Urbanising disaster governance

The politics of risks in the foothills of Santiago

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Publication date
2021

Citation for published version (APA):
1 Introduction
1.1 PRESENTATION AND RESEARCH AIMS

This thesis deals with urbanisation and disaster risks. Disasters related to natural hazards can be pivotal moments for city dwellers in terms of the risks they face and how they occupy urban space thereafter. Disasters nonetheless do not occur ‘suddenly’ – rather, urban societies settle and evolve in hazardous spaces. Although the existence of such hazards is often known, society functions by ‘incubating’ disasters, waiting for them to occur. I argue that much can be learned by researching the spatial nature of such incubation processes, leading to an understanding of why disasters have occurred and, more importantly, what is being done to prevent future instances. With this in mind, I focus on Santiago and its foothills (see Figure 1.1). The seven million inhabitants of the Chilean capital enjoy privileged access to the Andes, which form the backdrop to their daily lives. As both a resource and a hazard, however, the mountain range can suddenly become a source of danger, especially to the eight districts (or comunas) located on the piedmont, whose urban lives are, for better or worse, marked by their histories of disasters.

Figure 1.1 Panoramic View of Santiago, drawn by Rodolfo Hoffman

Source: Memoria Chilena
Don Luis arrived in the foothill comuna of La Florida in 1968. At that time, the area was rural and inhabitants’ livelihoods revolved around agriculture. He was interested in meeting his neighbours and finding out how they obtained their water for agriculture and human consumption. A decade later, in response to the economic hardships experienced in urban poblaciones\(^1\) during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990), he and his neighbours participated in emergency initiatives such as community-based food preparation (ollas comunes) to help tackle persistent hunger among the population (Hardy, 1986). During the 1980s, a number of floods along the Macul Ravine damaged informal settlements in the area. Although Don Luis was not affected then, his luck changed on 3 May 1993 when major landslide or debris flows hit three of Chile’s regions, impacting heavily on five foothill comunas (ONEMI, 1995). In the district of La Florida, the debris flow (or 1993 aluvión) dragged tons of material down from the mountains, destroying two neighbourhoods and damaging hundreds of homes. Although the impacts of the disaster were localised, its causes relate to a long history of development that generated vulnerabilities as urban marginalisation and environmental degradation forced working-class groups to live in areas exposed to the hazard (Binimelis, 1993).

Don Luis did not lose his house to the aluvión, but life in this marginal space was never the same for him. Already a representative of his neighbourhood association, Don Luis engaged even more enthusiastically with planning authorities and local governance in the aftermath. He risked eviction, struggled to regularise his población, and experienced repeated flood events. More widely, he witnessed how some of his long-standing neighbours, having been severely affected by the debris flow, relocated to a densely populated area with no services, while others continued to live in exposed conditions. In parallel, real estate companies were urbanising the foothills to attract new high-income residents, transforming it into a highly unequal and segregated area. In this thesis, I show how all these processes are related in different ways to the 1993 aluvión. As observed from below, the disaster marks a pivotal moment in the urban lives of long-time inhabitants of the foothills. They have had negative experiences of both the debris flow itself and the area’s post-disaster urban transformation. In the decades since the aluvión, the growth of La Florida (one of the metropolis’ 37 comunas) and of Santiago in general continued, producing a highly unequal urban space. Map 1.1 presents the predominant income quintile per block in Santiago, revealing stark socio-economic segregation\(^2\).

\(^1\) As low-income urban neighbourhoods are known in Chile (De Ramón, 1985; Murphy, 2015).
\(^2\) With a Gini index of 0.53, it has been argued that while some residents of Santiago have incomes at the level of Norway, others are on a par with Ivory Coast (Garreton, 2017; Zahler, 2011).
Behind this development trend, ambivalence in regard to efficient urban risk management (Camus et al., 2016; Sánchez, 2010) is combined with critical and persistent levels of vulnerability, incubating multiple disasters in Santiago’s hazardous spaces.

**Map 1.1 Socio-economic segregation in Santiago (2012)**

This snapshot foregrounds the phenomena I analyse in the thesis. Urban disasters are rarely ‘exceptional moments’ that pass and from which people move on, but processes that unfold over time (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002). The disruptions caused by disasters and the trajectories upon which actors set out are embedded in social structures, many of which are uneven and unjust (Hewitt,
1983a; Wisner et al., 2004). Since mounting evidence shows that disasters interact with and even exacerbate long-standing social inequalities (Collins, 2009; Letelier & Irazábal, 2017; Peacock et al., 2014; Sovacool et al., 2018; Susman et al., 1983; Wisner, 2001) it is imperative to understand how to break the cycle. The purpose of my thesis is therefore to engage with how cities have dealt with disasters in the past and are dealing with disaster risk now. By exploring the case of the foothills of Santiago, I aim to understand the interplay of urban and disaster governance processes and highlight the profound role of politics in that interaction. This issue remains underexplored in the interdisciplinary field of disaster studies, especially in terms of critical consideration of their urban dimension.

This chapter sets the stage for my thesis. I begin by describing the emergence of urban disasters as a social issue, along with its related policies (1.2). I then turn to my research problem (1.3) before highlighting certain limitations and presenting the structure of the book (1.4).

1.2 UNDERSTANDING URBAN DISASTER GOVERNANCE

1.2.1 DISASTERS IN A GLOBAL URBAN SOCIETY

Disasters are critically challenging global society, as floods, landslides, droughts, earthquakes and hurricanes constantly reveal the fragility of human-environment relations. Although the number of disasters and disaster victims varies due to hazard variability\(^3\), hundreds of disasters have killed thousands of people and affected millions every year between 1990 and 2019 (CRED, 2020). Since 2011, disaster mortality rates have fallen\(^4\); however, millions still suffer their long-term consequences, including displacement. In low- and middle-income countries, more people are forcibly moved by disasters than by conflict and violence (IDMC, 2017). The human costs of disasters for all hazard types and on all continents paint a gloomy picture of recent decades and the future (UN Environment, 2019; UNDRR & CRED, 2020). As the UN Global Assessment Report (GAR) on Disaster Risks stated in 2015: “global disaster risk has not been reduced significantly” (UNISDR, 2015a, p. 44).

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3 Severe earthquakes, rainfall, hurricanes, etc. do not occur every year or season.
4 I am not including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic here, which affects this statement dramatically. As stated by the head of the UNDRR in July 2020, “more people have died in the last few months from COVID-19 than have been killed in all the floods and storms of the last twenty years” (Mizutori, 2020a, para. 8).
This era of disaster risks is an urban one (IFRC, 2010; The World Bank, 2011; UN-HABITAT, 2011; UNISDR, 2013). We hear constantly that since 2007 more than half of the world’s population lives in cities (UNDESA, 2014). However, beyond pure demographics, urbanisation today is at the core of social, economic, political and ecological transformations (Heynen et al., 2006) and has become a planetary condition (Brenner, 2013; Lefebvre, 2003b). As such, urbanisation and risks go hand in hand (Bull-Kamanga et al., 2003; Pelling, 2003, 2011a; UNISDR, 2015a). More people living in cities increases hazard exposure but, more importantly, particular forms of urbanisation drive greater risks, such as higher density, growing informality, segregation and inequality, environmental degradation, poorly sited or designed construction, sprawling urban forms, or poor planning and development management (Bull-Kamanga et al., 2003; UNISDR, 2015a). These drivers are more prevalent in the global south but exist all over the world in socially disadvantaged urban areas (M. Davis, 1995, 2006; Gotham & Greenberg, 2014; UNISDR, 2015a). Thus, not only is it riskier to live in some cities, but also in some parts of the city. Urbanisation not only drives hazards and exposure by depleting natural resources and contributing to climate change, but also produces differential disaster vulnerabilities and capacities along social divides (Cardona et al., 2012; IFRC, 2010; Pelling, 2003).

We see this regularly, as across a diversity of disaster ‘events’, images, reports and statistics reveal a common trait: that people suffering the most occupy a marginal or dominated position in society. Table 1.1. provides examples of this. Disaster risks vary according to class, race/ethnicity, age, location, and so on (Cutter et al., 2003). This means that socially produced inequalities, which are the outcomes of particular histories and geographies, are at the roots of all disasters (UNDRR, 2019; UNISDR, 2009, 2015b; Wisner et al., 2004, 2011). For this reason, many activists, academics and policymakers are acknowledging that there is no such thing as a ‘natural’ disaster, but instead, processes associated with natural hazards which are produced by long-standing social development (see 2.2) (Gaillard et al., 2014; Hartman & Squires, 2006; O’Keefe et al., 1976; Smith, 2006).
The study of the social nature of urban disasters is critical for three reasons. First, it implies that not all hazards turn into disasters – and that even hazards have a human element (Clark et al., 2013; IPCC, 2014b). The misnomer of ‘natural disasters’ is problematic not only for its stronger focus on nature and physical entities, but also because it depoliticises their social construction – i.e., it evacuates or externalises social responsibilities and blame (Chmutina & von Meding, 2019; Gould et al., 2016). Second, underlying conditions driving exposure and disaster vulnerability – from poverty and inequality to racism, patriarchy and colonialism, and, more globally, climate change and the ongoing ecological crisis – have not changed substantially (IPCC, 2012, 2014a; UNDRR, 2019). This means that along the current global pathway of climate change, the disasters being incubated are innumerable (IPCC, 2018). Third, understanding disasters as social processes carries blame and responsibility: to ground the occurrence of disasters in society is to acknowledge that ‘somebody’s’ choices and actions create them (Kelman, 2020a; Oliver-Smith, 2013). The problem is that

5 This is a simplification; vulnerability is more complex and variables interact.

Table 1.1 Comparing attributes of selected disasters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME &amp; HAZARD</th>
<th>DATE(S) &amp; LOCATION</th>
<th>KEY DRIVER OF VULNERABILITY¹</th>
<th>IMPACTS</th>
<th>REFERENCES</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995 Chicago Heatwave</td>
<td>12–16 July 1995, in Chicago, USA</td>
<td>Age and race/ethnicity</td>
<td>Nearly 600 excess deaths (75% over 65 years old)</td>
<td>Klinenberg (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Katrina</td>
<td>29 August 2005, in New Orleans, USA</td>
<td>Class and race/ethnicity</td>
<td>1,000 deaths, half a million affected (injured or displaced)</td>
<td>Brunkard et al. (2008); Sharkey (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ‘boxing day’ earthquake and tsunami</td>
<td>26 December 2004, in south East Asia</td>
<td>Ethnicity and gender</td>
<td>Thirteen countries affected and 226,000 deaths</td>
<td>Gaillard et al. (2008); Jones (2018); Kelman (2020a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 Haiti earthquake (7.0 Mₑ magnitude)</td>
<td>12 January 2010, in Haiti</td>
<td>Colonialism and under-development</td>
<td>222,000 deaths</td>
<td>Oliver–Smith (2010); UNDRR &amp; CRED (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 Chilean earthquake (8.8 Mₑ magnitude) and tsunami</td>
<td>27 February 2010, in central–southern Chile</td>
<td>Class and location</td>
<td>525 deaths (one third from the tsunami previously unaccounted for in planning)</td>
<td>Farías (2014); Romero (2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author
these actions are spatially and temporally distant, hard to change, frequently unjust, and involve contentious social structures: finding causation entails asking why some people remain at risk (Kelman, 2020a; Ribot, 2014). Critically, powerful actors make decisions (sometimes unintentionally) that (re)produce disaster risks, maintaining a system that benefits them and where, in principle, they are not directly exposed to hazards. However, creating risks for others also generates risks for the powerful, as Kelman (2020a, p. 130) explains:

“…‘why do some people let disasters happen by creating vulnerability?’ Because most of the vulnerability they create is for others. Ultimately, a minority creates vulnerability, and hence disasters, for the majority, because they do not care or choose not to be aware that they are doing so. And, ironically, in creating vulnerability for others, they also create some for themselves, since vulnerability is so interconnected.”

My thesis engages with these features of social studies of disasters. As we live in a complex urban and risky world, the way forward is to deal with disasters in a way that is more socially just. This requires us to understand how disaster risks are managed nowadays, an issue to which I now turn.

1.2.2 URBAN DISASTERS IN THE GLOBAL AGENDA: TOWARDS A NEW LEXICON FOR GOVERNING RISKS

Disaster issues represent a growing field of research and practice in recent decades. In light of the social drivers of risks, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) has become the main goal by which to address the ongoing risks we inhabit (UNISDR, 2015b). This objective is accompanied by a deep conviction concerning its collective character and hence to position governance centrally. The predominant role of both DRR and governance, however, has a particular evolving trajectory.

In 1989 the UN proclaimed the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) (1990–1999). The IDNDR initiative enhanced efforts at the global level, bringing the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World (UN, 1994) and the establishment of an office in 1999 to implement DRR goals through the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)⁶. The initiative, resulting from intense negotiations between participants, prompted criticism from

⁶ Renamed UNDRR in May 2019.
experts – especially during the first half of the decade – due to its ‘top-down’ and
‘technocratic approach’ to disasters (Wisner et al., 2004). By involving NGOs and
communities more centrally, the approach shifted in the second half of the decade and
relevant tools for assessing urban risks were advanced (UN-ISDR, 1999). Although
the IDNDR recognised society–environment relations for constructing vulnerability,
it maintained and reproduced an understanding of disasters that was overly focused
on the physical character of natural hazards, and portrayed vulnerable individuals and
groups as weak (Hewitt, 1995; Pelling, 2001). By contrast, in July 2020 the head of the
UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), Mami Mizutori, urged replacement
of the ‘natural’ in disasters in order to change the perception that society does not
create risks (Mizutori, 2020c).7 Moreover, she identified ‘bad governance’ as the
biggest driver of disaster risks (Mizutori, 2020a). There is hence a clear evolution
towards centring on social agency in disaster occurrences. While these issues have
long been recognised in academia (O’Keefe et al., 1976), international organisations
have played a key role in expanding this into policy agendas (S. Jones et al., 2015a).
There is thus a need to understand how this change has occurred and, critically, what
it means for DRR and governance.

Table 1.2 *SDG 11 and associated targets*

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<tr>
<th>SDG 11</th>
<th>TARGET N</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
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<tr>
<td>11.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>“By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>“By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water–related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations”</td>
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<td>11.b</td>
<td></td>
<td>“By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels”</td>
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7 The #NoNaturalDisasters campaign undoubtedly contributed to this, as stated by Mizutori herself.
After the IDNDR, many global policymaking efforts emerged in relation to managing urban disaster risks. These include the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 (HFA) (UNISDR, 2007), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (SFDRR) (UNISDR, 2015b), the New Urban Agenda (NUA) (United Nations, 2017), the Transforming our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations General Assembly, 2015), and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (United Nations, 2015). As climate change, disaster risks, sustainability and development intersect, these policies are interlinked (Kelman, 2017; Schipper & Pelling, 2006; Solecki et al., 2011). They relate closely to urban policy discourses, as construction of resilient and sustainable cities to reduce disaster vulnerabilities is fast becoming the prevalent urban discourse (UNISDR, 2015b, 2015a; Vale, 2014). In my thesis, an important objective emerges from Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 11 (Table 1.2). The SDGs, in their effort to enhance a new agenda of development, recognise the importance of sustainable urban development and, as such, align with the NUA adopted at the UN–Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (also known as HABITAT III). While this agenda as a whole intervenes in the underlying drivers of risks (Sarmiento, 2017), I expand on the HFA and SFDRR, as they entail a more explicit effort to change the view of disasters.

The HFA had a strong institutional focus on implementation of DRR objectives. Emphasising different aspects of governance such as institutional and legislative frameworks, resource availability, and community participation, it promoted the creation of myriad arrangements at different governance levels. As assessed in the GAR of 2015, the HFA worked as a catalyst for creating awareness and “transition from emergency management to disaster risk management” (UNISDR, 2015a, p. 118, emphasis added). Later, the SFDRR proposed to substantially reduce disaster risks and losses due to disasters as an expected outcome. It aims to “prevent new and reduce existing disaster risk” by implementing integral and inclusive measures concerning exposure, vulnerability, and “preparedness for response and recovery”, and therefore to “strengthen resilience” (UNISDR, 2015b, p. 12). Emerging from the HFA, and reflecting more explicitly on the social character of risks, the SFDRR stresses the need to develop more actions to tackle ‘disaster risk drivers’ such as poverty, inequality, climate change, certain forms of urbanisation, and land management (UNISDR, 2015b). The SFDRR explicitly promotes a people-centred approach to DRR, where participation of diverse actors is a central feature. For this, the UNDRR in general, and
the SFDRR in particular, constantly state that ‘risk is everyone’s business’ (UNDRR, 2017a), which means that all members of society should incorporate them at all levels.

Throughout these policy initiatives, development of ‘partnerships’ with multiple ‘stakeholders’ has become an intrinsic procedural step towards DRR. In this sense, there is a clear trajectory in which governance is occupying a more central position in this global agenda (Table 1.3). Although it remains less used than other concepts such as disaster risk management (DRM) (Rumbach, 2016b; Tierney, 2012), governance processes are deemed critical nowadays for advancing sustainable urban policies and preventing disasters\(^8\) (Ahrens & Rudolph, 2006; Alexander, 2015; Gall et al., 2014; Murray, 2017; Tierney, 2012). As with any conceptualisation of ‘governance’, it denotes a governing process that includes a multiple and diverse array of actors and their coordination (Asselt & Renn, 2011; Bevir, 2012, 2013; Renn, 2008). By definition, the process portrays a shift ‘from government to governance’ and prescribes a varied set of institutions or systems of actors – including multi-level and multi-scale arenas of authority – who should interact in order to prevent disasters and reduce risks (Lassa, 2011; Meriläinen et al., 2019; Sandoval & Voss, 2016; Srikandini et al., 2018; Tierney, 2012; UNDRR, 2017b). Sociologist Kathleen Tierney defines disaster governance\(^9\) as:

“...the interrelated sets of norms, organization and institutional actors, and practices (spanning predisaster, transdisaster, and postdisaster periods) that are designed to reduce the impacts and losses associated with disasters arising from natural and technological agents and from intentional acts of terrorism” (2012, p. 344).

There is therefore a clear contrast between the participatory practices prescribed by governance models with the top-down and command-and-control paradigm that characterised the IDNDR (Hilhorst et al., 2020; S. Jones et al., 2015a). The goal of DRR governance is thus to develop prevention, preparedness and mitigation of disaster impact, explicitly involving the participation and coordination of multiple actors.

\(^8\) Even the concept of risk governance, which encompasses disasters along with other sources of risks, was only coined in the late 1990s (Asselt & Renn, 2011).

\(^9\) I use ‘disaster governance’ and ‘disaster risk governance’ interchangeably, as many authors do (Srikandini et al., 2018). Srikandini et al. (2018, p.182) use a definition similar to Tierney’s (2012), stressing that disaster risk governance encompasses the dynamics involved throughout the phases of disaster management, “in contrast to disaster governance”. While not explicit, making this contrast connotes that disasters are temporally concentrated events, which is a questionable definition (see 2.3).
DRR governance positions sustainable development in relation to risks (Meerpoël, 2015; UNDP, 2010). In practice, DRR governance entails community involvement and participation; developing multi-stakeholder platforms; enhancing accountability and transparency; respect for the rule of law; decentralisation to achieve a more direct allocation of resources that is more targeted to local needs and involves greater familiarity with the interventions; flexibility in their operations, especially in terms of response and recovery in the case of emergencies; and a more efficient bureaucracy (Gall et al., 2014; UN/ISDR Africa, 2004; UNDP, 2010; UNISDR, 2015b). This is why models of ‘good governance’ are seen as a guarantee for a virtuous DRR circle (Ahrens & Rudolph, 2006; Gall et al., 2014; Meerpoël, 2015; UN/ISDR Africa, 2004; UNDP, 2010).

Governance arrangements comprise different procedures: upward movement to incorporate global institutions, outward movement to encompass different sectors, and downward movement towards decentralisation and local communities (S. Jones et al., 2015b). The actual distribution of roles varies, as activities such as emergency operations still require some level of centralisation (S. Jones et al., 2014). In cities, governing urban risks leads to policies focused on both vulnerability and resilience (IFRC, 2010, 2016). These policies prescribe the importance of arranging multiple levels

<table>
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<tr>
<th>GLOBAL POLICY</th>
<th>GOVERNANCE AIM</th>
<th>YEAR(S)</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yokohama Strategy</td>
<td>Developing and strengthening capacities and capabilities; the inclusion of non-governmental organizations and the participation of local communities</td>
<td>1994-2000 (remainder of the IDNDR)</td>
<td>UN (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyogo Framework</td>
<td>Ensuring that DRR is a “national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation”</td>
<td>2005-2015</td>
<td>UNISDR (2007, p.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Urban Agenda</td>
<td>To strengthen urban governance with “sound institutions and mechanisms that empower and include urban stakeholders”, enabling “social inclusion, sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and environmental protection”</td>
<td>Adopted in 2016</td>
<td>United Nations (2017, p.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sendai Framework</td>
<td>“Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk”, which includes actions at the local, national, regional and global level.</td>
<td>2015-2030</td>
<td>UNISDR (2015, p.17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author
and sectors at metropolitan and urban scales (Pelling, 2003). As assessed by Christine Wamsler (2006, p. 169), urban disaster governance represents the “combined domain” in which “knowledge about disaster and urban planning, and their management, is coordinated, mediated and altered through joint governance practices.” Risk governance arrangements require a profound knowledge of the multiple drivers of disaster vulnerability (Gordon, 2020). Ultimately, disaster risk governance entails incorporating knowledge about hazards and vulnerabilities into policy design and implementation; managing risks through participatory and accountable actions; preventing disaster risks at the local and urban level through initiatives such as technology and infrastructure, land use planning, environmental laws and regulation to restrict growth in hazardous areas, and building codes and design standards; empowering agencies and organisations and enhancing the role of civil society in preparedness and recovery; and sectoral issues such as slum upgrading, good healthcare provision, and good emergency services (IFRC, 2010, 2016; Pelling, 2003; Schofield & Twigg, 2019; Twigg, 2015; Wamsler, 2006).

This agenda drove many positive transformations. Evidence shows an increasing number of DRR networks and organisations, with relevant progress at the international, regional and national levels, starting with the HFA and consolidated with the SFDRR (Riyanti Djalante & Lassa, 2019). Given the agenda’s people-centred and multi-hazards approach, many efforts transcend a hazard-by-hazard assessment of risks and focus instead on a holistic view of systemic risks (UNDRR, 2019). Similarly, instead of reactive policy processes in the face of disasters, institutions are taking a proactive decision-making approach that combines DRR efforts with disaster response (Mizutori, 2020b; UNDRR, 2019). It has also meant more direct alignment with other policy agendas (Kelman, 2020b; Mizutori, 2020b; Wisner, 2020), mainstreaming DRR for development (Aysan & Lavell, 2014) and, critically for the thesis, within urban governance and planning processes (UNISDR, 2015a; Wamsler, 2006). The quality of governance processes marks the success of all such initiatives. Returning to Mami Mizutori (2020a), if ‘bad’ governance is driving disaster risks, ‘good’ governance will contribute to reducing them. The challenge is that even in “well-governed cities” (IFRC, 2010, p. 140), urban risks persist because multiple urban vulnerabilities continue and are increasing for lower-income and marginal urban groups. Therefore, wider structures of urban space reproduction – and the resulting inequalities – are critically influencing ‘good governance’ towards DRR.
**1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

**1.3.1 URBAN GOVERNANCE AND THE LIMITS OF REDUCING RISKS**

Efforts to govern disaster risks in cities – as any policy – are modulated by urban geographies (Le Galès, 2007; Parés et al., 2014). On top of the particular institutions and government policies in place, long-standing histories, spaces, and urban politics contribute to the ways in which risks are governed. Concrete urban ‘regimes’ – i.e., a “set of arrangements by which a community is actually governed” (Stone, 1989, p. 6) – influence risk reduction initiatives, requiring a focus on their wider urban arrangements. The literature on urban governance has described in detail the collective and interactive process involved in urban politics and urban policymaking (Lukas, 2019; Raco, 2020), and the emerging forms of public–private arrangements involved in the ‘steering’ of cities towards certain goals. Such arrangements take the form of quasi-markets, partnerships and networks (Torfing et al., 2012). Pierre (1999) describes four general – albeit ideal – varieties of governance found in cities of the Global North: managerial, corporatist, pro-growth and welfare. These models differ in terms of participants, goals, instruments and outcomes.

The literature highlights the polysemy of the concept of governance, indicating the existence of, among other varieties, ‘organisational’, ‘corporate’, ‘public’ and ‘global’ governance (Bevir, 2012). A critical distinction is the extent to which ‘governance’ describes or prescribes certain processes, i.e., whether it is an analytical or a normative concept (Castán Broto, 2017; J. Gupta, Verrest, et al., 2015). While, analytically, governance serves as a lens through which to interrogate the practices of power (Bevir, 2013), normative usages describe a desired institutional conduct – e.g., ‘good’, ‘democratic’ or ‘participatory’ governance (Fung & Wright, 2003). In relation to disasters, Hilhorst et al. (2020, p. 215) distinguish three dimensions of governance: (a) a ‘formal’ dimension, denoting how “governance arrangements are designed or meant to work”; (b) a ‘real’ dimension, or “the way in which formal governance arrangements manifest and evolve in practice”; and (c) an ‘invisible’ dimension, which describes “an amalgam of household and neighbourhood-level activities and networks for disaster response that happen outside of the gaze of the formalized governance arrangements”. Governance, especially in urban centres, is multiple, site-specific, involves diverse arrangements (including elected and non-elected actors), and by definition heavily influenced by the political entity that is the city (Davidson, 2015).
In this vein, researchers have described how different usages of ‘governance’ have been intimately and problematically bound up with neoliberal transformations in the final decades of the 20th century (Demmers et al., 2004; Jessop, 1998). Scalar changes in how capitalism works and how changes in the focus of power and authority form the backdrop (Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 2002). In relation to urban practices, David Harvey (1989) describes this shift as a transformation from a ‘managerial’ to an ‘entrepreneurial’ logic of governance wherein the role of public-private partnership arrangements became the norm, aimed especially at attracting external funding, investments and employment sources. It is thus entrepreneurial because it is “speculative in execution and design (...) as opposed to rationally planned and coordinated development” (Harvey, 1989, p. 7). The advance of neoliberalism occurred around the world in variegated forms, including in Latin America, with Chile as a prime example (Boano & Vergara-Perucich, 2018; Demmers et al., 2004; Harvey, 2005). With this advance, models of urban governance have come to reflect discourses, aims, instruments and actor involvement that foreground an ‘entrepreneurial’ logic, prioritising economic growth goals over social inclusion or sustainability (J. Gupta, Verrest, et al., 2015; Jessop, 1998; Stone, 1989).

Engaging with the development of the concept in the literature, Claus Offe (2009, p. 557) asks whether governance is an ‘empty signifier’ and sketches three critiques: the unresolved issues within its definitions that make it difficult to find a common denominator in its multiple usages; the polysemy of governance that privileges its usage as both adjective and noun towards a “harmonizing rhetoric” that makes it a “game without losers”; and the depoliticisation of governance, which masks the exercise of power in the deployment of policy actions. For Offe, the last point constitutes the main problem with the concept, as governance underpins pro-market actors while diffusing the democratic process for doing so. As a political project, neoliberal governance results in marginalising and punishing certain groups and reinforcing inequalities (Harvey, 2005) while changing the dynamics of power and naturalising its tenets in governing cities (Jessop, 2002).

According to Erik Swyngedouw, by putting forth a “regulatory framework for managing a beyond-the-state polity”, urban governance empties the democratic content of politics (2005, p. 2002). This represents a ‘Janus-faced’ character of governance-beyond-the-state: while their arrangements encourage innovative
participation between civil society and the state, they also erode democracy in key issues such as representation, accountability and legitimacy (Swyngedouw, 2005). In practice, this entails the installation and predominance of techno-managerial forms of governance, which subordinate dissent, conflict and political debates to the administration of consensus and agreements (Swyngedouw, 2009). In an age of neoliberal capitalism that transforms state and civil society relations, governance represents “the Trojan Horse that diffuses and consolidates the ‘market’ as the principal institutional form” (Swyngedouw, 2005, p. 2003). All these features form the basis of what critical theorists have described as the post-political or post-democratic condition (Dikeç, 2005; Mouffe, 2005; Rancière, 1999, 2001), which includes both urban and environmental domains (see 2.4) (Swyngedouw, 2007, 2009).

When considering this politically laden dimension of governance, questions and challenges for practicing DRR and preventing disaster arise (Alexander, 2017; Coates & Nygren, 2020; Raju & da Costa, 2018; Srikandini et al., 2018). As the DRR agenda lacks binding and multilateral agreements (Hannigan, 2012), their mainstreaming and integration with other governmental structures remains scant and secondary, and years after the adoption of the SFDRR, its advances are insufficient (UNDRR, 2019). Empirical analyses question the extent to which there is actually a transition ‘from government to governance’, as the neoliberalisation of state power generates tensions between central and decentralised expertise for disaster risk management (S. Jones et al., 2014; Lassa, 2013). As such, the creation of new agencies and authorities to deal with recovery faces problems with delays, confusion over jurisdictional legitimacy and inability to coordinate actors – even resulting in cases where central governments retake command (Mukherji et al., 2021).

Relatedly, approaches that empower local stakeholders or seek to tackle structural causations of risks are discontinued due to lack of funding (Pelling, 2011b) or are not followed in the event of emergencies (Daly et al., 2017). In that sense, global framework policies do not adequately consider the state’s capacity to protect its citizens (Wisner, 2020). Promotion of ‘good governance’ in itself does not reflect on the complexity of implementation practices (see 2.5): for example, the goal of the SFDRR to increase the number of countries and local governments adopting DRR strategies fails to address the uneven abilities and intricate political processes involved in such adoptions (Imperiale & Vanclay, 2020). SFDRR’s goals of governance and accountability are limited by the absence of implementation tools and methods (Raju & da Costa, 2018).
In addition, there is a strategic usage in urban disaster governance discourses. Hand in hand with neoliberalism, there is a tendency to over-emphasise aspects of economisation in policies, stressing the value of DRR for businesses and the potential dividends to enhance resilience (UNISDR, 2013; Wisner, 2020). For example, institutions such as The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, or The Rockefeller Foundation make use of such discourses (IMF, 2017; Rodin, 2014; Spaans & Waterhout, 2017; The World Bank, 2013). In their view, governance is a set of arrangements for delivery of public services that can be improved by “generating mechanisms to make the state responsive to the needs of the population and accountable for its actions” (The World Bank, 2013, p. 21, emphasis added). As such governance is assessed through concrete indicators that turn a political process into a domain of decision-making techniques.

Being profoundly political, governance entails normative issues that are regularly obscured by actors and policies. While many risk management processes convey a positive imaginary for the future, using “so many laudable objectives disguises the trade-offs involved and the resulting distributions of costs and benefits” (Fainstein, 2015, p. 157). As such, some governance approaches portray traditional and conservative views of managing risks. For example, authors have shown how usages of resilience employ the malleability of the concept and apply it to ‘bounce back’ and ‘return to normal’, maintaining the status quo (Pelling, 2011a; Ziervogel et al., 2017). The discussion, adoption, and implementation of disaster risk policies are linked to questions of inequality and justice (see 2.6). By hiding their contents and outcomes, some policies end up overlooking social differences, treating all stakeholders as equal, minimising their conflicts, and resulting in a forced consensus on “objective[s] at least minimally acceptable to all” (Marcuse, 2006, p. 275). In practice however, participation entails multiple costs and values that are not normally accounted for in policymaking (Anggraeni et al., 2019), and hence the idea of disasters being ‘everyone’s business’ is empirically questionable (Clark-Ginsberg, 2020). Neoliberal governance has instead increasingly privatised risks (Calhoun, 2006), making communities self-responsible for their safety and management of their disaster vulnerabilities (Nygren, 2016, 2018; Tierney, 2015; Wisner, 2001).

Ultimately, city politics challenges urban disaster governance processes. In many ‘good governance’ approaches, the state is seen as a neutral actor – an impartial coordinator or facilitator at best. To recognise the limits of the state in terms of risk reduction raises questions about democracy, authority and power in urban life, which are not central to

10 See, for example, https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators
discussions about disaster policy implementation. The (re)production of inequalities and marginalisation in disaster processes is well-known in academic research (Ingram et al., 2006; Kammerbauer & Wamsler, 2017; Mustafa, 2003; Oliver-Smith, 1990; Susman et al., 1983). What remains unknown, however, in the field of disaster studies in general – and urban disaster governance literature in particular – is how urban politics influence the emergence of these conditions, especially in post-political contexts. To understand this absence, I turn now to the underlying paradigm framing disaster research and DRR in particular, in order to contest and change it.

1.3.2 PUZZLING NARRATIVES IN DISASTER RISK CREATION

In light of the consideration of politics in urban governance, questions arise regarding the extent to which DRR governance can effectively and inclusively reduce risks. Disaster literature has revealed the power-laden production of disaster risks through extensive research on vulnerability – a promising paradigm emerging in the 1970s and 1980s to contest the pre-eminence of physical science in disasters (Pelling, 2001). Despite this advance, some tenets of a naturalistic, physicalist and highly technocratic paradigm endure today (Gaillard, 2019; Gibb, 2018; Sliwinski, 2017). Although challenged by scholars for decades (Hewitt, 1983a), the physicalist paradigm remains dominant and has proven to be rather ‘resilient’ (Sliwinski, 2017). Policies influenced by a physicalist frame could recognise levels of social vulnerability – especially through the measurement of distinct social categories and their static visualisation (F. Jacobs, 2019) – but end up solely intervening in the natural hazard as the physical manifestation of disaster risks. An uncritical usage of vulnerability, and the policies engendered by it, maintain a dualist position between nature and culture (Gibb, 2018). As stated by Pelling (2003, p. 49):

“For good reason, a physical science approach is often preferred by urban planners and political decision-makers. Engineering projects are visible and can unambiguously show the electorate and potential investors that the government is responding to risk, whilst social reform tends not to grab headlines and is a longer-term, slower process.”

These kinds of interventions not only are “less likely to threaten the status quo in the city” than social programmes (Pelling, 2003, p. 49), but also present themselves as technical and apolitical. Construction of infrastructure or development of territorial planning, however, are profoundly political endeavours, as they reflect the city’s power
relations (Kaika, 2005; Pelling, 2003, 2011b; Swyngedouw, 1997). Moreover, just like the aforementioned urban governance arrangements, such solutions for managing disaster risks are having a profound anti-political outcome, suspending deliberation by imposing neutral and technical goals (see 2.4) (Ferguson, 1994; Gaillard, 2019). As such, the field of disaster studies is currently rendering hollow any potentially progressive transformation of social vulnerability; as argued by Gaillard (2019, p. S15), “technical fixes predominate because disasters continue to be seen as technocratic issues, as they were 40 years ago”.

A different research agenda is needed to change this. Along a postcolonial lineage, Gaillard (2019) encourages local researchers to study their ‘local disasters’, instead of experts from the Global North rushing to major ‘events’ in the Global South. My thesis concurs with this (see 3.5.1) and with Gaillard’s (2019) call to ‘relocate’ the political agenda of disaster studies by contesting the technocracy within the field. In that regard, I intend to reposition the role of the ‘urban’ in disaster governance by developing a more critical approach to space in this process. While the concept of governance is in question (Offe, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2005), it is still relevant to denote the practice of power. As such, my thesis approaches urban disaster governance in light of work on geography and urban studies (Davidson & Iveson, 2015; Fairbanks, 2012; J. Gupta, Verrest, et al., 2015; Jaffe & Koster, 2019; Nygren, 2016; Smart, 2018) and incorporates anthropological (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002) and sociological (Tierney, 2007, 2014) perspectives. From this view, the city is better understood in relation to governance processes, as its production and reproduction results from social practices (Davidson, 2017). This approach to governance has been addressed by a range of urban research on urban nature (Cornea et al., 2017), adoption of discourses such as smart or resilient cities (Wakefield, 2020), and Anthropocene urbanism (Derickson, 2018). Governance remains a concept with the potential to expand emancipatory avenues of engagement with cities (Davidson, 2017; Davidson & Iveson, 2015). My intervention in the field of disaster studies, therefore, questions the underlying spatial notions of DRR governance and opens up the role of politics for risk reduction (see 2.3).

This objective reiterates an important societal challenge: while efforts to reduce risks remain partial and insufficient, the processes creating them continue to expand. The ongoing climate emergency makes this more critical, as the current pathway will increase “death, loss and damage” in such a way that “will surpass already inadequate risk mitigation, response and transfer mechanisms” (UNDRR, 2019, p. x). As argued
by the renowned disaster anthropologist Anthony Oliver-Smith, in current conditions “we are actually spending more money on constructing risk than reducing risk” (quoted in Raju & da Costa, 2018, p. 279). The point in this discussion is that, regardless of the socialisation of DRR as engendered by the SFDRR, it is unlikely that these urban policies will cope with ongoing processes that create and increase vulnerabilities and hazards. The advances in risk management made in recent decades, while important, become more relative as “little was accomplished other than mopping up excess mortality that had resulted from neo-liberal social and economic policy” (Wisner & Lavell, 2017, p. 3). To expand a research agenda on the politics of disasters, adoption of a different narrative is strongly needed.

Following the revelation by multiple efforts in disaster studies of the political causation of risks (Gaillard, 2019; Oliver-Smith et al., 2016, 2017; Tierney, 2014), a way forward is to reflect on the limits of DRR by attending to the structural production of risks. In this approach, neglecting dynamics and long-term processes that drive risks contributes to ‘disaster risk creation’ (DRC) (Lewis & Kelman, 2012; Rumbach & Németh, 2018; von Meding et al., 2020; Wisner, 2020; Wisner & Lavell, 2017). DRC results from failures to reduce vulnerability and exposure, as well as from increases in the same. In the words of Lewis and Kelman (2012): “Without tackling all vulnerability drivers – that are the roots of DRC – the conditions of DRC will continue to prevail over attempts at DRR”. To reverse this, Wisner and Lavell claim that “risk reduction is not enough”11 (2017, p. 16). What is needed instead is a more ambitious objective they call ‘resistance to disaster risk creation’ (RDRC). While levels of risk will always exist – as, for example, some natural hazards will continue to occur – a more ambitious goal is to understand the historically and geographically produced drivers of risks in order to contest them.

In a context where urbanisation has an uneasy relationship with the environment, where society chooses to live with disaster risks, and where DRR is not enough, RDRC is a way forward, especially if combined with strong reflection on the current governance paradigm for approaching risks. Governance and institutional elements form part of a more comprehensive way of understanding the underlying root causes of disaster risks and vulnerability, because such institutional arrangements engender society’s decisions to deal with vulnerabilities and hence the relative importance of reducing risks over other goals (Cannon, 2008; Oliver-Smith et al., 2016). Based on this, advancing DRR or DRC depends critically on wider processes governing cities, including the extent to which disaster governance arrangements are treating symptoms instead of

11 The authors here echo Naomi Klein’s (2017) call to proactively transform global capitalism by saying that “No’ is not enough”.
causes of risks, and ultimately maintaining them (Oliver-Smith, 2013; Oliver-Smith et al., 2017). This challenge constitutes the main puzzle of my thesis: To what extent do disaster-related initiatives incorporate the pressures of the politics of the city, and with what results? As hinted, the interdisciplinary field of disaster studies tends to maintain a nature–culture dualism that does not consider the intricate spatialities of disaster governance (see 2.2) – this represents the main knowledge gap of the thesis. This absence is especially relevant in three dimensions related to urban politics, each with a particular knowledge gap in the literature on urban disaster governance: power (see 2.4), space (2.5) and justice (2.6).

To engage with these gaps in knowledge, my research attends to four characteristics underlying the challenge of RDRC and urban disaster governance. First, the geographically situated nature of governance, including its emergent contestations, must be explicitly considered (Cornea et al., 2017; Gabriel, 2014; S. Jones et al., 2014; Lawhon et al., 2014). This means expanding on the joint consideration of urban and disaster risks from the everyday perspective of those living in hazardous areas (Bull-Kamanga et al., 2003; Ziervogel et al., 2017). Second, disasters can serve as ‘tipping points’ of transformation (Pelling & Dill, 2010), meaning that certain critical conjunctures are relevant to understanding the potential changes observed (e.g., the change of a political regime or the reinforcement of the status quo). Third, based on medical analogies that aim to ‘dissect’ the historical and geographical drivers of risk, some authors have developed ‘autopsies’ of disasters (Adams, 2013; Klinenberg, 1999) or conducted a ‘forensic’ analysis of disaster risks (see 2.3) (Oliver-Smith et al., 2016, 2017). This involved examining the histories of disasters, beginning with the social production of vulnerability, the disruption and associated relief and recovery, and ongoing risk management efforts. The fourth element is the need for attention to immaterial drivers of risks, as discourses and cultures are not exempt from power concerns in relation to disasters (Hoffman, 2002, 2016).

Before turning to my research questions, I reflect on the innovative character of the thesis. Significant advances have been made in the field of disaster studies through a focus on big ‘events’, as evidenced by the number of researchers rushing to study globally prominent disasters (Gaillard & Gomez, 2015). This, however, has overemphasised knowledge about low-frequency but high-impact disasters in comparison with other lower-impact ‘events’ that nevertheless occur more often (Allen et al., 2015, 2017; Bull-Kamanga et al., 2003). The problem with this is twofold.
First, the everyday urban characteristics that drive risks fall into a secondary position behind humanitarian, relief and recovery research (Oliver-Smith et al., 2016); and second, as local perspectives are excluded, knowledge production tends to maintain a paradigm that favours the status quo (Gaillard, 2019; Gaillard et al., 2019; von Meding et al., 2020). Reflection on the political causation of disaster risks, which include contentious issues on power/knowledge, are less extensive. This raises questions about inequality, theory and politics, all of which are under-researched in disaster studies (Reid, 2013). Nonetheless, global and urban policy agendas require this discussion, as six years following the launch of the SFDRR, the contributions of specifically ‘urban’ processes to governance and DRR/DRC remain underexplored.

1.3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In light of the problem highlighted above my thesis explores how urban disaster governance initiatives reduce risks while considering whether they (re)produce other pernicious socio-spatial conditions. This requires that we address the contentious relationship between urban and disaster risk processes. If disaster governance is having unintended results, including the creation and reproduction of risks, an in-depth and nuanced analysis of such interplay may provide clues as to why this is the case. For this, we must ponder the historical and geographical nature of both processes jointly. In other words, we need to examine long-standing and current disaster vulnerabilities, as well as the spatialities of associated disaster risk management initiatives. Based on the preceding discussions, my doctoral research responds to the following central question:

How do urban political dimensions of governance influence the reduction of disaster risk, and under what conditions do they (re)create disaster risks in post-disaster urban contexts?

I also pose four associated sub-questions corresponding to the three urban political dimensions mentioned and expanded on in the next chapter: power (1), space (2), and justice (3). The final sub-question considers these jointly (4).

(1) How do urban politics and their associated processes of depoliticisation and re-politicisation operate in governing disaster risks?

(2) How do spatial contestations and spatial practices influence the ways in which disaster risks are governed, and with what results?
How does attending to multiple disaster justice concerns contribute to understanding risk governance, and under what conditions do injustices emerge?

How does joint consideration of power, space and justice help to contest and resist the creation of disaster risks?

Empirically, I focus on the site of the 1993 aluvión as a post-disaster context in order to develop a situated perspective of the foothills of Santiago that considers historical and geographical inhabitation of the area. I follow a bottom-up strategy using mostly qualitative methods (see 3.3). To operationalise this empirically, I expand on four interfaces of disaster risk and urban processes: (a) housing recovery, (b) post-disaster spatial planning, (c) practices of disaster memory, and (d) the politics of risk management. Although these reflect some phases of the ‘disaster management cycle’ (i.e., response, recovery, mitigation and preparedness), my view focuses instead on the post-disaster trajectory as mirrored in the everyday perspectives of inhabitants of this at-risk area. This approach yields a more profound knowledge of the full spectrum of risks to local inhabitants (Satterthwaite & Bartlett, 2017) and understands their rights and social justice claims (Ziervogel et al., 2017).

Ultimately, my thesis explores a theoretical approach to understanding the spatialities of joint urban and disaster risk processes. With the aim of developing a critical perspective, I apply a spatial political economy approach (see 2.7) inspired by various critical theorists (N. Fraser, 2005b; Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1991; Young, 1990). By expanding on power, justice and space, and in conversation with critical research on urban disasters, my thesis intervenes in the field of disaster studies by ‘urbanising’ disaster governance. Drawing upon urban scholarship (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2014; Goh, 2020; Lefebvre, 1991), my work approaches disaster governance as a process that is critically tensioned by ‘urban’ dimensions of power. In addition, my perspective contests anti-politics and de-politicisation processes, not necessarily to prefigure social mobilisation and contestation per se, but rather to recognise governance as a power-laden process that, while seeking to achieve consensus, can lead to conflict and dissent. If disaster governance is intertwined in urban development processes, many of which produce exclusion and injustices, risk reduction initiatives must be subjected to examination in order to establish their outcomes – especially if they lead to DRC. Such a project, ultimately, converses explicitly with other efforts to ‘disrupt the status quo’ within disaster research (Gaillard et al., 2019; von Meding et al., 2020) by exploring alternative
ways of arranging a more just and inclusive way of governing risks. Based on my research questions, theoretical approach and empirical focus, Figure 1.2 summarises the logic of the thesis.

Figure 1.2 *Central concepts of the thesis*

The next chapter expands upon my theoretical perspective in detail. Before that, I address some limitations of the research and present the outline of the book.

1.4 **LIMITATIONS AND THESIS OUTLINE**

This chapter has launched my doctoral thesis, introducing my research site and the politics of urban disaster governance, describing the relevance of conducting related critical research, and presenting my aims and research questions. As with any academic work, my thesis has a number of limitations, three of which I will cover here. First, as a thesis focused on one research area, there is an issue in terms of generalising my findings. I expand on this in section 3.3, explaining why my research is a case study. This, along with other circumstances I describe below (see 3.5.2), led to decisions that affect the possibility of extrapolating my results more widely. Despite certain methodological and analytical considerations of my research design, selection of a sole case remains a limitation.

Second, I do not focus on certain dimensions of vulnerability such as gender or race – aspects which are particularly relevant on an intersectional level (Reid, 2013). Regarding
gender, although the majority of my interviewees were women and I integrate feminist theoretical approaches (see 2.6), my thesis does not incorporate ‘gender’ as a distinct analytical variable. Race, on the other hand, is unexplored for one empirical reason. With increasing immigration over the past five years, Chilean society is experiencing a cultural transformation relating to race; however, this did not arise in my fieldwork. This may be a shortcoming of my own analytical frame, as my lens did not attend to particular questions of race/ethnicity, despite a degree of openness of my ethnographic work (see 3.3.1). The lack of focus on gender or race/ethnicity is ultimately a limitation because these social development variables interfere in governing urban disasters.

Finally, a third limitation is practical. From the outset, my research project has engaged explicitly with issues that have policy relevance. However, my thesis was never intended to be ‘instrumental’ in regard to solving a societal problem related to governing urban risks. Given my interdisciplinary social scientific background and my freedom in developing my PhD project, my research is less ‘problem-oriented’ and rather takes a more analytical or anthropological angle. The obvious limitation of this is that I do not expect to shed light on the multiple problems and possible solutions associated with governing urban risks. While I offer some potential practicalities arising from my thesis, these are not as exhaustive in their application to policymaking as an instrumental perspective would be. However, my intention is to identify the limits of certain interventions and thus give a voice to the people affected by them.

Having addressed some limitations of my work, I now describe the structure of the book. Including this introduction, my PhD thesis is divided into eight chapters. I have chosen not to include a separate literature review chapter, as elements of this are presented above, in Chapter 2, and in each of my empirical chapters. Following this introduction, I present two chapters that help with the scaffolding of my argument. Chapter 2 presents a theoretical discussion to frame my approach to urbanising disaster governance. There, I review literature on disaster studies, and expand on my take on power, space and justice. The chapter ends with an analytical framing for the thesis as a whole. Chapter 3 concerns my methodology. I describe my research approach, explain my research methods extensively, introduce the case of the foothills of Santiago in more detail, and finish with a reflection on my research ethics and positionality.

Chapters 4 to 7 are my empirical sections, each of which addresses a particular way of interfacing urban and disaster risk processes. As an article-based thesis, each empirical
Chapter includes a literature review, focuses on certain elements of urban disaster governance in the foothills of Santiago, and can be read independently. Chapter 4 focuses on disaster recovery governance. It expands on the historical and spatial conditions that produced the 1993 disaster and shows how recovery (re)produced spatial injustices for survivors. Chapter 5 takes a step towards the politics of risk management, focusing on spatial planning instruments. I analyse a multi-level arrangement that implemented a buffer zone to protect the area from future disasters, before expanding on some of its unjust socio-spatial results. Chapter 6 then turns to the community level to study local memory initiatives. By focusing on the politics of memory and the production of a landscape through which to remember the 1993 disaster, this chapter presents the contested interpretations regarding disaster risk management among local groups and the relevant DRR implications. The last empirical chapter, number 7, turns to the urban political dimensions of risk management. In particular I expand on the dual dynamics of de- and re-politicisation and focus on the interplay of different modes of governing urban risk.

Finally, Chapter 8 takes up once again the general thread of my thesis and brings it to its conclusion. I respond to my questions on power, space and justice, arguing that particular conditions relating to depoliticisation, pro-growth urban development, and a lack of attention to grounded justice concerns are relevant to the perpetuation of disaster risk creation. A critical issue of development and risk management in the foothills is the extent to which governance can contest these trends. Based on these reflections, I conclude the thesis by proposing practical implications and avenues for further expansion of this line of research.