

Who's Who? Power Mapping, Decision Making and Development Concerns in an Indigenous Community of Oaxaca, Mexico

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ABSTRACT This paper examines how power is understood and exercised by actors involved in local decision making, by drawing on an experience in participatory power mapping in an indigenous community of Oaxaca, Mexico. Research was carried out during 2003-2007 by coupling a participatory action research approach and ethnographic methods to focus on the *usos y costumbres* system (U and C or local customary law) as the most important framework ensuring social order at the community level. The major recognized local actors and their interrelations are identified as the most powerful elements in the local decision-making process. Local people as well as outsiders must act within the framework of local values and norms to attend development interventions. New research approaches towards community self-assessment can clarify how actors shape and re-shape local power structures through daily routines, contributing to a better understanding of community development from a productive perspective.

INTRODUCTION

In Mexico, many studies on power issues in communities have been carried out, mainly by focusing on aspects of local development, natural resources management, management of environmental problems, agricultural interventions, and agrarian conflicts (Van der Haar 2001; Nuijten 2005; Govers 2006). Several studies have also looked for better insights into local realities from a conventional anthropological perspective, of-

ten by observing communities and people as researchable objects (Chevalier and Buckles 1995). In Mexican communities, this “objectivizing” approach has at times led to adverse reactions towards researchers on the part of residents. A common criticism has been that researchers arrive, conduct their work and leave, without following up or leaving valuable information with their communities of study (Alemán 1998). It is not strange to see local people deny researchers entry to their community or even to 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 El Oro, an indigenous community in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, where relations between social actors, especially those between residents and certain locally present outside entities, determine the function of the social and political institutions of the community. However, conventional anthropological research approaches are unwelcome and not useful in El Oro, due to their inher-

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ent violation of important and 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 participatory tools whose initial use is described in this article, along with what they reveal about El Oro, and the very impacts of their use on locals' sense of agency in their context. Thus, the paper provides insight into how to articulate with local people and how to comprehend the relationship between local situations and communities and academic research and goal-setting-a relationship which thus has far been marred by friction and inequality at times even jeopardizing both the 'development' of the community and academic research.

This study set out to provide a window into the unwritten regulatory system of traditional and collective *usos y costumbres* (U and C or local customary law), which largely govern local development possibilities. U and C governance structures are constituted of historically built collective norms and rules that continually revalidate and re-construct themselves to ensure and regenerate local social order. Huge cultural diversity in Mexico explains the wide variance in U and C systems, often based on the social groups present (Govers 2006; Nuijten 2003). The U and C system is not officially recognized by any federal law with exception of the Constitution of Oaxaca state, which considers this possibility within articles 25, 29, and 98 (SEGOB 2004).

In this study, power mapping techniques (Bass et al. 1995; Chambers 1999) were used to detect recognized and unrecognized social spaces in the U and C where decisions are made. Questions such as how power is gained, used and lost were also considered within power mapping techniques, providing valuable clues for an analysis of natural, political and economic resource control in El Oro, as well as identifying who benefits from rural development interventions. Finally, this paper elucidates who is included and excluded within decision processes in El Oro, how networks emerge, and how they influence social integration and consensus formation through production interventions. The participatory approach outlined below fosters a lucid analysis of power in different structural contexts, especially in situations where conventional academic research techniques are not locally accepted, and reveals the importance of the

U and C system to El Oro's development potential.

Context

In rural Mexico, small and remote communities can be seen as both political and natural congregations. However, they are also social entities in which internal and external forces are constantly interacting (Guevara-Hernández 2007). 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 'community life' (Long 2001; Hickey and Mohan 2004). Thus, one can consider the conflicts, behavior and progress of community actors as manifestations of the interacting internal and external forces within daily life (Hunter 1953; Hunter 1978). In other words, actions implemented by individuals and organizations define their role in community society (Long and Long 1992). In such situations, governance systems represent the regulating frameworks within which shared codes, values and relations mediate power relations.

Many indigenous Mexican communities share four elements 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). 'Indigenist' researchers and some anthropologists suggest that many indigenous communities do not have this last element. But as 'communities of common practices,' they are normally constituted by groups of families linked by ties of reciprocity, rituals of marriage, and other social relationships, such as *compadrazgos* (godparenthood), in which property is shared and social obligations taken on (De Mente 1998). Moreover, communities often share a social feeling of protection and exercise a collective right to defend territory and family values (Guevara-Hernández 2007). They provide thus a clear collective path for the future proving the indigenist anthropologists and researchers wrong.

In most communities, the natural resource base is the crucial economic element of a community's life. Complex social factors determine the access and use of local resources. It could be said that economic factors play the most important role in community 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 communities and individuals. The interplay of social and economic factors, formal and informal structures created by land reform, these relationships between land, history, and power, and the role of unwritten U and C codes constitute important questions for researchers.

Socio-economic and Biophysical Characteristics of El Oro

El Oro is an indigenous community located at the highlands in the *Mixteca* region of Oaxaca State. It was founded in 1909 by families displaced from other areas by religious conflicts. The community has about 1,200 inhabitants (75 % are children under 15). There are about 130 citizens with rights on local resources and decision making autonomy in regard to resources. All of them are called *Mixtecos*, and they share a millenarian culture of social organization, with particular elements of own language and traditions. Thus, the most important *Mixteco* root being strongly kept is the language that is mainly used as a connection with other communities in the region and considered locally to be a source of pride. No other cultural manifestations as *Mixtecos* are observed in the community.

El Oro has a warm semi-humid climate but because of its altitude (2,350 m), nights are cold (between 8-10 degrees C). The rainy season is from the end of May until October with annual rainfall of 800 mm. Close to the community there are two very small and clean rivers, from which water is directly brought a high point in the community, stored and distributed through eight taps. The natural vegetation is mostly pine forest and tropical oaks, locally used for fuel, house building, and to make charcoal and furniture.

The houses in El Oro are basically made of wood and sun-dried clay blocks and have dirt floors. Residents base their productive activities upon small scale agriculture and livestock. However, the main cash earning activity is the exploitation of 4,500-5,000 ha of common forest. The locals mostly sell wood or charcoal. The main crops are maize, wheat and oats (cropped by men on collective lands) and a few vegetables species like beans, chili peppers, zucchini and lettuces (cropped by women around the homestead). The livestock rearing is basically small

herds of goats and sheep, with some households owning a few cows and chickens. All of them are the responsibility of women and children. Most production is destined for self-subsistence. What is left is sold on the market in Oaxaca. The land tenure is the communal type. Rights to use local resources are regulated by a system of customary laws, exercised as the main mechanism for allocation and control. In other words, everyone with local rights and respect for internal agreements, norms, and traditions can make some use of the soil, water and forest resources available. Thus, the community is partly administered through the use of customary, informal law.

However, the federal government runs an anti-poverty initiative called *Oportunidades*, by which a couple of residents have been trained as health promoters in order to educate locals on issues family health, reproduction and enhancement of social harmony. Monthly economic support is provided to every woman with children. The other federal initiative is called *Procampo*, which provides a cropping-season allowance to all male and female farmers, to buy inputs for the maize fields. Other productive interventions have been run by a locally run, internationally funded NGO for about twenty years. The NGO was initially called AMEXTRA and then later, *Misión Integral*. This NGO depends mainly on an American Protestant church for support.

METHODOLOGY

Field work was undertaken during 2003-2007 in El Oro, in the municipality of Santo Domingo Nuxaá, within the district of Nochixtlán. Participatory and ethnographic methods were used in organizing participatory workshops to bridge the gap between researchers and locals; 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 residents in reflection on local realities, and shared all information gathered with community research participants.

Power mapping, a first step in rural appraisals, forms a part participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and other participatory approaches to research in rural areas. It has also been called actor map-

ping, structure mapping, social mapping, retrospective community mapping, among other terms (Chambers 1994; Bass et al. 1995). 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 place local actors graphically in terms of their importance in affecting community decisions (Guevara-Hernández et al. 2010). In terms of the mapping exercise, an actor can be a person, a group or an organization. The placement is carried by the residents themselves. It is called power mapping here because the actors should be those actively involved in decision-making related to the regulation of community life and thus according to the community hold a certain amount of power (Guevara-Hernández et al. 2008).

Nine workshops were conducted in El Oro, in which all the locals were invited to participate through door-to-door invitations. Participants were generally people from the various sectors of the community, including those with duties in the local governance system, women, elders and children. Workshop attendance averaged between 25 and 50 people. Power maps were drawn up with the residents. 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 *non-recognized* 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 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 El Oro, for example, 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 and C in assigning power and shaping social interactions at the local level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Collective Reconstruction of El Oro History

Participative historical reconstruction of El Oro is shown in Table 1 and was carried out through two workshops and by using a timeline as main tool. Cross-checking and triangulation were undertaken with key informants. The collective recognition of important dates in community history gave an initial idea about the local development efforts and the community's structure as a rural social entity, and provided a chance for workshop participants of all ages to form a common platform in order to better analyze present power structures.

El Oro was funded in 1909 by two families that were expelled from the main town of Santo Domingo Nuxaá municipality because they had become Protestants. To get these families out of town the local government gave them permission to settle permanently in forested lands 30 km away. They were allowed to use the land as common landholders of the municipality. It was not until 1915 that any form of collective governance took shape. The settlers named a local committee to work as the authority of the community and to deal with all local administrative concerns. This was the Executive Committee, now called the Municipal Agency for Common Goods (*Agencia Municipal y Bienes Comunes*, or AMBC). This was the point at which the system of U and C became the main instrument of local governance, to ensure the social order at the community. It is, thus, important to recognize that U and C is not always associated with tradition in established settlements, but can also be adopted to regulate the affairs of new settlements. In accordance with Foucault (1983), this is a source of power to ensure sovereignty and discipline. Nevertheless, nowadays most of the younger residents from El Oro have been raised within the U and C system and thus hardly analyze the origin and evolution of the community. This lack of consciousness was a frequent complaint that community elders often mentioned to the research team. They consider El Oro to be at a critical point in its development since the leaders who initially founded the community and developed its governance structures are aging (most are in their 70s and 80s). The end of cycle feeling that emerged in the collective exercises

Table 1: The most important historical moments of El Oro as identified during the workshops

<i>Year</i>	<i>Event</i>
1909	The first two Presbyterian families expelled from San Domingo Nuxaá arrived to this area with forest. The Presbyterian church arranges some talks and negotiation with the Catholic and Methodist churches at the municipality
1914	Due to the Mexican revolution some people also look for refuge in this isolated area. At the same time because of a dry season in the valleys, food was scarce and hunger affected the region; this forced some people to look for assistance in the El Oro
1915	Some North Americans (gringos or güeros) came and opened a mine to extract gold and mica in the village territories. Villagers were cheated about the mine and were only hired as laborers
1921	Adoption of the system of <i>usos y costumbres</i>
1925	The first Presbyterian chapel is built on the highest hill of the village. It was made of local timber
1925	Villagers assist in building another chapel in Chinapa, a neighborhood village
1930	Villagers define an area to settle the cemetery
1935	They participate in the construction of the rural road linking to the freeway that connects Oaxaca City and Nochistlán
1938	The first elementary school is built. At the same time the first education committee is formed
1942	The village is recognized and registered as a communal village through a national decree
1948	Further extraction of gold and mica
1960	The Presbyterian chapel roof is replaced with a local material called <i>tejamanil</i> (leaves of a palm tree)
1965	The village is constituted as an Agency of the municipality The first mill is bought and the committee for its management is formed The committee for local infrastructure and construction is also formed
1966	The Presbyterian church faces up a crisis, and only one family in the village is practicing the religion. A 'faith re-conquer' strategy is launched and North American missionaries start to come to the village. They stayed up to a month and brought from the USA several presents like cloth and toys for the children
1968	The DIF office (office for family integral development) launches the first open school for adults. The committee is also constituted
1969	The rural road to connect the villages Herradura-Ojo de Agua is made
1970	The elementary school started working with six grades of education
1976	A well is opened in order to provide water to the villagers
1977	The first fertilizers are introduced into the village
1980	The villagers participate in the building of another Presbyterian chapel in the village of Tres Vistas It is noticed that the amount of water is going down drastically and the crops start to decline in production
1983	The forest exploitation started on an intensive basis due to economic crisis The construction and running of the kindergarten is carried out Coplamar (a program from the state of Oaxaca) starts to provide some assistance for local health. Then a health committee is also formed.
1985	The current building of the local authorities is opened Electricity is introduced The Presbyterian organization called AMEXTRA (an NGO) arrives in the village
1986	Two local shops are opened, both of them managed by the village. The committees for their management are formed
1990	The water is brought from the small rivers The rural road from El Oro to Chinapa is opened The Presbyterian chapel is built in the village of Piedra de Cal A basketball field is built
1992	The electric network is extended A forest nursery is launched by the NGO and some villagers participate
1993	The satellite telephone is introduced
1995	Electricity and water is provided to Chinapa village
1997	Some ecological (dry) sanitary cabins are built with Coplamar's support People from <i>Misión Integral</i> (before AMEXTRA) arrived
1998	A committee for road maintenance is formed The secondary school 'by TV' is built and opened The Catholic chapel is built and Catholicism is formally practiced The governmental program <i>Progreso</i> is provided to eight families
1999	The Presbyterian chapel is rebuilt with concrete
2000	The forest nursery is expropriated by the village
2002	The village buys a bus to work as a public transport from the village to Oaxaca City. The committee for its management and administration is formed The government program called <i>Oportunidades</i> is brought to the village and all the women are included The well runs dry Another forest nursery is run in Chinapa with villagers' support
2003	A committee is formed to ensure water provision to the village
2004	A committee for running a local museum is approved as result of these research workshops
2006	Projects and resources from CONAFOR are brought to the village

was an important early clue for understanding power in El Oro: the collective structures that have been built and maintained by current elders may be less stable than their formal recognition would suggest, depending upon changes and continuity in the horizons and worldview of the youth, as have shown other recent studies (Guevara-Hernández et al. 2010, 2011).

A Differentiation of Actors

Internal Actors

The residents identified 18 internal actors: 15 'locally recognized' and 3 'non-recognized' (Table 2 and Fig. 1). The internal and locally recognized were: the AMBC and all its committees, a forest nursery, a grocery store, a rural shop, water services, construction, a road, the kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools, an open school, sports, health care, the mill, and finally, the bus and other vehicles.

One of the responsibilities of the AMBC is to assist and monitor the progress of the different committees, making announcements in the CA (community assembly) and facilitating the process of selection of candidates for the different *cargos*, or individual duties to be performed on a temporary and rotating basis within the various community structures (Nuijten 2003, 2005; Govers 2006; Soler-Gómez Lutselschwab 2010). The AMBC also deals with external initiatives, local conflicts and the administrative responsibilities of the governance of the community. For instance, the Municipal Agent, the head of the AMBC, travels to, talks to and negotiates with the outside world. As head of the AMBC, this person (usually a man) actually represents the governing structure of the community, and thereby the community itself. The other members of the AMBC support him or her in this *cargo* by, for example, writing administrative letters, managing the communal funds, presenting monthly financial status reports to the CA and

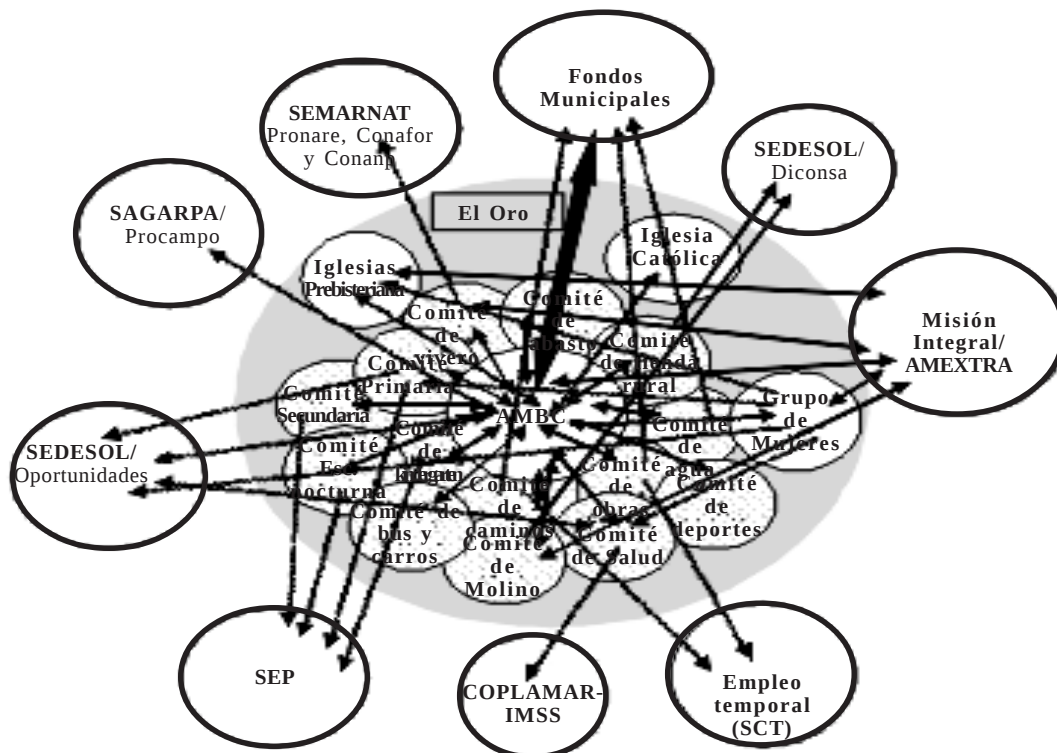


Fig. 1. The power map developed through participatory methods in El Oro

Note: Internal actors are those shown within the dark oval marked "El Oro". 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.

Table 2: Main actors emerging from the power mapping in El Oro, Oaxaca

Actor	Constitution*	Current representative	Type of actor	Area/space of action	Members	Addressing	No. of links	Type of links	Links to	Participation in the work-shops
Municipal Agency and Bienes Comunes (AMBC)	1915	Jorge López	Internal and recognized	Political	4 persons (Agent, Secretariat, Treasurer, Substitute) + 3 watchers, 6 policemen	All internal and external issues of the village, especially the administration of all local resources	Many	Permanent and temporal	Almost every actor in village and the different governmental institutions	5 times
Forest nursery committee	1992 and 2000	Israel López	Internal and recognized	Environmental and productive	3 villagers	Seedling production and reforestation of common lands	3	Permanent and temporal	AMBC, Pronare-Conafor and Misión Integral	5 times
Groceries supply committee	1986	Miqueas López L.	Internal and recognized	Social	2 villagers	Buying all groceries for the shop	1	Permanent	AMBC	3 times
Rural shop committee	1986	Elíoenaí López L.	Internal and recognized	Social and productive	2 villagers	Sells and shop	1	Permanent	AMBC	2 times
Water committee	2003	Tranquilino Sánchez	Internal and recognized	Social and environmental	2 villagers	All water issues	2	Permanent and temporal	AMBC and municipal Funds	2 times
Construction committee	1965	Alabán López Aparicio	Internal and recognized	Social	7 villagers	Public buildings and other infra-structures	3	Permanent and temporal	AMBC, municipal Funds and SCT	1 time
Road committee	1998	Isaías López y Catalino López	Internal and recognized	Social	3 villagers	Maintenance of road	3	Permanent and temporal	AMBC, municipal Funds and temporary job program (SCT)	2 times
Kindergarten committee	1983	Filadelfo López L.	Internal and recognized	Cultural	6 villagers	Kindergarten issues	2	Permanent and temporal	AMBC and SEP	4 times
Elementary school committee	1938	Hermenegildo García L.	Internal and recognized	Cultural	10 villagers	Basic education issues	2	Permanent and temporal	AMBC and SEP	4 times
Secondary school committee	1998	Odilón López L.	Internal and recognized	Cultural	6 villagers	Middle level education issues	2	Permanent and temporal	AMBC and SEP	3 times
Open school committee	1968	Eleazar	Internal and recognized	Cultural	4 (+ 8)	Adult education	3	Permanent	AMBC, opportu-	1 time

Table 2: Contd.....

Actor	Constitu- tion*	Current rep- resentative	Type of actor	Area/space of action	Members	Addressing	No. of links	Type of links	Links to	Partici- pation in the work- shops
Sports committee	2001	López Juan Sánchez	recognized Internal and recognized	Social	women Assistants) 4 villagers	issues All sport events and sport infra- structure main- tenance	2	and tem- poral Permanent and tem- poral	nities prog. and SEP AMBC and other villages	4 times
Health care committee	1983	Eliut López	Internal and recognized	Social	4 promoters	All problems related to health	3	Permanent and tem- poral	AMBC, IMSS and opportunities prog.	5 times
Mill Committee	1965	Rodolfo López	Internal and recognized	Social and pro- ductive	5 villagers	Ensure proper milling services	2	Permanent	AMBC and Misión integral	5 times
Bus (cooperative) com- mittee and other vehicles	2002	Tito López Aparicio	Internal and recognized	Product- ive and social	3 bus drivers 3 other drivers	Offer transport- ation services to main city	1	Permanent	AMBC	5 times
Presbyterian church	1909	Alabán López Aparicio Filadelfo López López	Internal but non-recog- nized	Religious	2 villagers	Offer spiritual services	2	Permanent	Misión Integral and AMBC	3 times
Catholic church	1998	López López	Internal but non-recog- nized	Religious	1 villager	Offers spiritual services	1	Permanent	AMBC	3 times
Women's working group	1998	Florinda Sánchez	Internal but non-recog- nized	Product- ive	3 (President Treasurer Secretariat)+ 13 members	Small family businesses and vegetable pro- duction	6	Permanent and tem- poral	AMBC, Misión Integral, oppor- tunities, educa- tion, health com- mittees and Presby. church	5 times
Coplamar and IMSS	1983	-	External and non-recog- nized	Social	Federal officers	Support and training the health com- mittee and medi- cations	-			No, without repres. in village
SEDESOL (Oportunidades)	2002	Eufrosina Sánchez (local pro- moter)	External and non-recog- nized	Social and economic state officer	and 1 villager and training for families and other comple- mentary edu- cation	Support and training for families and other comple- mentary edu- cation Supply most of	2	Temporal	AMBC and health care committee	3 times
SEDESOL (Diconsa)	1986	-	External and non-recog- nized	Social	-		-			No,

Table 2: Contd.....

Actor	Constitu- tion*	Current rep- resentative	Type of actor	Area/space of action	Members	Addressing	No. of links	Type of links	Links to	Partici- pation in the work- shops
			non-recog- nized			the groceries for the shop				without repres. in village
Misión integral (before AMEXTRA)	1985 and 1997	Sergio, Azalea, Carlos y Raúl	External and non-recog- nized	Productive, eco- nomic and social	3 facilitators	Support and training for the women group, Presbyterian church and the forest nursery	5	Permanent	AMBC, Women's working group, Presbyterian church and mill committee.	5 times in village
SAGARPA (Procampo)	1998	-	External and non-recog- nized	Productive and economic	Federal officers	Provide small subsidies to farmers	1	Temporal	AMBC	No, without repres. in village
SEMARNAT (Pronare and Conafor)	2000	-	External and non-recog- nized	Environmental and Eco- nomic	Federal officers	Support forest nursery	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
Municipal funds	1940	-	External and non-recog- nized	Productive and economic	Municipality and state officers	Support and invest in vil- lages infrastruc- tures	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
SEP	2000	-	External and non-recog- nized	Cultural	Federal and state officers	Provide all teachers	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village
Temporary jobs program (SCT)	2000	-	External and non-recog- nized	Economic	Federal and state officers	Provide funds for road main- tenance	-	-	-	No, without repres. in village

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

even organizing and facilitating meetings of the various committees. In other words, the members of the AMBC have the power to govern the community under the validation of the CA.

The recognition and validation that locals grant to actors in the decision making process is in accordance with their origins and the nature of the activities taking place in the community. Validation in this context is considered an act or process of making something legitimate, ratifying it, or checking that it satisfies certain standards or conditions, in accordance with Gledhill (2000), Govers (2006) and Soler-Gómez Lutselschwab (2010). In this case, people publicly manifest, encourage and accept certain actors and recognize their room for action to fulfill community interests under U and C norms. Therefore, most internal actors originate in the community itself and occupy an active role in validating community power structures, as well as maintaining economic and productive activities. The distribution of *cargos* is another common trait among local, recognized actors. For example, road maintenance and construction activities can be seen as obligatory, U and C mandated activities carried out through the system of *cargos*. This suggests that a line can be drawn between recognized and unrecognized actors that has more to do with the gravitational pull of U and C obligations than with property relationships or other social distinctions.

Three entities were considered in workshops to be local and yet unrecognized actors: the Presbyterian Church Protestant Church, the Catholic Church, and the women's working group. While the women's working group emerged from the inside the community, their dependence on external support and use of unofficial space (such as the pulpit) for exercising power led to their denomination as unrecognized actors, with limited participation in official decision-making and relative autonomy from community obligations. Likewise, the Churches depend on outside support and do not operate within U and C structures, and are thus considered to be unrecognized actors. Church-related activities are carried out with internally defined *cargos* that do not correspond to the U and C defined roles within the community, suggesting that these actors have created a space of their own, outside the local governance structure, but which may nonetheless play an important role in the community's daily life.

External Actors

In El Oro, the nine external actors identified are almost entirely composed of governmental institutions present in the community because of specific projects or support programs carried out through local and internal actors. They are mostly services providers and a civil society organization (a NGO). External actors identified were: the NGO called *Misión Integral* (formerly, AMEXTRA). The governmental institutions are COPLAMAR (coordination for marginalized areas), Seguro Social (IMSS-Ministry of the Health), Ministry of the Social Development (SEDESOL-Oportunidades), Ministry of Agriculture, Forests, Livestock and Rural Development (SAGARPA-Procampo), Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT-Pronare and Conafor), Municipal funds (Municipio), Ministry of Education (SEP), and the Ministry of Communications and Transport (SCT-temporary jobs) (Table 2 and Fig. 1).

The fact that these actors were 'identified' as a distinct type of actor indicates that they create or maneuver within certain spaces beyond the U and C. The visualization of these actors as another type of power holder represents an entry point for identification of a range of active, passive, challenging and other types of actors and relations. According to Nuijten (2003, 2005), Gaventa (2004) and Soler-Gómez Lutselschwab (2010), this local diversity of actors may also represent the manifestation of different 'force fields' and spaces for action where power is gained, lost, created, manifested, hidden, etc., in a different manner than that within the sphere of locally established power demarcated by U and C.

The Role of the Community Assembly

The Community Assembly (CA) 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 residents' notions of the concept of action (and committees as actors). When facilitators asked specifically, locals again said that the assembly is not a committee with an action-oriented 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, in accordance with Govers (2006). Basically, the responsibilities of

the CA are suggestion, approval, rejection and supervision of actions taken by the internally-recognized actors constituting the executive branch of the U and C. Every resident with gained rights is part of the CA. The CA thus embodies power as exercised over the administration and regulation practiced by several institutions, in the sense of the supervising state structures as mentioned by Foucault (1983), Perrés (1995) and Gledhill (2007).

Since all the internal actors are recognized or not by the community assembly, these actors have local power to manage the *cargos* assigned to them and to establish links with outside actors on behalf of the community and the community assembly. However, beyond the AMBC, the other internal committees also play very important roles in the establishment of external links, since the CA also entitles them to do so in order to perform their duties.

Interactions Between Actors

In workshops, locals 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, residents 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 (see Guevara-Hernández et al. 2010, 2011). Collective debate gave form to the web of interactions that show link permanency, direction and intensity (Fig. 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 internal and recognized actors, particularly between the AMBC and all the key local actors. 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 AMBC and all the internal and recognized actors (Fig. 1).

Links of 'recognized' internal actors with the 'non-recognized' internal actors (that is, the women's working group and the two churches) were not clearly specified in the workshops. The

community authorities give support to these groups to organize local events and allow them to use community buildings and recreational areas. However, any such relations can be classified as temporary, because power dynamics within the women's group and the churches are in fact parallel to and different than those found in the U and C structures. This result is interesting because it shows that even in a community founded fairly recently (1909) by religious families, the consolidation of U and C structures has led to relative autonomy for churches, leading to a sharply diminished gravitational force of U and C obligation within churches and a lack of participation by churches in official local governance, despite the enormous impact of religion in people's daily lives. As a local power structure created partly as a response to outside power structures (federal, state, and municipal governments), it is possible that the U and C system in El Oro has reflected the same separation between communal administration and common religious practice that is found in other levels of governance in Mexico.

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, residents manifested a bottom-up vision of local initiatives made possible through ties with external entities, hinting at certain transformative possibilities (Gaventa 2004 and Soler-Gómez Lutselschwab 2010). This may have to do with El Oro's historical development as a religious confrontation and separation from the municipality and thus facilitate access to public services (Guevara-Hernández 2007). This same community history may explain the description as 'temporary' given to all links with external actors except for the municipal authority (the strongest and permanent link). It is through these links that negotiation of conditions and resources that benefit the community is carried out, but links depend on specific projects and activities, and are not seen as eternal by residents (Arce and Long 1988). According to locals, the external relations with governmental programs are more important for the local actors than for the government. This is their interpretation, based on the fact that officers from governmental programs rarely visit the community to establish real collaborative projects; this pattern of behavior is

common among Mexican officers (from governmental organizations), according to Arce and Long (1992).

The Women's Working Group

The women's working group has temporary links to different internal actors that provide organizational support but mainly to the AMBC and the Presbyterian Church. The group has very important links to the NGO *Misión Integral*, which has been crucial for its constitution and consolidation. According to some locals, this women's group is becoming an important player in organizing household developments since its creation of new spaces for women's self-empowerment through economic independency and by improving household material conditions. 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. This is because spaces for recognized actors are historically male-dominated, and have formally and informally excluded women (Guevara-Hernández 2007).

The Catholic and Protestant Churches

The group of Catholic residents 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. The links of the Catholic families are based on their relationships to the mother church in Nochixtlán. The other religious conglomeration is a grouping comprising or 80 % of the population who practice the Presbyterian religion. There is no major doctrinal difference between the last two, but they split up due to interfamilial conflict. This local actor has functioned since the foundation of the community. It has played an important role in shaping the residents' beliefs and behavior. Over the years many relatives of first settler families came to the settlement and joined the El Oro. They were attracted by the local opportunities for living in peace and ensuring a way of living, by being closer to their relatives. Thus, family ties and religion have been among most important elements of community cohesion in El Oro, though not conceptualized as such in the power mapping exercise. The power of the church is in a sense made invisible since it is rooted mainly in

the minds of the believers and is not actively expressed. Therefore, religious organization plays an important role in establishing links between locals and external actors, in a considerable covert way and outside of the official, public social structure.

Power as Locally Exercised

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

In its official political structure, El Oro 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 and 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 and C. Thus, a dual power structure is established, in which recognized and unrecognized actors are constantly (re)shaping community life, often through official, visible structures but as representatives of a collective will embodied in the U and C system. Collective U and C is silent and invisible as long as the visible power structures are able to provide the goods and services necessary for community life to continue within accepted norms and limits; when these authorized channels are unable to deliver, U and C becomes visible through residents mobilization, protest and social expression outside of local power structures.

FINAL REMARKS

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 El Oro was conceptualized by the locals themselves. Residents, 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 community. Local actors and their links, spatial connotations and the direction and intensity of social relations all became apparent, based on collective agreements among residents and between residents and researchers.

The U and C system is the most important structure for internal actors to focus collective action and decision making on community development concerns. The current social configuration of El Oro reflects many years of putting local rules, norms and codes into practice. With time, a durable alliance of local actors and family structures has emerged and constructed a functional social configuration. Internal, recognized actors depend very much on the U and C as a guide to local governance, although they exercise their person-based 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, look at their communities as dynamic entities with a number of important areas of conflict and contestation, and understand their roles in these more sophisticatedly mapped out social and power networks (see Guevara-Hernández et al. 2010).

Contradictory, at the national level of Mexico, power is exercised based on a top-down model, particularly for the distribution of state and federal resources to rural communities (DeWalt 1979; Eckstein 1978; Chevalier and Buckles 1995). However, the formal structures that administer power at the community level are only useful in as much as they correspond to the informal U and C decision-making systems. When top-down local power structures fail to provide space for U and 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 (see Guevara-Hernández 2007 and Guevara-Hernández et al. 2008, 2010, 2011). The periods of time required for popular discontent to result in action depend on the type of U and C system present in a specific place, the degree of tolerance of a given political or economic situation, and the family dynamics present, especially with respect to the role of rural and indigenous women in community 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 and 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 community, as a social entity, to survive within the natural and social fabric of modern Mexico.

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APPENDIX

Non-English words appearing in text:
Usos y costumbres (U and C)—Local customary law
 Cargos—Individual duties within the U and C system
 Pueblos—Communities of common practices
 Compadrazgos—Godparenthood,

Mixteco—An ethnicity of Southern Mexico, especially present in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca
Agencia Municipal y Bienes Comunes (AMBC)—Municipal Agency for Common Goods