Disaster Karaoke After Typhoon Haiyan
Informal Sociability and Social Capital

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Within the existing literature on participatory communication in the field of C4D, references to the role of informal sociability and entertainment are extremely rare, particularly in the context of humanitarian relief. However, the data presented in this poster questions whether the process of ‘being entertained’ should be so easily dismissed.

Drawing on observations of a weekly live karaoke event at a humanitarian radio station and interviews with community members, humanitarians and local radio staff this poster presents evidence that the entertaining aspect of communication can be an important factor in fostering new linking and bridging relationships after a disaster.

The paper shows how different forms of participatory informal sociability contribute to fostering social capital and how this type of interaction may be relevant to so far under-researched interactions between humanitarian staff and affected communities that are part of fostering resilience. The paper also explores how this type of interaction relates to Filipino culture and traditions such as the cultural openness towards strangers experienced during local festivities.

The paper will give a new and detailed insight into the kind of relationships developed through informal sociability after a disaster, the limitations of these relationships, the reasons why informal sociability may be particularly suitable in the Philippines and, relate the concept of informal sociability to the field of humanitarian response.

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The paper offers evidence to suggest that entertaining parts of participatory communication which are often disregarded as ‘white noise’ can contribute to strengthening bridging relationships between community members themselves and linking relationships between community members and humanitarians. These relationships are an important part of social capital, which has been argued to strengthen social resilience of communities in hazardous environments (Mayunga, 2007).

Within the collected data the weekly karaoke shows and the greetings and song requests that were sent via text and handed in fit best into the category of ‘white noise’. I define white noise as the part of communication, which is disregarded because it belongs to more entertaining parts of communication. The term ‘white noise’ is used to describe the continuous noise from a switched on technical device which does not receive a clear signal, such as a radio. ‘White noise’ is also used to describe meaningless or distracting chatter, it is this last definition that best describes what this more entertainment/recreational communication seems to be seen as within the wider humanitarian field, both on a practitioner and academic level. Within the field of participatory communication this type of communication is often ignored, however, looking at the collected data disregarding this ‘white noise’ equals disregarding the majority of communication as this paper will elaborate. There is not much evidence that other publications have used the term ‘white noise’ and if they do, they do not necessarily assign it the same meaning. Shannon and Weaver for instance refer to ‘noise’ in their rather technical communication model. However, they define noise as a distraction that disturbs the message of the sender to the receiver, either in a semantic or a technical way (1964, pp. 18-19). Again this ‘noise’ is seen as a disruption of communication. During informal conversations with humanitarians the term ‘white noise’ referred to information that is not seen as useful, such as greeting messages to phone hotlines and that is perceived as less desirable than messages on for instance accountability. ‘White noise’ does not come up in humanitarian or resilience literature however, which may be because most publications appear to focus on different parts of communication. Although, there is no literature specifically arguing against ‘white noise’ as being useful, its perceived irrelevance becomes clear from the lack of it in literature and humanitarian programmes. If there is entertainment
it is usually related to edutainment, for instance radio dramas that encompass key messages. Although there may be exceptions, these kinds of radio programmes seem to be less able to be participatory as they are commonly used as a tool for behaviour change and more ‘top down’ dissemination of information rather than relying on bottom up community input. Moreover, they are part of the field of development communication rather than disaster resilience and humanitarian communication.

There are real life implications of this new found value of participatory informal sociability for resilience building that are currently mainly being dismissed. The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), a United Nations framework that aimed to build more resilience between the years of 2005 and 2015, does not mention strengthening relationships, recreation or similar keywords. It does however, put a focus on community resilience and touches on topics such as community participation and community based approaches (2005, pp. 1,7,10,). Under key activities for disaster risk reduction (DRR) as a national and local priority, the subsection on community participation the framework also mentions that one of the goals should be to: ‘promote community participation in disaster risk reduction through the adoption of specific policies, the promotion of networking […]’ (p. 7, emphasis added). This suggests that networking and as such bridging relationships are indeed seen as a priority conducive to resilience. However, the document does not explain further how these key activities should be implemented. This suggests that although networking is one of the many priorities, there is no focus on informal sociability or ‘white noise’ in connection with networking or with any other HFA goals for that matter. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFA), the follow-up framework of the Hyogo Framework for Action, is set for the years 2015 until 2030. The SFA does mention building up psychosocial support and mental health services (p.19) as part of disaster risk reduction. However, there are again no details as per how this support would look like and no mention of any communication that could be defined as white noise. The lack of detail within both the HFA and the Sendai Framework is not surprising as these are policy documents produced by a wide variety of stakeholders that have to agree on guidelines that will be achievable for a very diverse number of countries. As these two major policy documents for resilience do not mention any type of
‘white noise’ it seems reasonable to suggest that there is no indication that ‘white noise’ is seen as relevant to disaster resilience. However, the characteristics that I argue can be strengthened by white noise, such as establishing and strengthening relationship, are indeed mentioned. This suggests that more research in this area is needed and humanitarian response organisations should reconsider disregarding such ‘white noise’.

The paper analyses the collected empirical data in regards to how this type of white noise may actually be important for certain characteristics of social resilience, such as strengthening bridging and linking relationships between different stakeholders. The next section gives a brief account of the method and sets the context. The following section explores characteristics of social resilience, bridging and linking relationships and how they are relevant to social resilience and participatory communication. The next section will give more insight into the background of the karaoke in order to set the ground for the empirical data and is commenced by a section drawing out the participatory nature of the karaoke. The analysis of the empirical evidence regarding linking relationships between humanitarians and the affected community and relationship building within the community follows. Finally, the paper will conclude with the main findings of how participatory informal sociability contributed to relationship building and summarise the challenges and limitations of this type of communication.

**Method and context**

The research is based on a longitudinal case study of different aspects of social resilience built through the participatory approach of a humanitarian radio station in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, Philippines. The empirical research was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative research adopting an embedded research approach with participatory elements. The case study was researched during two field trips to the Philippines after typhoon Haiyan, one month (8, December 2013 – 8, February 2014) and eight months (10 July 2014 – 24, September 2014) after the typhoon made landfall.
The challenges faced in disaster research are manifold. One major challenge is the involvement of the researcher and the ‘usefulness of the research’ to the affected communities (Hoffmann & Oliver-Smith, 2002, S. 14). Richardson and colleagues, who conducted research in the wake of hurricane Katrina and Rita not only recommend that the needs of the affected community should be prioritised over the research but also that ‘[…] disaster related research specifically needs to be made available to and be useful for end-user communities (i.e., usable by those affected by the disaster)’ (Richardson, Plummer, Barthelemy, & Cain, 2012, p. 9). In order to address this need for usefulness I embedded myself first with the humanitarian radio station, Radyo Bakdaw (RB) that served as the case study and during the second field trip with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). This enabled me to on the one hand document the chaos of the first response phase, while also contributing to the response. Moreover, it allowed for observations at the radio station and participation of the broadcasters in my research.

The radio station, Radyo Bakdaw (RB) was built up by Internews, a humanitarian organisation focusing on media development and communication in humanitarian response. Super-typhoon Haiyan (locally known as Yolanda) made landfall in Guiuan on November 8, 2013 and caused the death of over 6000 people in the Philippines, displacement of 14.1 million people and damaged 1.1 million houses (UNOCHA Philippines, 2013). RB set up on November 26, 2013 as a humanitarian information service which aimed to link the affected community with the humanitarian response. In addition to their humanitarian programme RB also had a weekly live karaoke show, in which 15 local singers competed for an on-air radio interview and a small solar radio in front of a crowd of onlookers. The singers were judged by two radio staff and one weekly changing international humanitarian. The station closed down on February 14, 2014.

Overall four quantitative surveys were conducted (two during each field trip). The main part of the data was qualitative and consisted of: four focus groups (two during each field trip) and semi-structured interviews. In total 16 semi-structured community conversations and community interviews, 11 key informant interviews with RB broadcasters and
team members (five of which were interviewed during the first and second field trip) and four international humanitarians (two UN workers during the first field trip, two Internews team members as a follow up after the second field research) were conducted. Additionally, short-term observations were conducted at RB and a second local radio station, Radyo Natin (RN), which were documented through notes and reflectional journal entries. The RN observation served to set the RB data into local context. The data was analysed with R (quantitative data) and Nvivo10 (qualitative data and open ended survey questions). A broad based exploratory analysis with open coding allowed to investigate the data not only along predetermined themes of participatory communication and social resilience, but also gave room to explore findings and discover themes that were not initially expected. Using this open approach to analysis, data was explored from the ‘ground up’ through repeated reading and grouping or reoccurring themes. Yin has argued investing data ‘ground up’ can be ‘[…] leading farther into your data and possibly suggesting additional relationships.’ (Yin, 2014, pp. 136-137). Although, Yin is not necessarily describing relationships between people, looking for more hidden connections is extremely valuable when researching social resilience and participatory communication as they evolve around links between different stakeholders and enable to trace processes. Main challenges faced during data collection were the complexity of disaster research, working with vulnerable participants that were traumatised by the disaster and overcoming power relations and dealing with cross-cultural/cross-language research. The data was collected as part of PhD research, therefore the paper only focuses on one aspect of the data and findings. The following section will explore how the key theme of informal sociability relates to social resilience in the form of social capital and participatory communication.

Informal sociability, social resilience and participatory communication

Social resilience has many facets. I am drawing on the definition of social resilience from Mayunga (2007) who gives a concise overview over resilience in his five capital approach. Under social capital he lists ‘[…] activities such as involvement in public affairs, public meetings, informal sociability and trust’ (2007, p. 7). Other literature similarly cites
characteristics such as trust, community cohesiveness and strong links within the community and from the community to organisational structures as beneficial to communities (Norris, Phifer, & Kaniasty, 1995; Gilchrist, 2000). This paper defines social capital according to Robert Putnam who defines it as closely related to ‘civic virtue’ and can be defined as ‘[…] connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’ (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Putnam further argues that these networks and generalised reciprocity will benefit a community since it will ultimately lead to stronger political participation and mutual community help. While he does not propose a change in the political system these ideas do not collide with the notion of participation. If we look at a ‘softer’ approach to participation, such as by Servaes and colleagues (Servaes, 1996), the goal they describe is a more just society and social change, but not necessarily a complete change of power, rather they argue for an improvement of the status quo, which will eventually lead to a more equal society. It could be argued that especially, a strong participatory media would contribute to both goals – a more equal and economically strong society. Within participatory communication the entertaining aspects of communication are often dismissed. Arnstein (1969) does not mention informal sociability nor relationship building in her concept of participation nor does Freire (1970). However, they both assert the importance of a strong community and collective action, which has been argued to be a potential result of strong bonding and bridging relationships (Gilchrist, 2000; Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008). It is doubtful whether Arnstein and Freire would see value in informal sociability and social resilience. Rather, they might argue that this type of communication is merely a form of ‘therapy’ as Arnstein would probably identify it as nonparticipation- a form of communication that replaces true participation and keeps those in power in their position (compare p. 217). Similarly, humanitarian organisations may disregard informal sociability as less relevant to their work as it does not have a clear and direct link with their organisations mandate, which may rather surround accountability (Turnbull, Sterrett, & Hilleboe, 2013; Ljungman, 2012). I disagree with the notion that this type of white noise should be dismissed, as the data gives evidence to the argument that white noise is also valuable even if it is not leading directly to collective action or overthrowing an oppressive system. In the context of social resilience in a disaster response even these ‘lower levels’ of participatory communication are important
and lead to subtler factors that Arnstein disregarded as she was looking for ownership as a goal. But if ownership as a goal is replaced by social resilience these types of communication also become relevant. Moreover, even within these lower rungs of participation, there are more nuances than Arnstein describes. Even Arnstein herself alludes that her eight-rung ladder is ‘a simplification’ (p.217). I propose that the reason that Arnstein and Freire would dismiss informal sociability is because its impact may not be as strongly contributing to community ownership and systematic change. Compared to for instance instating community ownership over a humanitarian project, recreational informal sociability may seem less relevant. However, it appears that the impact may just be more fine-drawn and less obvious to explore. I define participatory communication, as a communication that is open, accessible and inclusive of community voices. If we take this wider definition of participatory communication it maps very well onto the characteristics of social resilience and highlights the potential contribution of participatory communication to social resilience.

Although, the data suggests that informal sociability at RB contributed to several of these characteristics the paper focusses on how informal sociability can contribute to strengthening bridging relationships and linking relationships. Mayunga (2007) does not go into detail of what he means by informal sociability, only that it is part of social capital together with public events. However, he says that social capital is contributing to collective problem solving and community’s being able to help each other. I suggest that informal sociability is important as it gives an opportunity for community members to re-establish and/or strengthen their relationships through spending time together in a social context. Warde, Tampubolon and Savage make a compelling case for this argument in their study of how recreational activities contribute to social networks and social capital (Warde, Tampubolon, & Savage, 2005). Warde et al claim that their most surprising finding was, ‘[...] that there is little evidence of homophily in these recreational practices, which indicates that informal social contacts may be especially important in generating "bridging" and "boundary- spanning" types of social capital’ (2005, p. 402). This type of social capital is relevant for social resilience but does not seem to be researched in connection to recreational practices/informal sociability in humanitarian context. Therefore, although Warde and colleagues’ data comes from the UK and is not from
within field of disaster research it is highly relevant as it gives evidence that informal sociability does play a role in social resilience. Key ideas are, relationships within the community (bridging and bonding relationships) and of the community with humanitarians (linking relationships).

Generally bridging relationships are referred to as being the relationships between neighbours and friends in a community, bonding relationships are ones between family members (Islam & Walkerden, 2014). At times this is also referred to as bridging or bonding social capital. A few authors suggest there is a third type, which is linking social capital or linking relationships. The latter connects ‘[…] different interest groups and mobilizes across different hierarchical levels (Woolcock, 2001 cited in Hearne & Powell, 2014). Shaw and Nakagawa similarly distinguish linking social capital and define it as ‘[…] ties between community and those in positions of influence in formal organizations such as banks, agricultural extension offices, schools, housing authorities, or the police […]’ (2004, p. 10). This would suggest that relationships between the community and humanitarians would fall into this last category of linking social capital as humanitarians belong to a formal organisation, which clearly are in a position of influence within the disaster response. It has been argued that bridging and bonding relationships are crucial to disaster resilience (Islam & Walkerden, 2014). Even though literature on social resilience does not always use the terms bonding, bridging and linking relationships they do underline the importance of strong links within a community and from the community to organisations as conducive to social resilience as they ‘[…] promote social learning, foster diversity and create opportunities for recovery, renewal and reorganization’ (p. 231) (Tschakert & López-Marrero, 2011). There are different arguments as to why strengthening these relationships is important for social resilience. LaLone (2012) for instance claims that local informal networks make a disaster response more efficient as these types or relationships mean that (geographically and socially) close and distant, affected and less or not at all affected community members help each other in the recovery process. She argues that disaster management and risk reduction should account for these relationships more and find ways to foster them as they mean a significant material and voluntary work contribution (2012, p. 228). Mayunga (2007) similarly sees social capital as important to resilience in order to make disaster response more efficient.
The paper particularly looks at relationships within the affected community and relationships between humanitarians and the community because these are the most relevant to the case study and the informal sociability observed during the field visits. Relationships within a community and its different units, such as families and neighbours, may be severely disrupted after a disaster, for instance through displacement or in the worst case through death (Simich, Andermann, Rummens, & Lo, 2004, p. 49). As Gilchrist elaborates: ‘[p]eople in communities which have been dislocated, up-rooted or traumatized may need help re-connecting with one another and with wider society’ (Gilchrist, 2000, p. 268). There is evidence suggesting that the support of bridging relationships, although significant in the first response phase, often cease to support (Islam & Walkerden, 2014, p. 288) and instead turn sour due to jealousy and distrust caused by unequal aid distributions (Ong, Jonathan, 2015a, 2015b). Regarding linking relationships between humanitarians and the affected community, there might not even be any relationship established yet as humanitarian organisations usually arrive after the disaster. This emphasises the importance of strengthening these kind of bridging and linking relationships and making them more sustainable. Of course there may be other linking relationships such as with local organisations or government but due to the limitation of word count we will leave these aside for now. The following section will discuss the data giving evidence that informal sociability in form of karaoke contributed to strengthening bridging and linking relationships.

Informal sociability and white noise at Radyo Bakdaw

Exploring the data, this disregard of so-called ‘white noise’ seems not always appropriate. Even though, there are just as serious limitations to this type of participatory communication as to other communication it should not be overlooked. Firstly, the sheer amount of communication that is seen as ‘white noise’ should lead us to analyse it more closely as it often is the majority of communication. For instance, between November 26th 2013 and January 17th 2014, Radyo Bakdaw received a total of 19,792 text messages from listeners. As figure one shows, out of these text messages 896 messages were tagged as
information. This means for instance questions and/or information input, ‘hard information’ on where solar lights had not yet been distributed and so on. 39 messages were sent in order to get in touch with or find missing family members or friends. The largest amount of texts amounting to approximately 18,857 messages in total is fan mail (compliments for the broadcasters or the radio), song requests and similar content. The latter falls under definition of ‘white noise’. This would mean that if we ignore said ‘white noise, we ignore the majority of communication taking place. Secondly, the study provides evidence to suggest that ‘white noise’ actually does contribute to some characteristics of social resilience. Although, this contribution may be to different, subtler strands of resilience it is equally important. Thirdly, there is a lack of academic exploration of this ‘white noise’, which means we should not be so quick to disregard it before we know more precisely what it may or may not influence.

![Text messages sent to Radyo Bakdaw](image)

*Figure 1 Text message data from Radyo Bakdaw November 2013 - January 2014*

Within the Radyo Bakdaw programme the karaoke together with greeting and song request text messages fall most clearly in the category of ‘white noise’ as their intended goal was primarily entertainment. The karaoke was a significant draw-in for listeners and was extremely popular, both with the staff and the listeners. The programme director and the humanitarian director of Internews had bought the karaoke machine spontaneously in Manila when they saw how popular karaoke seemed to be with the idea of making a show out of it. Although, the international radio technician who was on location for the first week was very involved in setting the technical side up it was the local RB staff who
organised and led the karaoke. One local broadcaster moderated the karaoke the majority of the time, but at times other broadcasters would take over when he was unavailable. The panel of judges was usually comprised of two radio staff and one weekly changing international humanitarian judge from different humanitarian organisations. The two radio staff members who were on the three-person judge panel were with a few exceptions always the same. The humanitarian judges, would give a very brief introduction to the work of their respective humanitarian organisation, but this kind of ‘official information’ was kept very brief with a focus on informal questions and good-natured banter between the moderator and the judges. Other broadcasters and radio staff would usually attend the karaoke and support it through for instance making sure competitors knew in which order they would perform, registering competitors throughout the week and writing down the scores for each competitor. Additionally, the radio technician prepared and supported the karaoke and ensured the karaoke was live on air.

The karaoke took place from the first week of broadcasting November 26\textsuperscript{th} 2013 (with the first karaoke event on November 29\textsuperscript{th}) until the end of broadcasting on February 28\textsuperscript{th} 2014, with a final karaoke event on the very last day of broadcasting. The first week that I arrived in Guiuan during my first field trip I was the ‘international judge’ during the karaoke and I attended almost all karaoke sessions that took place during my first field research either in part or fully, so a total of approximately nine events. The station stopped broadcasting on February 28\textsuperscript{th} 2014. Thus during my second field trip there were no karaoke events, which means that all questions on the karaoke during the second field trip were asked after it had ceased to exist. On Friday afternoon’s onlookers, supporters and competitors would gather under a tarp in front of the station in order to join the competition. There were only two instances during which the karaoke took place inside the studio due to rain. But the door and front window were open and so onlookers gathered under the tarp and looked inside the station. The winner of the competition was interviewed live after the karaoke with the moderator and judges and was given a solar/crank radio. A humanitarian recounted in an informal conversation with me during the first field trip, that she heard the karaoke continuously playing from different radios as she was walking through one of the Barangays.
When asked about the karaoke, radio staff called it ‘a bestseller’ (Interview R2), ‘the bearer of Radyo Bakdaw’ (RBFGD R2), the programme ‘[…] that all the people were waiting for every Friday’ (Philip) and the ‘signature show’ (RBFGD B2). This suggests that they felt that the karaoke was of special importance to the station. While they also spoke with pride about other parts of their work (for instance holding local politicians accountable, or solving problems for the community) the karaoke was the programme that the radio staff without exception seemed to be most excited to talk about. Other programmes were led by individual or small groups of broadcasters and although broadcasters were involved in each other’s shows, the karaoke was more of a team effort. When I asked the RB staff about the karaoke the mood of the interviewees would in all cases seem to lift from normal to happy, with a lot of smiles. Only one staff noted that the karaoke was also a little bit stressful to her at times as she was one of the judges and felt stressed about her decisions in ranking the participants being questioned (interview R2). Nevertheless, her overall recollection of the karaoke seemed very appreciative.

For the listeners the karaoke seemed equally important; both for the audience that listened to the radio on air and for the audience that attended in person. The competition was well attended and there were at times over 100 people in the audience, a humanitarian that attended as a judge counted as many as over 200¹. One of the radio broadcasters reported that approximately 400 people attended the last event, which was part of the closing celebration of the station on the last day of broadcasting. Although, there were some listeners and competitors who came regularly to the karaoke the overall crowd seemed to change and also appeared quite diverse in their demographics. The Karaoke was often the first thing that came up when I mentioned Radyo Bakdaw. When asked what his favourite show was one of the community members said that: ‘It’s only on the Friday when they are singing’ (Interview F2). One broadcaster admitted that she had forgotten to advertise for the karaoke on the itself day, but that there were as many people in the audience as always:

¹ http://worldenoughandtimeblog.com/2014/02/25/life-in-the-hub/
‘[…] I forgot to plug that we would be having karaoke, but the people were still coming. Because they already know that Friday is karaoke time. Even if I forgot to plug it, the people are here […]’ (Interview J2)

This points towards the karaoke as an established public event and contributes to the assumption that the event was at least to a certain extent part of the community calendar. During the week individuals came to sign up for the weekly competition or at times would text to put their name on the list. There were also requests via text message to the radio hotline for the karaoke to happen more often than once a week: ‘Hellow Dj, I hope your karaoke contest will be on Friday’s and Saturday’s so that students can also compete’. This listener message underlines the popularity of the contest. There were other text messages on the karaoke but a lot of them got deleted as only ‘informational text messages that needed following up were documented and the karaoke frequently came up in interviews and informal conversations. This clearly shows the popularity of the Bakdaw karaoke with the local community. One of the reasons why the karaoke was so popular was that it is an extremely common and well love past time in the Philippines, and is even described as the ‘national pride’ of the Philippines by Tarocco and Zhou (2013).

**Why is karaoke participatory communication?**

The format of a live karaoke competition on air was nothing new in Guiuan as RN had also aired a karaoke competition in the past. Additionally, there were (less formal) karaoke events at pubs and other events, but there did not seem to be any other regular public karaoke competition before and after Yolanda, except for the one at RB. The karaoke shows at RN had been taken off the programme a few years earlier. The main difference between the karaoke at RN and the karaoke at RB was that at RN the competitors were in a studio, which was closed to outsiders/listeners. Therefore, the karaoke at RN was not accessible to the public but only to pre-chosen competitors. It is reasonable to assume that this lack of audience was also apparent when listening to the karaoke show on RN. Whereas on RB one could hear the audience on air and thus know that this was a public event, the RN show was clearly recorded in a studio without onlookers. This
suggests that listeners could have perceived the RN karaoke as a regular radio show whereas the RB karaoke was clearly an open event that invited listeners to participate.

If we compare the two stations (image 1 and 2) there is a quite striking difference in their physical approachability. Whereas RN features a big locked gate the RB station is in a former public health building with a simple house door that was mostly open. Even if the door was closed (for instance because of recordings) the windows were open and
especially children but at times also other onlookers would peak inside. These different settings already strongly influenced the karaoke as the RB station lends itself to a more open event in which the audience are part of the programme and also can be heard on the live-show. Onlookers would interact with the competition, loudly supporting or disagreeing with the votes of the karaoke judges, commenting on the singers’ skills and giving their support through applause and shouts. As photo 3 shows, the event was of a casual nature, without a stage and just a string to distinguish the area for the competitor and judges and the audience space. The audience was tightly packed together and there was the buzz of chatting, community members were interacting with each other.

One of the RB broadcasters who previously had worked for RN explained that: ‘[at RN] we had karaoke also, but compared to the Bakdaw karaoke singing contest on the radio, [it was] more lively at Bakdaw and more audience were coming to the station – and a lot of contestants. I mean, every week!’ (Interview Pido). This also underlines the difference in the openness of the two radio stations and their physical accessibility. Whereas the karaoke at RN was simply another programme that was meant to be entertaining, the karaoke at RB was a public ‘lively’ event open to all. This openness from the karaoke appeared to derive organically from the overall ethos of the station, which saw the community as its core (RB FGDG). This openness was also apparent regarding the audience and the participants. The only screening of competitors was in regards to whether they had already performed in order to try and give as many different people a chance as
possible. Broadcasters started this screening on their own account after the waiting list got longer and some competitors wanted to join more than once, which seemed unfair to the RB staff. There was no restriction as to what age competitors had to be. According to one of the broadcasters who regularly supported the karaoke, competitors’ age ranged from seven years to approximately 70 years (FB conversation J3). Unfortunately, there is no documentation of the average age of participants so there is no reliable data on the average of the competitors’ gender or age. During the events that I observed, the gender of competitors was quite mixed, as was their age, possibly with a slight tendency to younger and middle aged participants. Singers would choose their songs, in Tagalog or English. One of the interviewees who had a longstanding ‘black time’ (paid air time) programme at RN and was very critical of RB, but was still delighted when it came to the karaoke. After criticising RB for what the interviewee perceived as lack of professionalism and one-sided reporting, the interview turned to the topic of the karaoke, which brought a big smile to the interviewees face. She seemed genuinely enthused when remembering the karaoke: ‘That one [the karaoke programme] I admired, because it’s all from the different sides and sectors, whether they’re educated or not, they’re able to express themselves, that one I really like’ (Interview MA1). This statement conveys that even from a critical viewpoint the karaoke appeared to be open to all community members and was also used by different social classes of the affected community, which speaks for the inclusivity of the event, which fits with the definition of participation asking for inclusive and accessible communication. Moreover, the comment of the interviewee that she is ‘admiring’ the programme implies that the karaoke was something special, something that may not have taken place in a similar fashion before. Because the karaoke was open and accessible it gave an opportunity for a participatory type of informal sociability between different stakeholders of the typhoon response: the audience, the broadcasters and the international humanitarians. This echoes the findings of Putnam and colleagues on a public library that through its openness contributed to heterogeneous bridging relationships (2003, p. 2). The next sections will showcase the different types of relationships strengthened through the karaoke and how these were limited in their scope and depth.
Linking relationships between humanitarians and the community

It has been argued that linking relationships between affected communities and organisations are a crucial component of resilience (Islam & Walkerden, 2014, p. 289; LaLone, 2012, p. 225). Nakagawa and Shaw for example argue that linking relationships are ‘[…] the most important for betterment of the economic environment’ as the resources of bridging and bonding relationships are commonly able to provide more profound financial resources (2004, p. 10). There do not seem to be a lot of publications that go into detail of relationships between individual humanitarians and communities as a concrete example of linking relationships, rather authors mention organisations or government bodies or how these relationships are often problematic due to the power imbalance. However, the importance of the relationship between humanitarian organisation and communities does show up, for instance in the recent drive to establish communicating with communities (CwC) and Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP). These initiatives indicate a rather abstract form or relationship between humanitarian organisations and the affected community. Nevertheless, this surge in community relationships with humanitarians could suggest that closer relationships between humanitarian organisations and the community may make it easier to hold organisations accountable, even out power relations, but also that two stakeholders which have a stronger relationship to each other may work together better, thus enhancing the quality of relief services. There is also the notion of trust, which can be enhanced through closer linking relationships and may contribute to better collaboration from both parties. Research by the Feinstein Centre suggests that there are potentially large chasms between humanitarians and affected communities, which may lead to problems: ‘[t]he cultural differences, power relationships, and modus operandi of the two sets of actors are […] problematic’ (Feinstein Centre, 2006, p. 9). Other authors such as Stockton have pointed out similar tensions between humanitarians and the communities that they serve (Stockton, via HAP). Although, informal sociability cannot solve this type of dissonance completely, it could be argued that informal sociability may bring the community and the humanitarians closer together. Research by Buchanan-Smith, Ong and Routley suggests that communities may prefer a more personal kind of humanitarian response. They found that in the wake of typhoon Yolanda, the by far most popular humanitarian organisation was the Buddhist
Tzu Chi Foundation. They found evidence, which suggests that ‘the Taiwanese Tzu Chi Foundation’s language of love and care appeared to fit the Filipino culture better than the more consumer-oriented language of accountability and complaints mechanisms of many traditional international humanitarian agencies’ (Buchanan-Smith, Ong, & Routley, 2015, p. 49). This would implicate that affected communities may actually prefer a more personal relationship to humanitarians. This fits with data from a short survey (field trip 2) regarding the preferred communication channel of affected community members. The survey revealed that 10 out of 23 respondents would prefer face-to-face communication to any other type of communication and 11 individuals said they preferred group discussions with humanitarians. Facebook and text messages got another two ‘votes’, which means that two individuals must have chosen them in addition to either face-to-face communication or discussion groups. This suggests that communication channels that are more personal were actually preferred by the community. Informal sociability may contribute to a more personal relationship as the community and humanitarians encounter each other in a ‘non-work’ context of recreational activities, such as the karaoke.

Humanitarians attended the karaoke as judges, intermission guest singers and onlookers. The RB staff (and sometimes myself) would ask specific humanitarians or humanitarian organisations if they would participate as a judge or send one of their international staff members to participate as a judge. On a few occasions humanitarians approached the station to ask if they could be a judge at the karaoke, which implies that some individuals were keen to attend and participate in the event. One humanitarian recalls on her blog that it was ‘[...] quite an honour’ to be asked to be a karaoke judge and continued express how she enjoyed attending the event: ‘[the karaoke] was great fun, and a refreshing and nice break from all the stress and drama going on at work at the moment!’2. This portrays the karaoke also as a recreational event for the humanitarians, which would underline the definition of karaoke as informal sociability.

2 http://worldenoughandtimeblog.com/2014/02/25/life-in-the-hub/
When I asked a female senior RB broadcaster, whether it mattered if that the third karaoke judge was a humanitarian, she was affirmative: ‘Yeah, because it really linked the INGOs and the locals’ (Interview R2). This suggests that some broadcasters saw the ‘linking potential’ of the karaoke, when reflecting on its functions. When asked if RB linked the community with humanitarian organisations another radio broadcasters answered that ‘[…] one of the best examples would be during the karaoke show […] Because it is a time in the radio station where there are foreigners, humanitarians that would also join in the celebration with the local people and in that we… It’s like we bridge the gap, we bridge the differences between saying that he’s a foreigner, he’s from outside, outside the place [Guiuan], but then again they’re also enjoying with us’ (Interview J2). The broadcaster was one of the younger staff members who was supporting the karaoke, mostly through keeping track of the competitors’ scores but also moderated the event at least once. This would be a strong indication that the karaoke gave an opportunity to build linking relationships between the community and humanitarians through giving a space for shared informal sociability. It conveys that the karaoke gave chance for the ‘outsiders’ to show that they are ‘similar’ and enjoy the same things as the community.

This assumption fits with research on the fiesta culture of the Philippines. Guevarra and her colleagues who researched the Sariaya Agawan Fiesta in the Philippines argue that the fiesta is ‘[…] a cosmopolitan phenomenon because communities engage in a disposition of cultural openness with the strange and the stranger’ (Guevarra, Gatchalian, & Sir Tiatco, 2014, p. 1). The same broadcaster also noted at a different point in the same interview that she felt the karaoke ‘[…] was like a Fiesta at Radyo Bakdaw every Friday’ (interview Jessa). This gives weight to the suggestion that the karaoke may have fulfilled similar functions as a fiesta. Although the karaoke does not have the cultural religious importance of a fiesta there are certainly similarities as it is also a public event with music in which the community comes together. If the fiesta is seen as an opportunity to encounter ‘strangers’ this points towards that the karaoke can be seen as a similar event to a fiesta, a community gathering, during which the encounter with ‘the stranger’ is an encounter with humanitarians. Therefore, the karaoke tapped into a culture of public encounters with strangers. This puts weight to the argument that the karaoke indeed served as an opportunity to build links between humanitarians and the affected commu-
nity. Two of the broadcasters themselves claimed that for them it did not make a difference whether or not there would be International humanitarian judges (Interview P2, Ph2), but that it did matter for the listeners. It could be that the broadcasters wanted to show themselves as more ‘international’ than the listeners as they were used to foreigners whereas many of the listeners may not have had as close connections to foreigners as them, but there is no further evidence corroborating this interpretation. Nevertheless, one of the latter two broadcasters also recalled the international judges playing a particular role for the listeners: ‘Every Friday, we get international judges. It’s also fun for the people because when they are listening to us and they can also hear international judges from different countries. Because before the contest, we introduced them to the listeners. Maybe the listeners can think ‘This is not an ordinary karaoke contest because there are also foreign judges on air!’ That’s additional fun’ (interview Ph2). His answer seems to imply that the foreign judges were boosting the appeal of the karaoke as a special event, perhaps because other prior local events did not have foreigners participating and thus the RB karaoke seemed more interesting and new. The main reason for him appears to be that it added to the entertainment. This underlines the feeling of happiness that the next section explores. Another broadcaster said that the karaoke was also an opportunity for themselves to connect to humanitarians. She recalled an example of a humanitarian who was a judge at the karaoke and then became a very good friend of one of the broadcasters (interview R2). The broadcaster in question and the humanitarian are regularly meeting up and were still in touch about half a year after the karaoke event. This would suggest a strengthening of the relationships between the radio staff and some of the humanitarians.

Interestingly, humanitarians also mentioned that the karaoke gave an opportunity to bond with their local staff (who were often mainly part of the affected community). A Danish humanitarian noted that he and his colleagues organised attendance at the karaoke as a social evening for humanitarian staff and that ‘It strengthened the bonds between European workers and local staff’ (humanitarian karaoke survey). This provides evidence that even for the humanitarians that attended the karaoke as an observer there was a strengthening of relationships. An Italian humanitarian working for OCHA recalled
that after being a karaoke judge, community members recognised him on the street: ‘The day after [the karaoke] many local people [I] met along the road called me by name with big smiles, I realized I was very popular within part of the local community :))’ (humanitarian karaoke survey). This indicates at least a short-term change of relationships between humanitarians and the local population. When asked whether the karaoke had any impact on her work, a humanitarian worker for Oxfam, who also attended the karaoke as a judge, responded that the karaoke ‘brightened’ her day and gave an opportunity to interact with the affected community in a less grave context than her work usually requires: ‘As an aid worker, the hours are long, and it can be exhausting and overwhelming hearing stories of tragedy and suffering over and over. It was nice for me to have a fun break from that, to spend some time with local people in a fun and entertaining way, and see firsthand [sic] some of the talents they possess’ (humanitarian karaoke survey, emphasis added). Especially the highlighted section provides evidence that at least some of the humanitarians participating in the event enjoyed the karaoke also because it gave an opportunity for informal sociability with the local population. Another humanitarian from Germany answered to the question on how the karaoke made him feel that: ‘It was a great experience to take part in the karaoke. Because of the singing but also because of being part of the community experience [sic] that radyo bakdaw became in Guiuan, in particular it was a bridge between expats and locals’ (humanitarian karaoke survey). This again points towards the karaoke as an opportunity for humanitarians and affected populations to interact and that this connection was relevant enough to mention. I myself was a judge at the competition and although it was also a little bit stressful to be put on the spot and judge other people’s singing, it felt like an opportunity to connect to a large group of the community. It is questionable how long lasting this connection was, but in the moment itself it seemed to melt different parts of the humanitarian and local community into one. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these interactions were of a rather superficial nature. The humanitarians did not necessarily get to know individuals of the affected community, thus the relationship is to be seen as a looser type of networking, potentially as a step towards relating to one another in a more personal way and supporting the start of a relationship but without the intimacy that bonding and bridging relationships are built on.
The relationship between communities and humanitarians also relates to the Filipino culture of patronage. In the Philippines there is a long history of patronage system, which is based on support through patrons who for instance in exchange expect their clients’ electoral support (Esguerra III & Villanueva, 2009, p. 13). And indeed one of the community interviewees used the word ‘patrons’ when describing the karaoke. In response to the question how the karaoke made him feel, he recalled: ‘Great! Great! The patrons and the announcers, the other audience, they are always happy there.’ (Interview Federico, emphasis added). The direct word ‘patron’ did not come up in any of the other interviews, but that might also be because the question to the participant was about humanitarians rather than patrons directly. However, research by Ong and his colleagues suggests that this interviewee was not alone in viewing the humanitarians as patrons and that the patron–client relationship had a great influence on the overall humanitarian response and how affected communities interacted with humanitarians. The humanitarian system fits very well with this idea of patronage, as humanitarians providing support for the affected population. However, as humanitarian organisations do not even ask for anything in return the power relationships may be even more difficult. Ong et al. therefore argue for a feeling of being obliged to be grateful (Plan International, ‘Who’s listening’, 2015). This could mean that the karaoke was able to ease these kinds of relationships and may have lent itself as an opportunity to get a ‘closer look’ at these patrons, who have suddenly become so involved in the community. There certainly appeared to be an interest in the encounter with international humanitarians as this text message for instance underscores: ‘DJ, we just want to request to have a grandfinals [sic] for the karaoke singing contest. So that we can see who is the greatest and I hope the judges will be foreigners’ (text message, January 31st 2014). Although, the text does not give evidence as to why the sender wishes the judges to be foreigners, it nevertheless points towards some listeners being aware of the international judges and wanting them to be part of the event. This interest in the foreign judges was not necessarily true for all participants of the karaoke. Some of the data suggests that not all listeners were necessarily aware of the profession of the humanitarian judges. This becomes apparent in the answer of a community member from Salug who, when asked who the judges of the
karaoke were, said: ‘Foreign judges, I think. I was not able to know their names or where they came from because I only focus on the singers, not the judges’ (interview community member Salug 3). Another listener did not recall any foreign judges at all (interview community member tc 1). This suggests that the karaoke did not serve as an opportunity to strengthen linking relationships for all listeners or audience members. These two respondents were the only ones either not recollecting foreign judges at all or not being aware of them being humanitarians. There is no quantitative data on this, but within the qualitative data overall more respondents remembered the humanitarians as judges. This suggests although the linking potential of the karaoke was limited the argument does appear to hold for some listeners. The data suggests that through a participatory approach to communication certain types of white noise may actually contribute to characteristics of social resilience. Some of the humanitarians who participated in the karaoke or attended it did feel like it contributed as an opportunity to bond with the local population and local staff. However, other humanitarians when asked whether the karaoke had any impact on their work or stay in Guiuan appeared to imply that the karaoke was mainly entertainment, albeit good one. One humanitarian from Germany for instance said that it did not really impact his work or stay except for a ‘[...] morale boost ;)... but I did get recognized from time to time when strolling around in Guiuan...’ (humanitarian karaoke survey). Although, the last addition to his answer, that he got recognised when walking around Guiuan does suggest a heightened interaction between the humanitarian and some of the local population, but not on a scale that was meaningful enough for the humanitarian to recognise it clearly. This fits in with my own first impression of the karaoke. Since I was looking for themes such as collective action and accountability I dismissed the karaoke as only an entertainment programme at the beginning. Only after revisiting the literature and analysing the data further did I see the karaoke as a relevant contribution. A Filipino humanitarian who participated as a guest singer equally said that the karaoke had not impacted his work or stay in Guiuan: ‘[n]ot really since I rarely mentioned that I took part in the said competition/entertainment program’ (humanitarian karaoke survey). This suggests that the humanitarian worker in question only saw the karaoke as pure entertainment rather than an opportunity to relate to the affected population. The fact that the latter humanitarian belonged to the national Filipino staff would suggest that there is less of a barrier between him and the local population. However,
this still underlines the point that some humanitarians saw the karaoke as white noise and not as a direct contribution to the typhoon response. This may also limit the potential of such endeavours in the future, as it might be hard to argue for a humanitarian information programme that is on first sight purely entertaining. At RB the programme could develop into this kind of informal sociability because it was part of a whole humanitarian radio station, which saw the community at its heart. In a context where a humanitarian organisation does not have the full hours of a radio station to use but for instance only a few hours weekly, it might be a tough sell to incorporate this type of programme.

**Bridging and Bonding Relationships within the community**

According to one of the broadcasters the karaoke gave an opportunity to bring the community closer together: ‘*[I] think [the karaoke] it’s one of the reasons or it is one of the examples where we can say that radio helps keep people closer*’ (interview J2). Through the karaoke the station seemed to be functioning as a social meeting place for the community to enjoy themselves and be entertained. It also gave an opportunity to swap stories with friends and neighbours but also with individuals from other areas from the affected areas. As Gerrity and Steinglass claim the loss of home is frequently ‘[...] accompanied by profound disruption, which affects the internal fabric of family life, social networks, community ties [...]’ (p. 260), which makes the reestablishment of relationships in Guiuan, a municipality in which almost all houses were either damaged or destroyed all the more relevant. Karaoke competitors did not only come from other Barangays but even from other towns in Eastern Samar, such as Taft, Quinapondan or Salcedo (Interview R2, Interview P2, Interview community member tc 1). Although, some of the participants may not have come only in order to attend the karaoke it is nevertheless notable that they chose to spend their visiting time also by joining the karaoke. It can be argued that the karaoke gave an opportunity to meet people from other affected areas and exchange stories, this suggests that the karaoke also aided relationships between different affected towns. This assumption is supported by the recollection of a community member who said she had made a friend from a different town (Salcedo) during the karaoke (Interview community member tc 1). It may be that with the word ‘friend’ she actually meant acquaintance, however it still suggests that the karaoke gave
an opportunity to the audience to get to know other affected community members. Additionally, competitors also came from different towns in order to compete in the karaoke, again suggesting that this event of informal sociability brought people from different social and geographical areas together. This is emphasised through one of the RB staff who explained that, ‘[i]f they were watching the karaoke singing contest, a lot of people were there and then asking ‘Hey, what happened to your town? What happened during, after Yolanda? What’s going on? How’s your mother, father?’ asking people and getting information to each other’ (interview P2). This suggests that through exchanging news and information relationships were strengthened and emotions shared. Warde et al suggest that recreational activities foster social capital in the realm of community togetherness and bonding and bridging relationships. The karaoke clearly falls into the category of recreational activities. But additionally it is a type of recreational activity which is based on community togetherness, rather than a recreational activity such as going to the gym which has been argued to not be supportive to social capital as it fosters individuals being on their own rather than interacting with others (Warde, Tampubolon, & Savage, 2005, p. 406). Another broadcaster recounted that ‘[…] the karaoke was a venue for reunions among the other municipalities and Barangays’ (interview Rica). This again reinforces the notion that informal sociability gave an opportunity for the affected population to mingle and possible re-bond and connects to the at times quite disputed concept of community music therapy, which has been argued to be a great way to create community and connect individuals (Aigen, 2014, pp. 153-154). This fits with the karaoke as an opportunity for a shared musical experience to experience community togetherness. The majority of interviewees seemed aware of the fact that there were contestants not only from different Barangays but also municipalities. As for instance one community member and radio listener recalled: ‘Ah the singing competition! We are very happy, because the children and people here enjoy watching the contest. All people get challenged to compete with other people [from] other provinces that’s why every Friday we are listening’ (interview Federico). This suggests that the interaction with individuals from other localities was also an important factor. The playful competition and mingling. This once more adds weight to the karaoke as an opportunity to strengthen and explore bonding relationships in a recreational informal setting. Another community member from Salug, conveyed that: ‘I feel happy, because through that contest I realise that there are
hidden talents here in Guiuan’ (interview community member 3 Salug). Her mention of ‘hidden talents in Guiuan’ could be seen as a contribution to community cohesiveness through appreciation of the talents of other community members.

In the Philippines karaoke is an extremely popular national past time. Ergo the RB karaoke show was part of a bigger type of activity that was already engrained into the lives of the affected population. Moreover long established local fiestas and other public festivities show that informal sociability in connection social capital is part of Filipino history (Bankoff, 2007). So it is not clear how well this approach to social resilience would be transferrable to a culturally different context, for instance in a society where social gatherings are not as common and historically established. A comparative study in a different context would be useful in order to explore whether there are similar experiences in other countries. A study by LaLone, whose article researches resilience to environmental disasters for instance suggests that the mobilisation of bonding social capital ‘can be tied to the long-standing Appalachian regional support patterns […] that are still a part of the regional mind-set today’ (2012, p. 219). Similarly, it seems reasonable to suggest that the karaoke worked as an instigator for strengthening community relationships because informal sociability is something that may have happened regularly before the typhoon in the Philippines through for example town fiestas, which bring the community together and serve an opportunity to bond (Usamah et al.; Bankoff, 2007). The strengthening of bonding and bridging relationships also relates to the Filipino notion of ‘pakikisama’ (getting along) and ‘pakikipakapwa’ (relating). According to Usamah and colleagues this value is a crucial component of rural communities and ‘[…] can be interpreted as “smooth interpersonal relations” (Usamah, Handmer, & Mitchell, 2014, p. 185). This indicates that the karaoke also worked as an opportunity for community togetherness because this is a value that is deemed as important in Philippine culture. This suggests that the Philippine culture, and in particular the rural culture, lends itself especially well to the notion of strengthening bridging and bonding relationships through informal sociability. Still, research in other countries does suggest that informal sociability contributes to resilience, so although the context of the Philippines does appear to
lend itself especially well to informal sociability other studies suggest it may also work in different contexts (Warde, Tampubolon, & Savage, 2005, Hemingway, 1999).

Conclusion

The data suggests that the white noise of participatory communication, in this case the karaoke, contributed to strengthening relationships between broadcasters, humanitarians and the affected community, which is a crucial component of social resilience. The data also shows that both the location’s openness and overall inclusiveness of the event mattered in order to be conducive to strengthening these relationships. This supports the argument that a more participatory approach lends itself well to certain characteristics of social resilience. But the level of participation is not in the category of community ownership or questioning power imbalances. Thus it does not directly align with the ideas of Freire (1970) and Arnstein (1969). There are also limitations to white noise. From a participatory communication perspective, the karaoke may not have contributed directly to more ‘solid’ achievements such as collective action and there is no evidence that suggests that it questioned established power relations. However, there is evidence that through strengthening linking relationships between humanitarians and broadcasters/the community the former were more approachable, which Nakagawa and Shaw argue to be a relevant factor to resilience (2004). The data suggests that through the karaoke strengthening bridging and bonding relationships were improved and at times built. However, for all types of relationships it is not quite clear how long lasting their impact was. Did relationships last longer than the radio station, for instance? Another finding was that the concept of informal sociability and its participatory nature worked especially well in the context of the Philippines because it leaned on a pre-existing culture of public informal sociability, openness to strangers and an importance of relationships (Usamah, Handmer, & Mitchell, 2014). Therefore, the concrete example of using karaoke for informal sociability may not be easily transferable to other contexts. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that participatory informal sociability may also work in another context if adapted, albeit not necessarily as effectively as in the Philippines as
literature suggests that communal recreational activities and informal sociability contribute to aspects of social resilience (Warde, Tampubolon, & Savage, 2005). This suggests that more research into informal sociability as a contributor to social resilience is needed and practitioners should be cautious to dismiss ‘white noise’. The karaoke was not planned in order to contribute to these characteristics of social resilience. Rather, it developed almost organically into an opportunity for strengthening relationships, although, the local RB staff who managed the whole process of the karaoke did become aware of some of these functions when reflecting upon them they were not a set goal for them. This could mean that it would be hard to replicate this kind of event in a different setting, with a different set of staff members. Nevertheless, the evidence that this kind of white noise contributes to resilience is relevant enough to give it further consideration and research it in a different context. As the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) put a great focus on community centred response, informal sociability is a section of communication that should be taken more seriously and be explored further by both academia and practitioners.

Bibliography


