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Participatory Power Mapping:

A collective identification of development actors in a small cattle village of Chiapas, Mexico

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Keywords: power mapping, participatory approaches, ethnography, actors, local development, *usos y costumbres*, Mexico

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ABSTRACT: *This paper draws on insights that stem from a participatory power mapping experience in a remote cattle village of Chiapas, Mexico. It seeks to portray how villagers see themselves in terms of their roles in village development. The paper also looks at the way power is understood and exercised by actors involved in local development. The research was carried out using an action research approach that focused on collective* usos y costumbres *(U&C) as the most important framework ensuring social order at the village level. Collective and individual exercises were stimulated through a series of workshops and the use of semi structured interviews as part of an approach blending participatory and ethnographic methods, permitting a local perspective on how the spaces of action are created and shaped by the villagers. The different groups or committees making up the administrative structure of the villages are seen as local spaces for political action. The main locally 'recognized' or 'validated' actors and their interrelations are identified as the most powerful elements in the local decision-making process. Villagers as well as outsiders must act within the framework of local values and norms to attend development interventions.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Mexican context, small and remote villages can be seen as both political and natural congregations (Guevara-Hernández, 2007). However, they are also social entities in which internal and external forces are constantly interacting. The dynamics of these interactions and the forces behind them translate into the concrete actions of local social actors and thereby construct and shape what can be called 'village life' (Hickey and Mohan 2004; Long 2001). Thus one can consider the conflicts, behavior and progress of village actors as manifestations of the interacting internal and external forces within daily life (Hunter, 1953 and Hunter, 1978). In other words, actions implemented by individuals and organizations define their role in village society (Long and Long 1992). In such situations, governance systems represent the regulating frameworks within which shared codes, values and relations mediate power relations.

The way actors shape and re-shape local structures through the routines of daily life is a crucial element for understanding social phenomena (Mosse, 2004; Giddens, 1979; Nuijten, 2003). The identification of local actors, their actions, the structures that frame their way of acting and the manner in which they emerge is important in any attempt to draw a social portrait of a rural community (Long, 2001). How power is exercised in social life can be grasped using the concept of the social map, or power map (Crozier and Friedberg, 1980; Sadomba, 1996).

In Mexico, many studies on power issues in villages have been carried out, mainly by focusing on aspects of local development, natural resources management, management of environmental problems, agricultural interventions, and agrarian conflicts (Govers, 2006; Nuijten, 2005; van de Haar, 2001). Several studies have also looked for better insights into local realities from a conventional anthropological perspective, often by observing villages and people as researchable objects (Chevalier and Buckles 1995). In Mexican villages, this "objectivizing" approach has at times led to adverse reactions towards researchers on the part of local villagers. A common criticism has been that researchers arrive, conduct their work and leave, without following up or leaving valuable information with their villages of study (Alemán, 1998). It is not

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strange to see villagers deny researchers entry to their village or even expel them. Despite the clear presence of tensions between the observers and the observed, few studies have tried to overcome these research constraints.

This paper aims to explain how local governance systems shape the social configuration of California village, a remote cattle village in the uplands of Chiapas created by land squatters in the late 1970s. The relations between social actors, mainly villagers and certain outside entities working locally, determine the function of the social and political institutions of the village. However, conventional anthropological research approaches are unwelcome and not useful in California, due to their inherent violation of important yet scarcely visible local social codes, which themselves are a critical element of local power relations. The need for a new approach led to the development of a set of participative tools whose initial use is described in this article, along with what they reveal about California village, and the very impacts of their use on villagers' sense of agency in their local context.

Power mapping, utilized by development workers with participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and other participatory approaches, has also been called actor mapping, structure mapping, social mapping, retrospective community mapping, among other terms (Bass *et. al.,* 1995; Chambers, 1994 & 1999). It is a set of tools intended to provide a visualization of local actors and the groups of social forces that play a role in the local configuration of forces (Fundación Arias, 1997). Power mapping makes use of a simple mathematical procedure known as the Venn diagram, which is used to graphically place local actors in terms of their importance in affecting village decisions. In terms of the mapping exercise, an actor can be a person, a group or an organization. The placement is carried by the villagers themselves. It is called power mapping here because the actors should be those actively involved in decision-making related to the regulation of village life and thus hold a certain amount of power (Guevara-Hernández *et. al*, 2008).

In this study, power mapping techniques are used to provide a window into the unwritten regulatory system of traditional and collective *usos y costumbres* (*U&C*), which largely govern local development possibilities. These tools allow the detection of recognized and unrecognized social spaces where decisions are made. Questions such as how power is gained, used and lost are also considered within power mapping techniques, providing valuable clues for an analysis of natural, political and economic resource control in California village, as well as identifying who benefits from rural development interventions. Finally, this paper elucidates who is included and excluded within decision processes in California, how networks emerge, and how they influence social integration and consensus formation. The participatory approach outlined below fosters a lucid analysis of power in different structural contexts, especially in situations where conventional techniques are not locally accepted, and reveals the importance of the *U&C* system to California village's development potential.

2. CONTEXT: THE MEXICAN VILLAGE IN MODERN MEXICO

Contemporary Mexico finds itself in crisis: the productive sectors are disarticulated, institutions suffer a crisis of credibility, sustainable use of national resources is at stake due to overexploitation, political elites are mired in political scandals, and emigration to the U.S. and Canada creates a permanent exodus of as many of the poor as can make it, with negative effects on social cohesion of rural villages (Meyer 2005, Riva-Palacio 2006, Wallerstein 2006, Walton and Lopez-Acevedo 2005, World Bank 2006). Contemporary Chiapas State in Southern Mexico, apart from its biological richness, is among the most impoverished states in the country, and is characterized by high percentages of indigenous and impoverished *mestizo* populations. Resource richness and human poverty constitutes a highly contradictory situation in Chiapas (Berumen 2003, INFDM 2003, Nigh and Rodriguez 1995). As in many other rural and remote parts of Mexico, it is often said that the problems mentioned above can be easily seen at the local level. Current threats to local cohesion include massive out-emigration, overexploitation of local resources and frequent incursion into illegal activities as the only escape mechanism for coping with local adversities. The causes seem to be rooted in the exclusion of rural people, and the highly centralized policies and policy interventions of the federal state (Grindle 1996, Mata 1999, Zuñiga 2006). In other words, rural development is still approached from a top-down perspective, with dangerously little true local development. This situation fosters radical—often localist—visions that might one day trend, if undressed, towards separation and civil war.

Extension workers, researchers and development agents are often trained in a specific area and then delivered to the villages with a mandate, as if 'development' were a practical linear process. Agents often come with the best intentions, aiming to integrate the local population into their initiatives. But they tend to overlook, or do not know, or misunderstand the contexts and dynamics of small villages. For example, they miss out on the importance of the local institutions and actors responsible for local governance. Issues of local politics, associated with power and decision making, are often not visible to those who intervene (Guevara-Hernández, 2007).

Beyond the modern Mexico of industry, consumerism, and electoral politics, thousands of Mexican villages continue practicing traditional mechanisms to regulate daily life, administer resources, and maintain cohesion, apparently well beyond the reach of the state. Some authors reinforce the cultural sense of village, as the original expression of 'indigenous' – the way people live, organize their activities and define their identity, while others add special emphasis to notions of consensus, justice and equality (Bonfil-Batalla, 1990; Govers, 2006; Nuijten *et. al.,* 2005). Indeed, the concept of village[4] has been a central subject of

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[4] The term `community´ will be used more in the sense of communal activities, actions or resources of the collective. The latter is related to the type of villages labeled by the Mexican

research for important anthropologists during decades.

Mexican villages may often share four elements to be constituted as 'communities of common practices' or *pueblos*: a) relation with a common territory, b) sense of belonging, c) common culture, and d) collective project for the future (Carlsen, 1999; van der Haar, 2001). 'Indigenists' researchers and some anthropologists suggest that many indigenous villages do not have this last element. But as 'communities of common practices,' villages are normally constituted by groups of families linked by ties of reciprocity, rituals of marriage, and other social relationships, such as *compadrazgos* (godparentship), in which property is shared and social obligations taken on (De Mente, 1998). Moreover, villagers often share a social feeling of protection and exercise a collective right to defend their territory (Guevara Hernández, 2007).

In this sense, villagers create their lives within spaces created by themselves, as expresses the 'being community' concept in an indigenous language of Chiapas. In other words, these rural habitants live according to commonly held norms that seek to benefit the collective wellbeing. It is their existence as collectives that contrasts to the individual organization of life found in 'contemporary' Mexico. The local power is in the peoples' hands, under their own logic, and based upon their local political structures (Schermerhorn, 1961). Interactions and communication with outside development actors are translated through these local power logics and structures.

3. VILLAGES: IT'S STILL AN AGRARIAN QUESTION

Agrarian change during the long period that preceded the revolution of 1910-21 was characterized by the consolidation of vast landlord estates (*haciendas)*, which often encroached upon and even swallowed whole villages and traditional, collective land holdings. Landlords invested power and money inherited from the colonial period to create, with the *hacienda* model, an early form of agrarian capitalism (García de León, 2002; Grindle, 1996). The construction of a national railway, a project overseen by the regime of President Porfirio Díaz, was used as a means to privatize and consolidate land access throughout Mexico. The massive and violent conflagration that took place as part of the revolution of 1910 was largely led by villagers who had lost their access to land and with it, their means of subsistence. The lasting fruit of their decade-long armed struggle was the Constitution of 1917, which established the *ejido*, a form of collective land tenure which would become the model of radical land reform for Latin America. The constitution created three land classifications: private, public, and social. However, the consolidation of political power after the revolution did not immediately carry out land confiscation and distribution, leaving landless and land poor peasants without solution. Only under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, from 1934 to

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government according to land distribution. However, the term *village*, in this case, considers both *ejido* and agrarian communities of Mexico.

1940, was land redistributed on a massive scale to villages and rural communities, putting finally into practice the land forms established by the Constitution of 1917 (Lombardo-Toledano, 1973). Social land, which was basically distributed among the rural population, was also further subdivided into *communal* (mainly for areas in Southern Mexico with indigenous populations) and *ejido* lands (mainly in North, West and Central Mexico). This brought about two types of small villages: e*jido* villages and communal or agrarian villages.

Ejido lands are linked to villages, in which members (*ejidatarios*) live and are integrated as a social and economic community. They are considered to have rights to services as locally available health care, basic schooling, electricity and water. According to Mexican legislation, the *ejido* is a legal entity in the 'social interest sector, responsible not only as an economic entity but as a form of guaranteeing social wellbeing. Land must legally be held by Mexicanborn peasants. The holding consists of individually managed parcels, called *parcelas ejidales*, along with several types of communal parcels, such as school plots, housing zones, and any water and forest resources associated with the area assigned. Two basic kinds of *ejidos* exist: the 'individual' *ejido*, in which land tenure and 'ownership of rights' are legally vested in a community, but cropland is allocated by plots (*parcelas*) on a semi permanent basis among *ejido* members. The 'collective' *ejido* is an entity in which land resources are pooled for collectively organized usage (Gledhill, 1991). The majority are of the individual kind, while collective *ejidos* can be found in parts of Southern Mexico.

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The form of social property that is not included in the *ejido* concept is manifested in communal or agrarian villages, where villages have 'possession rights' of a given surface of land, but are not owners. In this land regime, individual properties (plots and other resources) do not exist and everybody is entitled to receive from the communal territory 'the necessities to live' (Cámara de Diputados, 2006).

In general, social lands (*ejidos* or agrarian villages) have been worked by *ejidatarios* (members with access to individual plots and rights to common resources), *comuneros* (villagers without individual plots, but with rights to common resources) and *avecindados* (new settlers or incomers without the same access to land or common resources). Social lands cannot be bought or sold, but only inherited within families. On the other hand, private lands have been worked by owners, sharecroppers, and landless peasants. Private farmers, or *rancheros,* have property titles and are allowed to sell the land and buy new parcels (DeWalt, 1979; Eckstein, 1978).

The various land forms created with agrarian reform in Mexico have produced an associated diversity of social organization types (Nuijten, 2003; Warman 1979). For Southern Mexican villages that hadn't been affected by land privatization in the pre-revolutionary period, land reform allowed for the continuity of village life, rather than major changes (Concheiro and Grajales, 2005; van der Haar, 2001). The most important change was that a range of villages, including new *ejidos* and *comunal* areas, were formed to in order colonize

the rainforest areas of Southern Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula. The older established villages were officially recognized and largely left without land redistributions, but within administrative agencies of land reform (Concheiro and Grajales, 2005; García de León, 2002), setting the stage for the organizational forms found today in Southern Mexico. These organizational forms have been protagonists of a series of social and economic conflicts relating to the provision of public services and resource exploitation (Gledhill, 1991 & 2005; Nuijten 2003).

In most villages, the natural resource base is the crucial economic element of villagers' lives. Complex social factors determine the access and use of local resources. It could be said that economic factors play the most important role in village daily life, yet local processes are not always easily or comprehensively described in economic terms. Social, as well as economic, needs are figured into the perceptions and aspirations held by villages and individuals. The interplay of social and economic factors, formal and informal structures created by land reform, and the role of unwritten U&C codes constitute important questions for researchers.

4. METHODOLOGY

Field work was undertaken during 2003-2006 in an isolated cattle village called California, located in the highlands of Villaflores Municipality, within a nationally protected area called *La Sepultura* in Chiapas, Mexico. Participatory and ethnographic methods were used in organizing participatory workshops to bridge the gap between researchers and villagers; these methods were also adopted in the hope of developing a new and viable perspective on how to conduct action-oriented research through joint generation and validation of information, as suggested by Alemán (1998), Guzmán *et al.* (1996), and Ricks (2003). Thus, researchers sought to involve villagers in reflection on local realities, and shared all information gathered with village research participants.

Five workshops were conducted, in which all the villagers were invited to participate through door-to-door invitations. Participants were generally people from the various sectors of the village, including those with duties in the local governance system, women, elders and children. Workshop attendance averaged between 30 and 50 people. Power maps were drawn up with the villagers. The information here presented was gathered from drawings, figures and diagrams drafted by workshops participants. Some complementary or missing information, in relation to the actors and their roles, was added from informal and/or semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants, concurrent to workshops.

In the workshops, participants identified and differentiated a series of entities in terms of *internal and external* and (locally) *recognized and nonrecognized* actors. Internal actors were defined as those included in the collective decision-making processes at the local level, while external actors were limited in their

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participation in the moment of decision-making at the local level. Recognized actors were those that had a formal position or voice in the political space of California, e.g. government agents, local committees; unrecognized actors were those that exercised power through other means, such as family obligation or religious affiliation. At every point, an attempt was made to determine the role of *U&C* in assigning power and shaping social interactions at the local level.

5. FINDINGS

Socio-economic and biophysical characteristics of California[5]

California is a mixed village where *mestizos* and indigenous people have lived together for more than 30 years. The village has about 800 inhabitants (of which 75 % are children and young people). There are 70 men with resource rights and 10 settlers (or *avecindados)* who do not enjoy the same resource-use rights as the *ejidatarios*. This village is inhabited mainly by immigrants from other regions of the state of Chiapas and the coast of Oaxaca State, to the north. California village is the result of two typical Mexican phenomena: a) land conflicts and fights against land concentration by private interests, and b) the process of re-location of communities displaced by a federal hydroelectric projects. Most forced re-locations in Mexico are reflected by popular mobilizations and social conflicts of resistance. In California, the common language is Spanish, but among families from the same ethnic group certain indigenous languages - mainly Tzotzil and Tzeltal – are still in use. The village is located in the highlands of Villaflores municipality, within the hot and water-rich Frailesca region of the State of Chiapas. Villaflores municipality is governed with an electoral democracy, in which political parties compete for the head of the municipality every three years. California is only one of the 992 villages in the municipality. Its political representation is through a municipal agent, who is internally selected every three years. Nevertheless, the village is basically administered through its own structure of *U&C*, supplanting in many cases its official political structure.

Moreover, California is located within the Sepultura Biosphere Reserve, a nationally protected rainforest. The village – as would be expected – has a humid tropical climate, even at an elevation of nearly 1,500 meters above sea level. During the day the heat can become exhausting, but at nights temperature can go down to between 16 -18 degrees oC. The rainy season lasts from May to the end of March with annual rainfall of 2,550 mm. Arteries of a major river cross the village at seven points. Several of them are dammed to create a water storage construction, from which water is distributed among the population through pipelines. The natural vegetation is composed of rainforest trees, with some tropical pines. About half of California's houses are made of modern construction materials; the rest are made with locally produced clay blocks and thatched using available plants, with cleanly swept dirt floors and hammocks used for sleeping.

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[5] Information mainly gathered from a pre-diagnosis made during the first visits to the village.

Villagers base their main activities upon small-scale subsistence cattle and farming. They crop maize, bean, chili pepper, banana and mango. The small portion of the agricultural production that is sold on the market goes to the city of Villaflores or to the state capital of Tuxtla Gutierrez. Most villagers earn cash from extensive livestocking based on small herds of a local cattle breed. Most women have a few chickens and turkeys, principally to obtain eggs and meat for the family. Small gardens with medicinal plants and vegetables are a common sight surrounding the houses. For most villagers, production and particularly agriculture-related activities are seen more as a way of life than as an economic activity. Animals, plants and other resources are generally considered as a form of livelihood security. It is locally said that *'produce is sold only when we really need cash or have an emergency'*. The village land totals 1,222 ha, distributed under two systems, *ejido* and common lands. Main crops and animals are kept on *ejido* lands. The other natural resources, such as forest wood and firewood, animals that are hunted for meat, and water, are regulated through a system of common rights, shaped by internal rules exercised through traditional *usos y costumbres* law. Thus, the village is partly administered through official, legal channels and partly through the use of customary, informal law.

The collective reconstruction of California history[6]

Participative historical reconstruction of California is shown in Table 1. The collective recognition of important dates in village history give an initial idea about the local development efforts and the village's structure as a rural social entity, and provide a chance for workshop participants of all ages to form a common platform in order to better analyze present power structures.

California is a young village; it was founded in 1980 as the result of an agrarian movement of *avecindados* (local residents not included in *ejidos*) from the highlands of Villaflores municipality during the late 1970s. A group of about 20 people, all landless farmers who lived as *avecindados,* left their village looking for a 'piece of land to crop' and found the land that would become known as California, left vacant by an absentee landlord. While working in a neighboring village as landless laborers, they held meetings during the evenings and organized themselves to take over the zone and convert it into an agricultural and residential settlement. Thus, California could be described as a squatter settlement.

Alongside the construction of the first houses, the inhabitants began to build a social identity. From its origins, the open processes of decision-making and a strong sense of commitment and mutual responsibility among villagers have been a very important element in the process of 'building California.' The current social configuration in terms of actors and relations in California is thus the result of over 30 years of internal organization with locally defined rules and norms; at the same time, it is a result of compliance with outside forces such

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[6] This was carried out through two workshops and use of the timeline as main tool. Cross-checking and triangulation was undertaken with key informants.

as the municipality and the initiatives of the top-down federal system. The rules and norms in the village are derived from the mixed traditions and visions of villagers from different origins and ethnical groups. Most of these elements originate from the different cultural and political arrangements settlers experienced in their places of origin, as well as what they have created in California.

Table 1. The most important historical moments of California, as identified during the workshops.

Year	Event
1975	Before California was founded, this village was a huge ranch called Sólo Díos Sabe (Only God Knows). The owner was Mr. Adalberto Hernández Gómez. According to the villagers, Mr Hernández never showed documents on his property rights
1979	A group of about 20 people began the 'fight for the land.' The original settlers were: Antonio Ramírez de la Cruz, Carlos Martínez Pérez, Belisario Sánchez Méndez, Régulo Gómez Méndez, Seir Gómez Sánchez, Martín Gómez Sánchez, Leandro Hernández López, Miguel Sánchez Hernández, Manuel Sánchez Sánchez, Andrés Sánchez Sánchez, Francisco Zaraus Martínez, Alfonso Guillén Moreno, Alfonso Guillén Grajales, Daniel Guillén Grajales, Juan Gómez Paquistán, Joaquín Escobar Escobar, Ciésar Gómez Sánchez, Mario Hernández López, Jesús Barrera, Rosendo Rincón Magdaleno, Ciro Hernández, Alfonso Hernández Estinca, Reynol Hernández Estinca y Asunción Pimentel.
	The first 'houses' were built, using plastic bags hung from trees. Then, a temporary local Municipal Agent (MA) was appointed in the village as recommended by municipal officers.
1980	The first extraordinary meeting held in order to constitute the Village Assembly (VA) and the *Ejido* Commission (EC). At this moment, the U&C system was accepted as the main ruling mechanism.
	During 1980 and 1981, the settlers held several talks with the municipal authorities and provided the first identification data and pictures of the occupied area.
	Several verbal and armed attacks were launched by the landowner. Many felt intimidated and left the village for several weeks, although most later came back.
1981	The area was covered by natural vegetation, including virgin tropical pines and oaks. As settlement continued, trees were cut to sell and to make space for shifting cultivation. Crops like maize, bean, pumpkin, and chili pepper were grown. Later on, a few trees and other fruits were planted. Banana, sugar cane, mango, citrus, sweet potato, and sweet cassava were later
	The first credits are provided by the municipal office for rural development. The credits received were for cropping maize and bean. The municipal president was Roger de Coss.
	Credits were altered. Villagers opened new areas to crop more maize and bean, then a federal officer came to stop them and some were threatened to be taken to jail.
1983	The first wooden houses were made and a preliminary delimitation of the 'urban' area of the village was drawn up.
	Several families (wives and children) join male settlers as the community grows. Some come from different regions of the state; from the Tzotzil and Tzeltal highlands *(*Las Margaritas, Soyaló, Bochil, San Francisco, San Juancito, San Juan Chamula, Mapastepec, Joaquín Miguel Gutiérrez), from the coastal region of Chiapas: Tuxtla Chico and Huixtla, and from the coast of Oaxaca: Chahuites and Tapananepec.
1985	Electricity was introduced with support of the municipal office called Copladen.
	The first cows were provided by the rural development office of the municipality.
	Villagers started to look for support in many offices to build up the *ejido* community house and introduce pipelines to bring water from the rivers into the village.

	Activities of two local churches began in the village: Adventist and Pentecostal.
1986	The first elementary school was established, "Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla." Built with Copladen support, it had only one classroom. The municipal president was Álvaro González (alias "Big Horse")
1991	A satellite telephone is installed, making possible calls with the outside world.
1993	A conflict with the neighboring villages Tres Picos, Los Angeles and Ricardo Flores Magón breaks out, based on disagreements during the federal process of lands delimitation.
1994	President Ernesto Zedillo visited the village, together with the Chiapas governor Albores Guillén, for two reasons: to bring material support after a hurricane which destroyed nearly all the houses; and the federal recognition the village as a communal settlement as well as an *ejido.*
	The first rumors about a national decree for a nature reserve surrounding the village territories are heard.
1995	September 17th (Mexican national independence) is the only local celebration allowed under the village constitution, due to the fact that the religions being practiced did not allow people to have massive celebrations for fear of drunkenness and fights.
1997	The second classroom is built with Copladen support, during the municipal period of Oscar Zebadúa.
	A credit providing some herds of sheep is received from the municipality.
2000	The rural development program of the municipality provided more than 2,000 coffee plants to the village.
	Thirty dry sanitary cabins were installed in some family' homes during the presidential period of Víctor Hugo Zuart Velázquez through the Copladen. At the same time, the SEMARNAT provided the village with thousands of seedlings of tropical trees to reforest the village lands.
2001	Copladen provides another set of 38 dry sanitary cabins.
2002	SEMANARNAT paid villagers about $60 USD per hectare for reforested areas.
	Copladen provides metal pipes to re-habilitate the village's water system.
2003	An extension of the electrical network is in process of being accepted. Copladen assists villagers in their negotiations with the CFE.
2004	The idea of seeking a village bus came out during power map workshops and a committee was formed.
2006	Conformation of a regional organization for organic farming supported by the village leadership.

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Most of the younger villagers from California have been raised within the *U&C* system and thus hardly analyze the origin and evolution of the village. This lack of consciousness was a frequent complaint that village elders often mentioned to the research team. They consider California to be at a critical point in its development since the leaders who initially founded the village and developed its governance structures are aging (most are in their 70s and 80s). The shared feeling of being at a turning point may have made young and old villagers more open to the collective exercises proposed by the researchers, since these exercises invited them to reflect as a group on past achievements and the present reality.

A differentiation of actors

Internal actors

The villagers of California identified 10 internal actors: six recognized and four without local recognition (Table 2 and Figure 1). The internal and locally recognized were: the Ejido Commission (EC), the Vigilance Council (VC), and the local Municipal Agency (MA). All are locally considered authorities with important responsibilities and duties. The other three internal and recognized actors are local committees for water, health care, and education. The responsibilities of the EC are: to assist and monitor the progress of the different committees, to convene the village assembly, and to facilitate the process of selection of candidates for cargos, or official positions. The EC also deals with external initiatives, and local conflicts, and assumes administrative

responsibilities for governance of the village. For instance, the Ejido Commissioner (leader of the EC) travels outside the village to negotiate with different official institutions. The other members of the EC support his or her activities. In other words, the members of the EC are in charge of the village governance and they work under the validation of the village assembly.

The MA is the entity that maintains a close link to the municipal officers and programs of Villaflores and is also locally appointed by the village assembly. The MA consists of two persons and its only role is external representation of the village and participation in some municipal meetings in Villaflores where village needs are brought up. In addition, the MA also has the role of an information broker and usually brings to the village information from the municipality regarding initiatives and regulations. The MA has always been seen by the municipality as the main link between village and municipal officers. In fact, it was the first formal actor recognized at the municipality level, before California became an *ejido*. The municipality itself suggested constituting this entity in order to establish permanent contact and exercise a certain 'control' over a young, emerging settlement. The VC is in charge of keeping the internal social order, maintaining proper use of natural resources and watching that the EC and MA work peacefully together. It only has an internal function, and does not maintain links outside the village.

In practice, there is good communication and coordination among the six locally recognized actors. An articulation of activities of each actor was developed, using consultation with the village assembly and villager mobilization as mechanisms of popular participation in the exercise of power. Observations by the research team during official meetings between these local, recognized actors and outside federal agencies suggested that these local six showed a sophisticated cohesion, representing California village as a lucid entity with specific interests relating to external support.

Four entities were considered in workshops to be local, unrecognized actors: the Protestant church, the Catholic church, and two women's working-groups ('Mujer Campesina' and Mujer Campesina 1'). While this group of actors emerged from the inside the village, their dependence on external support and use of unofficial

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space for exercising power led to their denomination as unrecognized actors, with limited participation in local decision-making.

Figure 1. The power map developed through participatory means at California. Internal actors are those shown within the dark oval marked "California." Recognized actors are those that overlap in the center of the figure; all other actors are unrecognized. Solid lines denote permanent links between actors while dashed lines denote temporary links
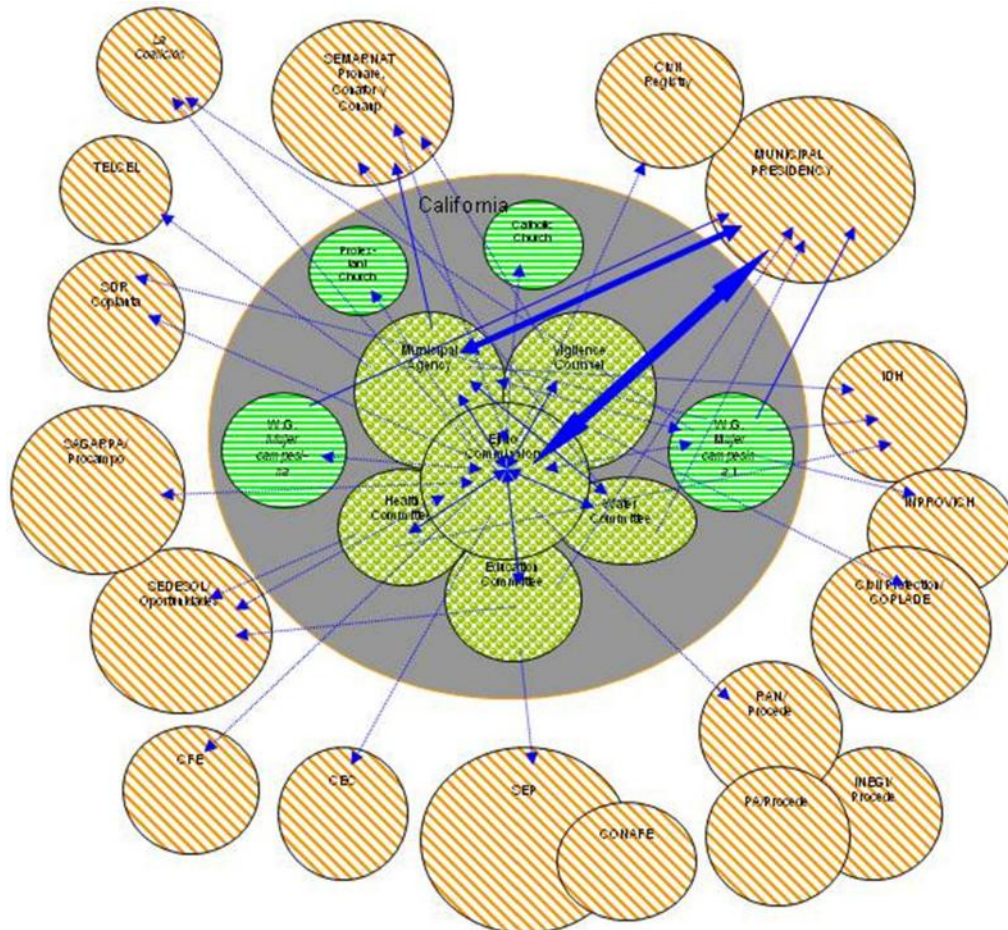
External actors

In California, the 18 external actors identified are almost entirely composed of governmental institutions present in the village because of specific projects or support programs carried out through local and internal actors. They are mostly services providers, comprising 16 federal, state and municipal institutions or programs, a private telephone company and a civil society organization. External actors identified were: the municipality of Villaflores, IDH (Institute for Human Development), Civilian Registry, Education Secretariat, CONAFE (SEP), INEGI, Agrarian Regulatory Agency, National Agrarian Registry, SDR (Coplanta), SAGARPA (Procampo), IMPROVICH,

Civil Protection (Coplade), SEDESOL (Oportunidades), the Federal Electricity Commission, the State Road Commission, and SEMARNAT (PRONARE, CONAFOR AND CONANP). The private company providing rural telephony is called TELCEL, and the civil organization for farmers is called *La Coalición*.

The role of the village assembly

The village assembly was not identified as an internal actor by workshop participants. This surprising non-identification at first puzzled researchers; yet discussion revealed that it had to do with villagers' notions of the concept of action (and committees as actors). When facilitators asked specifically, villagers again said that the assembly is not a committee with an actionoriented task, but rather a jury offering verdicts on the legitimacy and effectiveness of local processes, and validating the actions taken by all the local committees. Basically, the responsibilities of the village assembly are suggestion, approbation, rejection and supervision of actions taken by the internally-recognized actors constituting the executive branch of the *U&C*.

Since all the internal actors are 'recognized' by the village assembly, these actors have local power to deal with the all the duties assigned to them and to establish links with outside actors on behalf of the village. However, beyond the EC, the VC, MA, the other internal committees also play very important roles in the establishment of external links, since the VA also entitles them to do so in order to perform their duties.

Interactions between actors

In workshops, villagers defined the links between social actors in order to delineate the functions of each actor as they relate to each other, and to establish the character of these interactions (dependency, mutual support, etc.). Initially, villagers placed the identified actors very close to each other to show functional vicinity. As the map developed in subsequent workshops, they decided to draw arrows to offer a better visualization of the variation of links among the actors. Collective debate gave form to the web of interactions that show link permanency, direction and intensity (Figure 1).

The power mapping exercise revealed two types of links between actors: temporary and permanent (shown by dashed and solid arrows). Permanent links were identified between the six internal, recognized actors, and between the municipal authority and certain key local actors (including the women's groups). The rest of the links between actors were determined to be temporary or purely functional. The thickness of arrows between actors in the power map represents the intensity of interactions; the more intense links were found between the EC, the internal municipal agency, and the municipal presidency (Figure 1).

Links of 'recognized' internal actors with the 'non-recognized' internal actors (i.e. the women's working groups and churches) were not clearly specified in the

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workshops. The village authorities give support to these groups to organize local events and allow them to use village buildings and recreational areas. However, any such relations can be classified as temporary. This implies that the women's groups and churches do not have any direct responsibilities in the eyes of the village authorities. They are in fact autonomous and conduct their activities according to their own agendas. The two women's groups focus on productive alternatives and the churches were presumed to be more concerned with the spiritual life of villagers than with involvement in civic governance.

Interestingly, most links are directed from internal to external actors, revealing the local perception of the relationship between local actors and outside agencies. Rather than a top-down, developmentalist perspective of intervention or welfare, villagers manifested a bottom-up vision of local initiatives made possible through ties with external entities. This may have to do with California's historical development as an occupation and settlement of idle land by landless workers, who challenged the municipal and local authorities to recognize their legitimate land rights and thus facilitate access to public services. This same village history may explain the description as 'temporary' given to all links with external actors except for the municipal authority. It is through these links that negotiation of conditions and resources that benefit the village is carried out, but links depend on specific projects and activities, and are not seen as eternal by villagers.

The women's working groups

The women's working group 'Mujer Campesina 1' has temporary links to two internal actors considered to be local authorities (the EC and MA). However, it's most important links are to the various external actors that provide material and organizational support. For instance, the group has permanent and very important links to a political party (PRI – not identified as an external actor in the workshops) and to *La Coalición* (a regional organization that mobilizes people and resources with political interest and party ties). According to some villagers, this women's group is becoming an important player in organizing household developments.

The other women's working-group called 'Mujer Campesina' is less active, equally dependent on links to a political party, in this case the PRD (also not identified as external actor), and to some municipal officials. The group also obtains some resources and projects for those women who do not participate in or sympathize with the first women's group. Affinity or discrepancies between participants in each group relate to the political ideologies behind by the two political parties supporting these groups.

Both women's groups have their own spaces of action beyond the spaces within which the recognized internal actors interact. Participating women run production projects in the agricultural and domestic spheres, and enjoy external support that allows them to receive material benefits for their households. The spaces for recognized actors are historically maledominated, and have

formally and informally excluded women. The two w o m e n ' s w o r k i n g g r o u p s c r e a t e n e w s p a c e s f o r women's self-empowerment through economic independency and by improving household material conditions.

The Catholic and Protestant churches

The group of Catholic villagers does not involve more than 10 families, around 10% of the total population. Once a month, Catholic family members come together and celebrate service at the house of one of the members. On occasions, a priest comes to the village for the celebration of mass. The links of the Catholic families are based on their relationships to the mother church in Villaflores. Three other religious conglomerations are locally identified as a single grouping comprising 70 families who practice Protestantism. One group is Pentecostal and the other two are Adventists. There is no major doctrinal difference between the last two, but they split up due to interfamilial conflict. Religious organization plays an important role in establishing links between villagers and external actors, outside of the official, public social structure.

Power as locally exercised

Villagers from California described power as the right to participate in the decision-making of the village. As they expressed, power can be used individually or collectively, but must be publicly recognized and validated by the village assembly. Again, the understanding is functionalistic – the purpose of power is to run the village. California villagers—at the moment—do not consider their *cargos*, or political positions, as tedious chores. According to them, a *cargo* represents an opportunity to travel, meet people and make contacts outside the village for 'future needs'. They considered that a person in a position of power, e.g. holding a *cargo*, must be prepared for and capable of carrying out the duty. An element of the village *U&C* is that those who hold positions in the village must work their way up the ranks, from supportive to leadership positions, demonstrating their prudence along the way.

In its official political structure, California has a three-year cycle in which all the recognized internal actors, their links and duties are enacted, and then revised, through an electoral system. However, the *U&C* system is developed upon an intricate structure of links and codes that are constructed on a greater timescale, manifesting a 'common sense' law that changes constantly, but very slowly. These changes are then reflected in the function of internal social actors, whose use of recognized political and social spaces must conform to the unwritten *U&C*. Thus a dual power structure is established, in which recognized and unrecognized actors are constantly (re)shaping village life, often through official, visible structures but as representatives of a collective will embodied in the *U&C* system. Collective *U&C* is silent and invisible as long as the visible

power structures are able to provide the goods and services necessary for village life to continue within accepted norms and limits; when these authorized channels are unable to deliver, *U&C* becomes visible through villager mobilization, protest and social expression outside of official power structures.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Many research and policy interventions have been implemented in rural Mexico, but have generally sought to capture cultural, economic and/or political phenomena through analysis of ethnicity, social relationships, local institutions, natural resources, productive systems, poverty, or impacts of social and economic models implemented by the state (i.e. Chevalier and Buckles, 1995; DeWalt, 1979; Eckstein, 1978). Nevertheless, much of the focus is on the 'tangible elements' of villages—economic or productive systems at the individual or collective level. Few have analyzed in detail 'intangible' issues like local power and its implications for village dynamics and the lives of individuals (Gledhill, 2000 & 2005).

Considering power from a functionalistic perspective helps shape a better understanding of social power cycles, the role of local actors and the trajectory of political life. Power mapping proved a useful entry point to figure out how California village was conceptualized by the villagers themselves. Villagers, who had hardly ever had the opportunity to reflect on past and current social dynamics, started to visualize, recognize and evaluate themselves as part of something that had changed over the years. According to participants, that 'something' was the resulting social configuration of the village; or in their own terms, it was *la vida de la comunidad* (village life). Local actors and their links, spatial connotations and the direction and intensity of social relations all became apparent, based on collective agreements among villagers and between villagers and researchers.

The *U&C* system is the most important structure for internal actors to focus collective action and decision making on village development concerns. The current social configuration of California reflects many years of putting into practice local rules, norms and codes. With time, a durable alliance of local actors has emerged and constructed a functional social configuration. Internal, recognized actors depend very much on the *U&C* as a guide to local governance, although they exercise power through authorized structures. The serious problems among those internal actors were not clearly visible with the first approximation to their reality; however, once people reflected and became aware of the context in which they are immersed, they started to discuss, share, analyze, and look at their villages as dynamic entities with a number of important areas of conflict and contestation.

In Mexico, power is exercised based on a top-down model, particularly for the distribution of state and federal resources to rural villages (Chevalier and Buckles, 1995; DeWalt, 1979; Eckstein, 1978). However, the formal structures that administer power at the village level are only useful in as much as they

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correspond to the informal *U&C* decision-making systems. When top-down local power structures fail to provide space for *U&C* modes of decision-making, tension is likely to build up with local systems, including families, until it is expressed through protest or officially censured activities, such as the land occupation that gave birth to California village. The periods of time required for popular discontent to result in action depend on the type of *U&C* system present in a specific place, the degree of tolerability of a given political or economic situation, and the family dynamics present, especially with respect to the role of rural and indigenous women in village political life.

While slow advances have been made in Mexican formal political structures to include women in decision-making processes, these advances have at times failed to engage with *U&C* systems. In doing so, formal processes of inclusion run the risk of moving too fast *or too slow* in comparison with informal systems. Only those interventions able to enter into informal power structures, including the family, will provide legitimacy to the gender equity initiatives. Informal systems of power are not static; on the contrary, their independence from legal codes means that they are able to change in step with the transformation of opinions, ideas and understandings in the social praxis within which they operate. These changes, which take place within historical and collective contexts, will determine the capacity of the village, as a social entity, to survive within the natural and social fabric of modern Mexico.

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Table 2. Main actors emerging from the power mapping in California, Chiapas.

Actor	Constitution*	Current representative	Type of actor	Area/space of action	Members	Addressing	No. of links	Type of links	Links to	Participation in the workshops
Ejido commission (EC)	1980	Eduardo Sánchez Bautista	Internal& recognized	Political	5 (Commissioner Secretariat, Treasurer 2 substitutes)	All internal & external issues of the village, especially the administration of local resources & agrarian issues	Many	Permanent & temporal	All external & internal actors	5 times
Vigilence council (VC)	1980	José A Zaraus Martínez	Internal & recognized	Political	3 (coordin. secretariat & assistant +12 policemen)	Monitor & assist commission activities	9	Permanent	Only to internal actors	4 times
Municipal Agency (MA)	1980	Vicente Cruz Cruz	Internal & recognized	Political	2 (Agent & secretariat)	Represents village to the municipality but is also in charge of local peace & security	10	Permanent & temporal	To the municipality (external) & to all the internal actors in village	5 times
Water Committee	1985	Belisario Sánchez	Internal & recognized	Social & Environmental	2 (Coordinator & secretariat)	All water issues	3	Permanent & temporal	EC, MA & municipality	5 times
Health Care Committee	1998	Pedro Cruz Ocaña	Internal & recognized	Social	1 villager	All problems related to health	3	Permanent & temporal	EC, IDH & SEDESOL	5 times
Education Committee	1986	Hermilo Ramírez de la Cruz	Internal & recognized	Cultural	3 (coordinator, secretariat & treasurer)	Basic education issues	4	Permanent & temporal	EC, SEP, SEDESOL & municipality	3 times
Catholic Church	1985	1 local member	Internal & non-recognized	Religious	1 assistant	Offer spiritual services	1	Permanent	To the main church in Villaflores city	2 times

Protestant Churches	1985	3 local leaders & 3 chapels**	Internal & non-recognized	Religious	1 local pastor per chapel	Offer spiritual services	3	Permanent	To catholic churches in Villaflores &	2 times
Women working group 'Mujer Campesina'	1996	Praxedis Nango Símuta	Internal & non-recognized	Productive & Social	3 (coordinator, secretariat & treasurer) + 70 women	Enhancing households & supporting women's productive activities	8	Permanent & temporal	EC, MA, municipality, the coalition, IDH, Coplanta, INPROVICH & PRI	5 times
Women working group 'Mujer Campesina'***	1998	Mary Cruz Zaraus Ramírez	Internal & non-recognized	Productive & Social	3 (coordinator, secretariat & treasurer) + 10 women	Enhancing households & supporting women's productive activities	3	Permanent & temporal	EC, municipality & PRD (political party)	Not interested
Municipality	1980	-	External & non-recognized	Political & Social	municipal officers	Providing different resources	2	Permanent	MA & EC	No, without repres. in village
IDH	1986	-	External & non-recognized	Social	State officers	Supports health & family services	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
Civilian registry office	1980	-	External & non-recognized	Social	municipal officers	Supports marriages & births	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
SEP	1986	-	External & non-recognized	Cultural	State & Federal officers	Supports education services	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
CONAFE	1987	-	External & non-recognized	Cultural	State officers	Supports education	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
TELCEL	1991	-	External & non-recognized	Social	Private sector	Supports communication services	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village

INEGI (Procede)	2000	-	External & non-recognized	Social	State & federal officers	Supports land rights holders	-	-	-	No, without repres. i village
RAN (Procede)	1997	-	External & non-recognized	Social	State & federal officers	Supports land rights holders	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
PA (Procede)	1999	-	External & non-recognized	Social	State & federal officers	Legal support on problems related to land	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
SDR (Coplanta)	2000	-	External & non-recognized	Productive	State officers	Supports & provides subsidies to farmers	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
SAGARPA (Procampo)	1990	-	External & non-recognized	Economic	Federal officers	Provides small subsidies to farmers	1	Temporal	EC	No, without repres. in village
INPROVICH	1999	-	External & non-recognized	Social	State officers	Supports house building	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
Civil Protection & COPLADE	1985	-	External & non-recognized	Social	State & municipal officers	Ensures security & local infrastructure	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
SEDESOL (Oportunidades)	2000	-	External & non-recognized	Social	Federal officers	Supports health & education services	2	Temporal	EC & health care committee	No, without repres. in village
CFE	1985	-	External & non-recognized	Social	State & federal officers	Provides electricity	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
La Coalición	1990	-	External & non-recognized	Social	Civil society	Supports local organization	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village

CEC	1988	-	External & non-recognized	Social	State officers	Supports roads maintenance	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
SEMARNAT (Pronare, Conafor & CONANP)	1988	-	External & non-recognized	Environmental	A local promoter & federal officers	Monitors the use of natural resources in the protected area	1	Permanent	EC and local fire combatant	No, without repres. in village

* In the case of external actors, the year indicates when the village began to have some links to them.

** The three churches play a role in social aggregation but are also responsible for social divisions (because of personal conflicts some families got divided and constituted new 'churches').

*** This was the first effectively organized women's working group in California, and was led by María Dominga López Pérez (59). For local political reasons, the group was first fragmented and later disintegrated. It was originally constituted in 1989 and worked until 1997 with women participating actively. Later attempts were made to revive the group.

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