to provide recovery services, and

undertaking advocacy initiatives by leveraging media. As described by participants, a significant amount of time and work was required to participate in collaborative decision-making activities, such as serving on subcommittees of the Recovery Committee, attending workshops, or advocating for increased involvement in decision-making. For non-profit organizations, in particular, this workload challenge was compounded by an increased demand for social services and other services related to the increased needs of a community recovering from disaster. Due to organizational capacity challenges, many groups were required to make strategic decisions about where to focus their resources, and how they were to meet the needs of a recovering community when they themselves faced the task of recovering as a group. These findings help demonstrate that while many factors may impact the ability of groups to participate in disaster recovery decision-making in a meaningful way, practical capacity challenges, such as lack of staff, funding, and experience, represent essential barriers to participation.

The capacity experiences of participants in the context of Fort McMurray's recovery have been observed in other cases described through recovery literature, if somewhat sparsely. Through their 2004 study of the 1995 Kobe earthquake, Shaw and Goda (2004) reported that the "roles of voluntary organisations became minimised in certain areas" (p. 21) of the reconstruction phase, which could be attributed to "lack of sustained resources to continue the efforts; changes in the organisational mandates . . . . and lack of technical skills to contribute to the reconstruction process" (p. 21-22). Further, the Kobe study acknowledges that "Local initiatives and participation can be facilitated by training, capacity building and resource transfers" (Shaw & Goda, 2004, p. 31). This is reflective of the overall findings in Fort McMurray which indicate that capacity to participate meaningfully in community recovery decision-making was hindered by a lack of organizational capacity, including lack of resources

and expertise. Additionally, Shaw & Goda's (2004) study acknowledges that organizational

capacity supports can help facilitate the involvement of community groups in recovery

initiatives.

In Kapucu's (2007) study of non-profit response to disasters, proper training, education,

and experience were found to support successful inter-organizational collaboration, while lack of

knowledge and lack of leadership hindered such collaboration. This finding aligns with the

experiences of representatives from non-profit groups in Fort McMurray which identified that

lack of experience and the loss of group leaders was especially detrimental to their organizational

capacity. Kapucu (2007) further explained that, given the voluntary nature of many organizations

in the recovery period, "Their effectiveness depends ... on the willingness of an array of

individual leaders and organizations across sectors to participate in and contribute to the success

of the collaborative endeavor" (Kapucu, 2007, p. 553). Combined with findings from the Fort

McMurray experience, which demonstrates how the staffing capacity of non-profit organizations

can be constrained in the recovery period, this call reflects the importance of supporting staffing

capacity if collaborative efforts are a goal during recovery.

Findings from Nakagawa and Shaw (2004) also highlight the link between organizational

capacity and social capital. Through their 2004 study of the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, these

researchers found that "social capital is not the sole factor determining speedy and satisfying

recovery" (p. 18) and that "strong leadership inside the community is also essential for any

collective action" (p. 18). Nakagawa and Shaw (2004) conclude that community leadership and

trust in community leaders combined with strong social capital significantly contributes to

improved recovery outcomes. This finding is particularly relevant for participants in the Fort

McMurray case study who highlighted turnover in group leaders after the disaster as a key

barrier to collaboration and capacity. Financial considerations, burnout, and failure to return to

the community post-fire were all cited as explanations for the turnover in organizational leaders.

These findings could indicate not only that turnover in leadership after the fire impacted the

degree of collective action within the community during recovery, but also that particular

attention to maintaining consistency in organizational leaders after disaster could support

collective action.

In terms of financial supports and constraints, a 1998 study of the Northridge earthquake

by Bolin and Stanford (1998) identifies financial and organizational supports to community-

based and non-profit organizations as essential components of successful community recovery.

By observing that the recovery activities undertaken by both community-based and non-

governmental organizations focused on addressing the unmet recovery needs of vulnerable

populations, Bolin and Stanford (1998) sought to understand further the successes and

limitations of these groups in addressing the unmet recovery needs of vulnerable individuals. In

particular, the study found that "Disentangling pre-existing needs from 'disaster caused' needs

and then addressing only those attributable to the disaster … can inadvertently reinforce the

structures of vulnerability, however much such disentangling may simplify disaster agency

missions" (p. 27). This reflects the specific funding challenges experienced by community

groups in Fort McMurray, where participants felt that funding for specially-designed recovery

programming was available, however funding to maintain pre-disaster programming which

already addressed the needs of vulnerable individuals was not. Further, Bolin and Stanford's

(1998) study highlights the importance of staff experience and expertise, documenting how the

lack of grant-writing capacity resulted in the dissolution of a community-based recovery

organization, resulting in longer-term recovery funding being allocated to larger non-

governmental organizations "which had the staff and bureaucratic expertise for acquiring

resources" (p. 32).

Shaw and Goda (2004) hold that a "focus on community needs and priorities with a

specific emphasis on socially vulnerable groups" (p. 32) and the need "to bring communities into

the decision-making process for reconstruction" (p. 32) represent critical concerns during the

reconstruction process. This reflects the concept of sustainable disaster recovery, which sees the

recovery period as "an opportunity to strengthen local organizational capacity to facilitate

economic, social, and physical development long after the disaster" (Berke, Kartez, & Wenger,

1993, p. 93). Within this context, findings that show groups who experience significant

organizational capacity challenges during recovery also face barriers participating in disaster

recovery decision-making become important. For example, literature related to sustainable

recovery recognizes the importance of quickly initiating "collective action soon after the impact

to facilitate the timely and equitable distribution of aid" (Berke, Kartez & Wenger, 1992, p. 94).

However, findings from Fort McMurray's experience shows some organizational barriers, such

as financial challenges, reentry barriers, staff trauma, and other logistical challenges place

significant obstacles to the participation of local organizations at the outset.

The Fort McMurray recovery experience, in particular, demonstrates that community-

based organizations do not exist in a vacuum; they are themselves vulnerable to, and often

victims of, the disaster which impacts their community. From a practical perspective, the

findings of this study suggest, first, that if governments and communities plan to rely on

community-based and non-profit organizations to provide essential services to community

remembers recovering from disaster, particular attention is needed to the organizational capacity

needs of these groups during recovery. Alongside this, consideration needs to be given to the fact

that the leaders, staff and volunteers of community groups may require personal support during

recovery, especially if they themselves were victims of the disaster. When the capacities of

community groups are constrained, findings from this study suggests the services that

communities and governments rely upon to meet the needs of a vulnerable, disaster-impacted

community may also be constrained. This should be of particular concern, because capacity

constraints can also result in long-term impacts to community groups, such as the disbandment

of groups and cutbacks to services.

Summarizing findings related to the impact organizational capacity challenges can have

on the participation of community groups in disaster recovery initiatives, Kapucu (2007)

emphasizes that a need exists in recovery to commit "to build the organizational capacity of ...

non-profits so that they can truly fulfill their mission and a commitment to include them as part

of the response and recovery process." (p. 18) While findings from the Fort McMurray study

support this emphasis on strengthening the organizational capacity of non-profits, important

questions remain as to how to do so in a sustainable manner, and what role both the public sector

and non-profits should play in this work.

Theme 3: Perceived Value of Non-Profit Organizations

One theme which was discussed primarily by participants representing non-profit

organizations was the sentiment that recovery services provided by non-profit and grassroots

groups were not deemed essential services by those in decision-making positions. For these

participants, this theme illustrates both a general under-appreciation for the roles of non-profits

and community groups within a community and explains why some groups were not involved in

decision-making activities in the recovery period, especially at the outset. Participants described

feeling relied upon by local levels of government to provide advice and services to the

community during recovery in some areas, but also feeling that this reliance did not translate into

decision-making authority, financial support or precedence to the interests, needs, values and

perspectives of their groups. The participants who pointed to this factor ranged across levels of

involvement in recovery decision-making process, indicating that this was not simply pointed to

by those representing organizations which were excluded.

The roles community-based and non-profit groups traditionally undertake in disaster

recovery mirrors the roles and functions taken by such groups during Fort McMurray's recovery.

Studies have demonstrated that these roles include the performance of emergency-related tasks

by non-emergency related non-profit organizations (Kapucu, 2007), engaging in advocacy on

behalf of the community (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2010), and supporting the recovery of those

whose needs are unaddressed through mainstream efforts (Kapucu, Arslan & Collins, 2010). In

the experiences of participants in Fort McMurray, non-profit groups, community leaders,

professional associations and grassroots organizations directly supported the basic needs of the

most vulnerable in the community, advocated on behalf of local citizens, engaged with the

Municipality to develop innovative recovery solutions, and provided ad hoc mental health

support, amongst other functions. For many participants, the work their organizations undertook

during recovery was an extension of the work they undertook every day before the fire,

demonstrating their experience in serving in such roles.

Findings indicate that decision-makers acknowledged to some degree the expertise that

non-profit and community organizations brought to the decision-making table. This was realized

through the establishment of the Social Recovery Task Force, the invitation from the Municipal

government to well-established non-profits in the community to join, and the establishment of

the "people pillar" of the recovery "campaign plan" developed by the Municipality, which

sought representation from "every sector" of the community in Fort McMurray. As described by multiple participants, this sub-committee of the overarching Recovery Committee was the formal venue for everything related to "social recovery."

While the establishment of the Social Recovery Task Force appeared to acknowledge the expertise of community groups and establish a formal role for their inclusion in decision-making, experiences of both members of the Social Recovery Task Force and others reveal that some degree of tokenism may have been present both in its creation and management. Participants from across levels of involvement in recovery decision-making describe experiences of being relied upon by government and residents to provide essential community services, but in turn, being excluded from the decision-making table. This reflects Pelling's (1998) explanation that "There has been a tendency to inscribe roles onto the community (a source of local knowledge, a source of cheap or free labour, a resource to shape for infrastructural maintenance) rather than first asking how a community is structured" (p. 473). Other participants describe being able to involve their organizations in decision-making activities at the outset of the recovery period, but being sharply excluded once a bureaucratic structure was established to guide recovery. Further, participants emphasized that the amount of financial support allocated to business recovery was significantly disproportionate to the support allocated to the social sector, reflecting the perceived priorities of decision-makers.

This contradiction may indicate, in line with the sentiments that a number of participants from non-profit groups expressed, that the necessary services provided and work done by community groups is not considered essential to community recovery. This assessment is similar to concepts discussed in literature related to the prevalence of the command and control model. As described by Neal & Phillips (1995), the command and control model of disaster

management "promotes a strict, rigid, almost para-military approach to disaster management" (p.

327). Through the experiences of community groups during recovery in Fort McMurray, several

pillars of the command and control model were readily observed. First, the creation of the Social

Recovery Task Force, initially born out of the Regional Emergency Operations Centre (REOC),

with membership first managed by REOC staff, is representative of the command and control

model's attempt to assert strong leadership to manage assumed social chaos and to centralize

communications and decision-making (Neal & Phillips, 1995). As described by Dynes (1983), in

the command and control model, "efforts seem to be oriented around creating an artificial and

authoritarian structure to replace natural behavior and structures … plans are created and people

are assumed to fit into such plans as if they were parts of a rational clockwork" (p. 658). Second,

the command and control assumption that "citizens are inept, passive or non-participants in

disaster operations" (Dynes, 1994, p. 142) is reflective of the experiences of some participants

who expressed frustration at local knowledge, skill and opinion being left out of the recovery

process. Third, the reliance of decision-makers on a recovery plan that was developed almost

unilaterally by the task force leader, who had previous military experience, reflects the

command-and-control reliance on "strong paramilitary leadership in disaster" and an intended

"concentration of decision-making" (Neal & Phillips, 1995). This is especially interesting given

that Recovery Committee members discussed relying heavily on "technical expertise" and on

valuing the previous military experience of the Task Force team leader to guide municipal

recovery decision-making, without discussing the experience of community members or

community groups. Overall, the experience of non-profit participants in the Fort McMurray case

study re-emphasizes previous knowledge of how the command and control mentality permeates

disaster management practice. In particular, it raises important questions of how the command

and control model dictates not only disaster response practice, but also disaster recovery experiences and outcomes.

Conclusion

This chapter both interprets and places the results of this case study in context of previous recovery research in order to demonstrate and discuss the significance of the findings. Overall, the study identified three factors which influenced whether and how the values, perceptions, needs and interests of community groups in Fort McMurray were identified, solicited and prioritized in the community recovery decision-making process following the 2016 wildfires. First, this case study documented how the capacity of community groups to participate meaningfully in community recovery decision-making was hindered by a lack of organizational capacity, including lack of staff and expertise, workload capacity challenges, and funding constraints. At the same time, some organizations described how capacity supports received throughout recovery enabled their ability to dedicate time and resources to collaborative recovery initiatives. This has been previously documented through other studies focused on public participation in the recovery period, and highlights the importance of the practical considerations of organizational capacity when seeking the engagement of community groups. Second, the finding that connections impact the engagement experiences of community groups in Fort McMurray aligns with certain explanations of the role of social capital in the recovery period. This finding emphasizes the necessity of better understanding how pre-existing relationships impact community recovery decisions, and indicates that the disparity in the engagement experiences of community groups could be better understood through further study into the relationships of community groups, both with other groups and with government. Last, the finding that community groups, specifically non-profits, felt that there was a lack of value given

to the roles their organizations played during recovery was interpreted through literature related

to the prevalence of the command and control model in disaster management. This demonstrates

that further research could be focused on investigating how pre-existing ideas of which

organizations are essential to recovery work by those in decision-making roles impacts which

perspectives are solicited during community recovery decision-making. Overall, while the data

collected through this case study is useful for determining future research directions, the unique

experiences of participants should not be overlooked by future communities impacted by

disaster, especially if they wish to better understand which factors impact engagement of

community groups in recovery decision-making.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2016 Fort McMurray fires represents one of the largest and most-costly natural disasters in Canadian history. Community recovery efforts undertaken to date would not be possible without the commitment, determination and resilience of not only the residents of the city, but also members of all the community groups which worked diligently to serve their community. Underlying almost all disaster research is the goal of improving the outcomes of these events for future communities. It is in this spirit that, while difficult, documenting a piece of the community recovery decision-making process after the Fort McMurray fires was undertaken.

With the goal of further understanding the complex factors which influence recovery decision-making, the primary research question that guided this study asked: Which factors influenced whether and how the values, perceptions, needs and interests of community groups in Fort McMurray were identified, solicited and prioritized in the community recovery decision-making process following the 2016 wildfires? The study further sought to understand how groups most effectively asserted their interests during recovery and which factors limited the impact of groups on the public decision-making process. Overall, the research was undertaken with the aim of providing an important step towards understanding how disaster-impacted communities balance, prioritize, and ultimately endorse the competing interests of their constituent members during community disaster recovery.

For this purpose, a single-case, exploratory case study was undertaken. Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with three key informants from the Recovery Committee and 13 community group representatives, several of whom served multiple agencies and groups in the community. This qualitative data set was subsequently analyzed

through thematic analysis and coded, which resulted in the identification of three primary factors

which helped answer the research questions. The factors identified which impacted the

engagement of community groups in Fort McMurray during the recovery decision-making

process include: the degree to which organizational capacity was constrained or supported during

recovery, the nature and existence of the organizational relationships of community groups, and

the overall perception of groups' roles in the recovery period.

      The experiences of participants with community recovery decision-making following the

Fort McMurray fires first demonstrates that tangible barriers may exist which limit the ability of

groups to participate in recovery decision-making by restricting their organizational capacity.

Conversely, these experiences also indicate that organizational capacity supports may, in turn,

contribute to groups' abilities to participate in recovery decision-making. This finding is

interesting specifically in the context of previous participatory planning literature which

discusses the role of discrimination and power relations in the exclusion of some actors and their

perspectives from decision-making processes. In this way, findings from this case study indicate

that even if such challenges are addressed, staffing, financial, workload and knowledge barriers

might still limit groups' abilities to participate in the community recovery decision-making

process. With this in mind, further research aimed at strengthening public participation in

recovery decision-making may be interested in exploring sustainable practices to support the

organizational capacities of community groups after major disasters, as well as helping them

anticipate and plan for business continuity prior to a disaster.

      Findings related to the role organizational relationships played in influencing if, when,

and how community groups were invited to participate in recovery decision-making re-

emphasizes the focus of recent disaster recovery literature on the role of relationships and social

capital in facilitating improved recovery outcomes. Overall, findings from the Fort McMurray

case study demonstrates that well-connected community groups were more likely to be

frequently involved in community recovery decision-making than those which lacked contacts

and pre-existing professional or personal relationships with other organizations and levels of

government. Important questions arise as a result of these findings. First, participants identified a

lack of pre-existing relationships as an explicit barrier when seeking involvement in community

recovery decision-making. Therefore, research aimed at increasing the participation of specific

groups in recovery decision-making should ask how both horizontal and vertical relationships

can be facilitated in the recovery period, and if these relationships offer the same benefits for

engagement as pre-existing relationships. Further, as the findings of this study reveal, the

disparity in the engagement experiences of community groups during recovery suggests that

further research could be directed towards examining the concept of the horizontal and vertical

integration on the intra-community level. Overall, the findings of this study confirm the

importance of relationships for engagement and details how different types of relationships may

support the involvement of community groups in recovery decision-making.

Last, the perceived role of non-profit organizations in recovery work was highlighted by

participants as a barrier to their inclusion in recovery decision-making. While community groups

worked to support the essential needs of the recovering community, much of this work was

perceived by participants as unacknowledged and undervalued. The connection of this

perspective with pre-existing literature describing the culture of the command and control model

in disaster response demonstrates that this perspective might influence which community groups

are considered most relevant in disaster recovery work and decision-making. Future research

should, therefore, be directed towards more explicitly studying pre-existing ideas of which

voices should participate in recovery decision-making forums, to confirm if this perception of

some non-profit participants indeed influences recovery decision-making to an appreciable

degree. Further, more general research could be directed towards exploring if and how the

command and control mentality permeates the disaster recovery period, and if so, if community

policy outcomes can be related to this way of approaching recovery.

Overall, while this study documents the recovery decision-making perspectives and

experiences of community groups in a single community, the experiences of these participants

are valuable and should not be forgotten in future disaster recovery events. Community groups

represent important stakeholders in the public decision-making process, both inside and outside

of disaster recovery situations. They provide platforms to communicate the concerns of

individuals to the broader community, and often, advocate on behalf of and serve the most

vulnerable members of the community. Therefore, paying close attention to how they might be

supported to more effectively engage in the recovery decision-making process should be top of

mind for anyone who acknowledges the importance of public participation in the recovery

period.

Findings from this study demonstrate that relationships can influence if and how

community groups are invited to participate in the recovery decision-making process. For this

reason, when engaging with groups during recovery, if the inclusion of diverse perspectives is

sought, emphasis should be placed on those groups which might not have pre-existing

relationships with government or well-connected groups, such as emergent organizations, newly

formed organizations or those representing traditionally marginalized groups. This demonstrates

that certain perspectives might be excluded by simply inviting organizations which have well

developed pre-existing working relationships with decision-makers or other influential

organizations in the community. Further, for organizations seeking to become involved in

recovery decision-making themselves, including preemptively, looking to connect with other

groups or levels of government might offer a strategy for involvement.

The organizational capacity challenges which emerged from this study highlight the

recovery challenges that community groups face after a disaster, which may be overlooked by

decision-makers. To ensure the participation of community groups in recovery decision-making,

especially of client-serving non-profits, recovery capacity supports might be required to ensure

that groups are able to both participate and meet the recovery needs of traditionally and newly

vulnerable residents. Moreover, community groups are built on staff, volunteers and community

leaders. When a community is impacted by disaster, these individuals may also be personally

impacted. Ensuring these individuals are supported not only enables these organizations to focus

on community recovery initiatives and participate in decision-making, but could also ensure the

sustainability of the groups they represent by supporting their ability to withstand the stresses of

recovery.

Last, this study demonstrates that during recovery, community groups are often relied

upon to provide essential services to the community, both by community members and

government. In the case of Fort McMurray, the work community groups undertook during

recovery was an extension of the work they undertook every day before the fire, demonstrating

their experience in serving in such roles. Taking this into account, decision-makers, community

members and disaster management professionals should look deeper into how the expertise of

these organizations could be better integrated into the decision-making process, both pre and

post-disaster. Additionally, if community groups are relied upon to provide recovery support and

services to the community, even implicitly, greater emphasis on their needs, interests, values and perceptions should be considered during recovery.

Overall, as literature demonstrates, communities are not monolithic entities and are instead composed of a variety of groups, each with different needs, interests, values, and priorities. Further, research has shown that the disproportionate distribution of resources, power, and vulnerability within communities can result in disparate recovery outcomes between individuals and groups. Taken together, these ideas demonstrate that how communities identify, solicit and prioritize the values, perceptions, needs and interests of different groups during recovery impacts both the recovery outcomes and the future vulnerability of community members to disaster. Overall, this case study outlining the experiences of community groups following the Fort McMurray fires provides a case example through which to further understand how disaster-impacted communities balance, prioritize, and ultimately endorse the competing interests of their constituent members during community recovery.

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