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Environmentalism of NGOs *versus* Environmentalism of the Poor? Mexico's Social Environmentalism Coalitions

Jean Foyer and David Dumoulin Kervran ¹

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In the early 1990s, caught up in the new wave of mobilization that followed the democratization of Latin America, all of the countries of the region seemed to experience some kind of environmental movement and the creation of national environmental agencies (García-Guadilla and Blauert, 1994; Hochsteler and Mumme, 1998). Environmental struggle, alongside indigenous rights and women's rights, has often been called a “new social movement,” distinguished from previous social movements by the higher social status of its members, by their identity-based and post-materialist causes, and by the low priority they gave to direct action through extra-institutional means (Mellucci 1999). While this label of “NSM” had every opportunity to highlight the emergence of new forms of collective action, it also contributed to insist on the environmental mobilizations' elitist² dimension and the role given to NGOs. Hence in Mexico, the existence of a national environmental social movement seemed self-evident to the rare analyst who took it on as a specific topic (Simonian, 1999; Diez, 2008; Velazquez Garcia, 2010), and their attention remained focused on the NGOs. In fact, the very existence and demarcations of this “social movement” remain highly controversial among its stakeholders, and each researcher working on environmentalism has to question her or his own definitions.

This broad dichotomy between more elitist “new social movements” and more grassroots mobilizations, is the basis of the two main sociological frameworks currently used for the analysis of environmental mobilization in Latin America. On one side, many publications mostly emphasize the role of NGOs and transnational coalitions, staying closer to the discourse of the most visible actors (Kurzinger et al., 1991; Torres, 1997; Umlas, 1998; Hogenboom, 1998; Pacheco Vega, 2005). On the other side, a greater role is given to the grassroots organizations of marginalized populations, and to confrontation strategies, through analytical frameworks like Martinez Alliez's “environmentalism of the poor” (2002), or the “environmental justice movement” (Carruthers, 2008; Leff, 2001; Verduzco, 2002). The latter emphasizes environmental conflicts and local indigenous and/or peasant movements resisting infrastructure construction projects (hydraulics, mining, nuclear, petrol, tourism, etc.).

However, this broad opposition between research programs on NGO activities and that on popular mobilizations was largely overcome during the 1990s (Clarke, 1995). A convergence has been built between the study of the internationalization of social movements (Smith et al., 1998), and the role of NGOs in “transnational activist networks” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). This new analytical framework for both social movements and NGOs established an evolutionary typology : the formation of coalitions articulating heterogeneous actors through campaigns, constituted a middle ground between a mere network of information exchange on one hand, and the existence of genuine transnational social movements based on a shared identity and strategy on the other (Tarrow, 2005; Bandy and Smith, 2005).

¹ Respectively: CNRS-ISCC Sorbonne Nouvelle University-IHEAL/CREDA,. We thank Laura Kraftowitz for the English version.

² This elitism is fortified by the specific role played by academics and by « information politics » : the use of scientific data is exceptionally intense within environmental mobilizations.

This text, then, builds on analyses of mobilizations that have focused on the plurality of networks between organizations (Diani 2003), an approach that has only been applied to select aspects of the Mexican movement (Pacheco and Obdulia, 2003; Velázquez García, 2008). Unlike a somewhat idealized analysis of social movements focused solely on grassroots mobilizations, an approach focused on coalitions can show that the different actors mobilized are connected to another as much by complementarity and division of labor, as by a shared set of common values (Pacheco and Obdulia Vega, 2003). Environmentalism is often characterized by a “transclassist” heterogeneity of participants, and coalition building is therefore the most common way to expand a mobilization. This is the *distinct* nexus between “elitist” and “grassroots” organizations, as well as the two distinct historical trajectories of alliances that allow us to put forth empirically division of what we might call “Mexican social environmentalism” into two components.³ Conversely, we will not deal here with another organizational field, that of “conservationism,” which brings together (many) organizations that work only in the management of protected areas (Dumoulin 2003, 2007), not because we take for granted the claims of many of the conservationists of being apolitical, but rather, because their activities are too narrowly focused on “project management” to fit into any definition of a social movement.

This study is based on several periods of fieldwork in Mexico by the authors between 2000 and 2012⁴. It builds on over a hundred interviews with participants of the organizations mentioned, as well as select periods of participant observation.

Each of the text’s two parts, then, explores the construction of an “organizational field” built on coalitions between local populations, urban elites and international organizations: we call the first “sustainable community development,” and the second “environmental resistance”; in the conclusion, we will return to the main advantages of our way of constructing the object “environmentalist social movement.”

I. Networks of Sustainable Community Development: *From the Grassroots to the State and Funders*

A. The Origin of Alliances Between NGOs and Rural Communities

The first step in establishing the field consisted of urban groups, which were often organized into civil society groups, forging alliances with local communities. In the second half of the 1970s, and throughout the 1980s, an environmentalist movement emerged in Mexico that was deeply rooted in the rural world, and whose core activities were based more on the search for alternative community development than on nature conservation, which clearly distinguished it from the conservationists (Carruthers, 1996). In 1970, several student groups decided to take the environmental crisis seriously and seek alternatives in rural areas. They recognized the influence of the different schools of thought, often coming from Marxism and shockwaves of the 1968 repression in academe, but also from thinkers like Ignacy Sachs and Ivan Illich (who led the Intercultural Center for Documentation in Mexico between 1961 and 1976). Another inspiring persona was that of Mexican agronomist Efraím Hernández Xolocotzi, who advocated a “*ciencia de huarache*” (science in sandals), meaning a science based on field work, on direct

³ This terminology of « social environmentalism » is not usually used by the members of the organizations that are analysed here. This analytical category has been used for the 1st time by A. Gonzalez Martinez (1992).

⁴ These fieldwork periods had very different durations : from two years (during their two PhD preparation) to numerous one month periods dedicated to different research projects on related thematics all along the last decade.

contact with rural people and the recognition of traditional knowledge and practices. After creating the first autonomous ecology research centers,⁵ several groups embodied the growth of a movement oriented towards sustainable community development.

The founding members of the Grupo de Estudios Ambientales (GEA), experimented first for several years with new research programs, training local populations, and assembling development projects at the community levels (forestry, traditional corn growing, etc.), before they formally established their NGO in 1977, implementing alternative projects in marginalized rural communities in various regions (Xalapa, Puebla, Guerrero, etc.). A second major group consisted of researchers from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), essentially biologists who assembled around ethnobotanist Victor Manuel Toledo and biologist Julia Carabias, who were conducting left-wing opposition to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (the PRI).⁶ Thanks to the success of a first local experiment of an alternative development model, their group changed scale through the Programa de Aprovechamiento Integral de Recursos Naturales (PAIR), which extended across the country's various regions (Michoacán, Oaxaca and Durango) (J. Carabias, E. Provencio and C. Toledo, 1994; V. M. Toledo, 1983). A third group of scholar-activists participated during the second half of 1980 in the state of Oaxaca's Sierra de Juárez communities' movement to recover their forest territory rights from concessions to parastatal companies. They founded the organization Estudios Rurales y Asesoría (ERA). This first mobilization was part of the founding of one of the most interesting moments of community forestry, when a local organization, the Unión Zapoteca-Chinanteca (UZACHI), was trained in how to sustainably use the forest's resources. In this way, two large sectors—community forestry (D. Barton Bray and L. Merino Perez, 2004), and organic coffee production (Ejea G. and L. Hernández, 1991)⁷—forged intense relationships between NGO supporters and community organizations, transforming modes of development and local political systems alike. The struggle for control of natural resources and land, whether against the State or against local chieftains, and the processes of organizing communities into unions or cooperatives were fundamental to this first phase.

The environmental these thus served as a point of attachment between a highly politicized urban elite coming from the academic or religious world on one hand, and local communities engaged in struggles on the other. This alliance sometimes led to long-term partnerships between communities. The idea that there existed an indigenous environmentalist movement that was locally anchored around traditional practices (water, soil, and forest management) or in alternative modes of production (of coffee, honey, vanilla, and so on) was

⁵ Alongside with the Centro de Ecodesarrollo created in 1972, and the Instituto d'Ecología (1974), we found the INRIEB - Instituto de Investigaciones sobre Recursos Bióticos, which embodied the « social environmentalism » movement (1975 à 1988). All the three remained very dependent from Mexican State and University.

⁶ The Unified Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM in Spanish) comes up from the fusion between the Mexican Communist Party and different trends of the Mexican left; he won the municipal **elections** of Alcauzauca, in the Guerrero State, at the end of the 1970 decade. This victory gave to this group the opportunity to move from reflection to political action, and to implement an experimental project which is used to be seen as a pioneering experience of sustainable development in this region (mainly environmental diagnostic and a municipal management plan).

⁷ The most famous representative of this wave of exportation oriented Organic coffee cooperatives, are the organizations « Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Región del Istmo » (UCIRI) and the « Indígenas de la Sierra Madre de Motozintla » (ISMAM). In these experiences, the members of the liberation theology stream were more influential than the members of academia.

then put forth by the movement's intellectuals, including Victor Manuel Toledo, who went on to evoke the seductive idea of "green Zapatistas" (Toledo, 1992; 2000).

B. Institutionalization and State Relations

In the early 1990s, following the Earth Summit in Rio, a second generation of organizations cropped up around the issue of sustainable rural development. To cite only a few salient examples, they included the Grupo Interdisciplinario de tecnología Rural Apropiada (GIRA), which operated within Michoacán's indigenous communities; the Proyecto Sierra de Santa Marta (PSSM), in the southern state of Veracruz; and the Grupo GAIA, on the coast of Oaxaca. There was also an effort to coordinate at the national level, through the Consejo Civil Mexicano para la Silvicultura Sostenible (CCMSS), which formed in the mid-1990s to try to capitalize on different local experiences and promote community forestry on a national level, especially with the public authorities.

To understand the rapid development of Mexican environmental NGOs, we must place it within the wider national context of the Mexican system's democratization and openness, which left room for certain experiences outside official corporatism (E. Mollard and E. Lopez, 2006). However, in a State that had been controlled by the PRI for nearly seventy years,⁸ a party that had bet on corporatism and patronage, the question of whether to forge a relationship with official institutions presented a fundamental dilemma to all Mexican social movements. The dilemma was between maintaining independence at the risk of being cut off from all institutional leverage and resources,⁹ or enjoying access to jobs and means (financial or other) at the much greater risk of legitimizing a system set up by the PRI, and suffering under its many constraints.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, the group that had formed around Julia Carabias and engendered PAIR made the choice to institutionalize because when Ernesto Zedillo came to power in 1994, the opportunity presented itself to create the first Mexican Ministry of Environment, SEMARNAP.¹⁰ This opportunity also corresponded to the greening of the Mexican government in the late 1980s in response to external pressure (NAFTA negotiations, entry into the OECD) and internal pressure, including the channeling of many environmental movements and their emergence during this time as a dissident force (see Part II).

The integration of Carabias's entire team into the State can therefore also be read as part of the great Mexican tradition of co-opting social movements. After appropriating the concept of sustainable development, this team conducted six years of considerable work to consolidate the official Mexican environmentalist institutional and legal framework, to train administrative staff in environmental issues, and to increase and strengthen the supervision of natural protected areas, all while taking into account human activities.¹¹

Despite extremely virulent criticism by various social movements against Carabias, from her stance, which was deemed overly conservationist, to her positions against the neo-Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Julia Carabias's six-year tenure did unprecedented quantitative and

⁸ El PRI controló México from the end of the revolution during the 1920's, until the year 2000. After a twelve years transition dominated by the presidency of the right-wing party, the « Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), the PRI has been back to the power at the national level in 2012, as well as in numerous States of the country.

⁹ Indeed, a study produced in 1991 (Kurzinger 1991) showed that 75% of the Organizations taken in account had some connexion with the State and that 30% recieved some funding from him.

¹⁰ The « Secretaria de Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca » who, after having been reduced from the Fishing Sector at the end of the sextenio with J. Carabias as head of the ministry, becomes the le « Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales » (SEMARNAT).

¹¹ Julia Carabias, personal interview, carried out on October the 14th, 2004.

qualitative good for the consideration of environmental issues in Mexico. This passage of NGOs into institutions and from the local to the national always proves perilous. If managed budgets and implementation instruments are incommensurate with those of civil society, their means are insignificant compared to other public policies like that of agriculture, and more structural and predatory at the environmental level. One GEA member explained the difficulties of translating civil initiatives into public policy in this way: *“If you don’t enter into it, if you don’t negotiate, they marginalize you, and it’s important to position yourself politically, even if we may not be linked to any State power or party.”*¹²

Other field organizations that chose not to enter into the State authorities maintained a subtle position against the State: beyond a certain amount of critical discourse that might imply a wholesale rejection of the corporate State, some flexibility seems to have been accepted through collaborations with environmental institutions. At the discretion of personnel changes in the SEMARNAT’s central offices as well as in different states, relationships with members of government agencies, new programs and funding opportunities, gaps and “windows of opportunity” sometimes opened to members of the movement for sustainable community development. A certain amount of pragmatism in relation to national and international institutions seemed to prevail.

C. Globalization Connections: Funding and Professionalization

Playing a perhaps marginal but nonetheless pioneering role, social environmentalism organizations were well-placed to receive, beginning in 1992, the influx of international funding for sustainable development and biodiversity issues.¹³ A certain degree of similarity in the international funding and “partnership” channels should be emphasized because it illustrates the existence of the same transnational networks, (the Ford Foundation, cooperation agencies in Northern Europe, and the World Bank)¹⁴ as distinct from those of the environmental resistance. However, we might ask whether structural dependence vis-à-vis international institutional donors (as well as national funds, like those distributed by the Fondo Mexicano para la Conservación de la Naturaleza) didn’t help undermine the activist and alternative aspects of community development organizations, transforming them into service providers and local technical operators.

In this light, the PSSM example is significant. The organization eventually demonstrated such a close relationship with the various institutions of the Los Tuxtlas Biosphere Reserve, whether through its participation in its design of ecological scheduling, governing bodies and the operation of some of its programs, that we can legitimately wonder if it didn’t become a part of the official system itself. In a national and international environmental context where

¹² Translated by L. Kraftowitz.

¹³ During the 1980 decade, a majority of these organizations were self-financed, and more seldom, they were financed by public funding.

¹⁴ The more visible is the Ford Foundation (as well as the Foundations Rockefeller, Mc Arthur and the German Friedrich Ebert), almost always present in the support to these organizations at least until the end of the 1990’s. Then, we can find many times the organization of Netherlands international cooperation (NOVIB), as well as the religious German organizations Misereor or Pan Por el Mundo and the cooperation agencies of northern Europe (Scandinavia and Germany but including UK with his department for International development - DIFID). The General Environmental Facility (GEF) managed by the World Bank count as an other important sources of financing for these actors, enabling them to consolidate or to create new organizations. Regarding the multifold relations existing between these NGO and the World Bank, see for example Deborah A. Bräutigam and Monique Segarra, 2007.

environmental issues are institutionalized, the choice of themes to work on is partly determined by funding opportunities. Luisa Paré, the organization’s founder and an environmental activist for over 20 years, gave the following analysis:

“We went from an era of activism with a strong political commitment by those who lived and worked in the communities, to a more professional attitude today, where people are really trying to change things and prioritize the technical aspects of their work. I’m not judging, I’m just saying that these are different times and forms of action.”¹⁵

The arrival of foreign funds thus allowed for a certain amount of organizational professionalization, as well as the adoption of lines of work that, while still related to the promotion of local development projects, were increasingly institutionalized and restricted to sustainable development. In the 1990s and 2000s, community development was increasingly inserted into managed networks and national and international institutional funding. To a large extent, the social and productive alternative that sustainable rural development might have represented was widely and gradually standardized as sustainable development came to dominate national and international policies (Leonard and Foyer, 2011).

The construction of a dense “organizational field” for “sustainable community development”

| | Escalation of social network mobilization | Types of Links and Coalitions | Examples |
|---|--|--|---|
| A | NGO/local Communities Connections | Long-term relationship of technical support, spokesperson, fundraiser, and political support | Relations between CCMSS and the forest communities of the Sierra Norte de Oaxaca |
| B | Connections between NGOs, local organizations and different levels of government | New relationship beginning in 1994; mutual influence and financial interdependence. Old social networks between new environmental entities, NGOs, etc. | The relationship with the PRODERS program managers in the states, and those of the FMCN in Mexico City. |
| C | Trans-scalar connections with international donors | Financial dependence, reciprocal legitimacy. | Relations with the World Bank, the UNDP, the Ford Foundation, or Friedrich Ebert |

II. Environnemental Resistance :
From Coalitions Against Local Projects to Coalitions Against the Neoliberal Order

A. Resistance Coalitions to Mega-Projects and National Coordination

¹⁵ Personal interview carried out on octobre 3d. of 2008.

Parallel to and sometimes crosswise with the organizational fields of community development, some resistance campaigns against mega-development projects also created synergy between some urban elites and local grassroots organizations. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when environmentalists were still rare, two coalitions gave visibility to a fledgling Mexican environmental movement opposed to the state: the fight against planned deforestation, and the relocation of the Chinantecos to Uxpanapa (Veracruz, 1973-1975). Even more connected to populist organizations were the emergence of mobilizations against drilling, and against the massive pollution by the national petrol giant PEMEX, especially the 1976 Pacto Ribereño in the state of Tabasco (Velázquez Guzmán, 1982).

The 1987 anti-nuclear mobilization, Coordinadora Nacional Contra Laguna Verde (CONCLAVE), brought together very large sectors of the population: farmers' and fishers' organizations, NGOs, intellectuals, mothers' groups, and even the Catholic Church (García-Gorena Velma, 1999; Paya Porres and Víctor Alejandro, 1994). This mobilization experienced episodes of radical confrontation (blocking streets, etc.), and is considered the movement's founder.

The 1990s was a theater for large protests whose successes illustrated both the ability of NGOs to engage directly in political work with "grassroots organizations" in marginalized regions, but also the central role they could play in mobilizing coalitions in an environmentalist framework (Verduzco, 2002). This was especially true for mobilizations against dam projects (in Guerrero against "Altos Balsas," beginning in 1990), against the proposed highway in the Chimalapas region in 1991 (Umlas, 1998), and against the construction of a salt factory in the San Ignacio Lagoon in Baja California (1995-2000) (Castro-Soto, 2005; Velasquez Garcia, 2010).

In some cases, as with the famous victory against the Tepoztlan tourist resort project (1994-1995), peasant organizations led struggles where the environment was only one element among others, while conversely, certain coalitions had more "naturalistic" and limited goals, tied to a number of NGOs in the national arena, like the demand for accountability for the slaughter of migratory birds around the Silva Dam in 1994-95.

These various experiences connected a growing number of local organizations scattered across many states into an ad-hoc coalition, along with NGOs that were involved in the national arenas, and many successes contributed to creating shared social ties and memories. However, overall coordination between these "protest events" hardly existed, except through the existence of informal social networks.

From 1985 to 1994, urban political ecology groups in a state of rapid growth attempted to organize a national movement, to create a common identity under the headline of "contentious politics." Several initiatives brought together different coalitions, but without succeeding in unifying them. National meetings of environmental groups, attempts to unify the environmental movement in the Federación Conservacionista Mexicana (FECOMEX) in 1985, the same year of the great earthquake that catalyzed inter-sector organizational synergy, and also generated the "Pact of Environmental Groups" (PGE, established with 50 organizations that shared a national agenda). UN negotiations on the Rio-92 conference generated the creation of FOROMEX, gathering more than 100 organizations around a common agenda (Diez 2008, p. 86). The main turning point was probably when coalitions formed around the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between 1990 and 1994. Indeed, these initiatives required groups to develop a common agenda against a common enemy, and the window of opportunity gave them

an entirely new level of visibility and influence on the Mexican State (Torres, 1997; Hogenboom, 1998; Gallardo, 1999).

All these alliances allowed for the gradual emergence of a shared multi-sector agenda¹⁶ and coalitions of a new transnational scale that marked the protests that followed. But the institutionalization of the environmental cause also divided and destabilized these coalitions, which now contained an extremely diverse membership, with strongly held sensitive ideological positions, and **preferring** different strategies (Hogenboom, 1998 Alfie Cohen et al. 2003).

B. Network Transnationalisation and Anti-Neoliberal Resistance

From the late 1990s on, the environmental resistance network grew by structuring itself around anti-liberal themes at national and international levels. It was nearest to peasant and indigenous mobilizations, especially for organizations tasked with defending a national agenda, actors close to the *néo-Zapatista* and then the anti-globalization movement.

At the national level, an important organization was thus forming in Mexico to produce both technical and political expertise on environmental issues in rural areas. The Centro de Estudios para el Cambio en el Campo Mexicano (CECCAM), was initially intended as a think tank for generating political ideas for the peasant syndicate, Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas (UNORCA), member of *La Via Campesina*. CECCAM's discourse, which covered forestry, agro-ecology, and biotechnology, highlighted the gradual penetration of environmental issues into the world of rural organizations. Organizations like CECCAM, which had a national perspective, exhibited some social environmentalist maturation, halfway between technical expertise and PR activism, a stance that brought them closer to expert-activist organizations and transnational network campaigners.¹⁷

Organizations that were implanted in Chiapas, like Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste and CIEPAC (Centro de Investigaciones y Economicas Politicas Accion Comunitaria) denounced the Mexican government's various environmental initiatives, like the relocation of local populations outside of the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, its bioprospecting projects like the ICBG Maya ICBG (D. J. Dumoulin and Foyer, 2004), luxury ecotourism projects, and initiatives like the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC), which was considered as the environmental side of the Puebla-Panama regional trade initiative. Claiming a Zapatista autonomist approach in direct rupture with the government, these organizations moved away from community development activities and toward denunciation campaigns against official environmentalism, which they saw as overly conservationist, or as serving the interests of multinational corporations.

The second half of the 1990s and early 2000s corresponded with the arrival of transnational actors who influenced Mexican social environmentalism's already dense landscape. Catherine Marielle of the GEA summed up what she considered to be a new phase:

“The arrival of Greenpeace and the ETC Group is much more recent. Unlike these organizations, we do not have the time to really work on visibility like Greenpeace does as a fundraising strategy. This is a very distinct phase, and very

¹⁶ Nevertheless, we have **to take note** that this agenda was strongly influenced by the international agenda, much more than by some mexican specific features of the national trajectory (cf. Miriam Alfie Cohen 1995).

¹⁷ Worth to remember, the uprising of one of the first peasant movements who self identified sharply as « ecologist » from 1997: in the Costa Grande of the Guerrero State, with Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera, the two leaders martyrs (prisoners in 1999-2001 and then in forced exile) who have been winners of the famous Goldman Environmental Prize, in 2000.

*new, with its own characteristics corresponding to globalization. These organizations came after Rio 92. Before, our work was much more situated at the national level, whereas now we are participating in international networks.*¹⁸

Although Greenpeace had been present in Mexico as far back as 1993 for air pollution campaigns in Mexico City, against the Laguna Verde nuclear power plant, and for toxic waste importation campaigns, it was not until 1998 that it decided to start a “genetic engineering” campaign in Mexico. Mexico was considered a strategic area for this issue because of its agricultural biodiversity and the risk posed by U.S. imports.¹⁹ In 1999, Silvia Ribeiro, a representative from RAFI (the Rural Advancement Foundation International, which in 2001 was renamed the ETC Group), with already experienced in advocacy journalism, came from Uruguay to arrive in Mexico. Despite their organizational restraints, Greenpeace and the ETC Group played a central role in initiating and orchestrating campaigns against bioprospecting and against transgenic maize. Significantly, they introduced some major communicative methods to Mexico and became nodal points for an opposition network in training.

They quickly created alliances with Mexican environmental and peasant organizations. In this way, Greenpeace linked up with GEA and ANEC (*La Via Campesina*’s other peasant union) to found the Sin Maiz No Hay Pais (“No Corn, No Country”) movement, while the ETC Group became closer to CECCAM and UNORCA, and formed “Red en Defensa del Maiz”. Generally speaking, the arrival of these international organizations in the context of globalization appears to have “pulled” one section of Mexican social environmentalist actors from the local to the global, and from concrete problems rooted in local communities to more structural problems defined in terms of national and international policy. The confluence of environmental mobilizations into multi-sectoral coalitions therefore presented the great challenge of this new period. Mobilizations during the WTO summit in Cancun in 2003 emphasized the divisions and risks of some NGOs’ desire to appropriate coordination. With this change in the perception of scale, a part of Mexican environmentalism was drawn into the ideological reconfiguration represented by the opposition to liberal globalization.²⁰ Important enough, some key personalities of this movement were incorporated to the new environmental ministry, when it came to be headed by Lichtinger in 2001, after the PRI was defeated. But, far from reaching the expectations, the ministry was then unable to push for greater environmental justice, and rather lost any political power, when at the same time led to a new cycle of NGO demobilization.

In parallel, the 2000s also saw mobilizations continue against mega-projects, marked by this radical new character of peasant and indigenous organizations, which were now integrating the environmental argument into an increasingly unstructured political discourse in both the rural and national arenas. While some successes followed violent struggles (like the mobilizations against the airport in San Salvador Atenco (2001-2002), and against the “La Parota” Dam in the state of Guerrero (2003-2012) (Castro-Soto, 2005), it was above all an era of rapid advances of

¹⁸ Personal Interview carried out on January 22d, 2006. Translation by L. Kraftowitz.

¹⁹ One of the objectives was although to monitor and strengthen as long as possible the moratorium on GMO corn which has been then declared by the Mexican government (Gustavo Ampugnani, personal interview carried out on January 23d., 2006.) and to impede the authorization of Mexican GMO corn, notably by some activist and legal actions.

²⁰ This ideological reconfiguration can be observed through the systematic denunciation of the TLC commercial agreement, or through the strong support to the neozapatist movement, which constitute a main reference of alterglobalization movement.

large-scale mining projects on a large section of the national territory. The dynamism of the Asamblea Nacional de Afectados Ambientales (NAMAs), born in 2008 out of previous coalitions and “caravans” thus illustrates both the gravity of local conditions, and the attempt at a unified environmental struggle against neoliberal policies.

Four paths of mobilizing a radical oppositional repertoire on a broad social basis:
From minimalist transformative collective action to a strong social movement

| | Escalation of Social Network Mobilization | Examples |
|---|---|--|
| A | Collective action based on one local-national connection | Consejo Mexicano para la silvicultura Sustentable (CMSS) and its partners |
| B | Coalition of a large number of national environmental organizations | Foromex 92, Red Nacional de Derecho a la Información Ambiental (RNDIA) en 2001 ²¹ . Pres Silva, |
| C | Large coalition connecting national/transnational NGOs with strong local mobilization against big development projects | Laguna Verde (1987-1988), Tepoztlan (1995-1996), San Salvador Atenco (2002), Presa La Parota (2003-2012) |
| D | Large inter-sector coalitions where environmental organizations are just one component of a broader social mobilization | Tepoztlán Coalition, the “Sin Maïs no hay País” Campaign, Social Forums |

CONCLUSION

In the Mexican case, the opposition between, on one hand, an “environmentalism of the poor” with popular movements and mobilized local communities as main basis, and on the other hand a network of Transnational NGOs, does not reflect the complexity the social environmentalism movement. Based on the analysis of its different organizations and their trajectory over 30 years, we argue in this article that this movement is composed of two « organizational fields ». Each field developed from a different type of coalition between NGOs and local organizations, which then, became part of broader national, international or transnational networks. Both fields share two features : transclassism – as typical of the environmental topic, as well as extension of coalitions from local to transnational. Beyond reciprocal stigmatization claims of “elitism” and of “populism”, the best criteria for differentiating these two ways of articulation between local, regional, national and transnational organizations, should be the repertoire of collective action. Indeed : the sustainable community development coalitions are more “reformists” and are focused on the construction of alternative options for the poorest, while the ones of environmental resistance put at the foreground « contentious politics » in the name of the dominated²².

These two ways of aggregation, not only define two sides of the Mexican environmental social movement, but also match two distinct scholar definition of what a “social movement” is²³.

Even though “sustainable community development” field seems to fit quite well with the

²¹ “Su creación se dio en el marco del II Encuentro Nacional de Ecologistas, donde participaron 50 organizaciones de 26 estados del país” Voir Velazquez, 2005.

²² This polarity is close to the one proposed by G. Pleyers (2010) in his in-dept analysis of alter-globalization movement: between experimentation and counter-expertise.

²³ Touraine (1981) could be cited as an exemple of the first and Tarrow (1998) of the second.

diagnosis of “NGOization” and to technification, the historical analysis of this particular mobilization demonstrates that it could not be reduced to such a process. Broadly speaking, the trend is not unilaterally towards the NGOization of social movements through institutionalization (Álvarez 1999, Diez 2008), because some old formal organizations existed before larger mobilizations and because some cycles of re-politization have occurred after a period of institutionalization. On the other hand, Alvarez (1999) accurately identified the “double identity” of the leaders who conserve mixed networks and repertoires, between NGO and social movement dynamics, in spite of institutionalization (Mario Velasquez 2005).

This “sustainable community development” field found undeniably his origin in the collective mobilizations, with openly political dimension. Indeed, direct opposition to the State and community participation played a crucial role; and today, a significant part of these organizations still maintains close ties with the “environmental resistance” field. Moreover, the very strong relationship connecting the organizations of sustainable community development to local organizations of marginalized regions, even if more “professionalized” today, has always had and still keeps a key role. In some cases, that resulted in long-term processes of organization, autonomy and empowerment, and allowed the adoption of new productive practices (community forestry, organic coffee growing, fair-trade...) which then transformed the political relationships that these communities had with external actors. Of course, the institutionalization of this component is sometimes perceived as the death of an environmental movement based on contentious politics. However, this process could be seen as the best way to gain influence on the institutions and meta-norms that are regulating the relation the Mexican society has with its environment: such production of symbols, information and laws has a leading role in the transformation of the developmentalist model (Azuela, 2006).

If we look at his direct confrontation strategies - using extra-institutional means, as well as his anti-system discourse - more critical and radical against the State, neo-liberalism and transnational firms, the field of “environmental resistance” appears as fitting perfectly with a more classical definition of social movements. Nevertheless, one more time, things are more complex as we observe institutionalization phenomena in some alter-globalization networks, and as some of these universal claims can sometimes been seen as elitist, when top topics on agenda are closer to some high-educated urban “avant-garde” than to indigenous or peasant populations preoccupations (counter-expertise, bioprospecting, GMO...). The structure of political opportunities has gone through an important transformation since 1990, as have the form of the mobilizations. A two-fold tendency must be underlined : the transnationalization of a majority of networks and agenda, and at the same time, a pullback towards local political struggles (M. A. Velazquez Garcia, 2010 ; G. Pleyers, 2011). Locally rooted environmental organizations proliferated during the last decade but; emerging in-depth analysis of these local networks have great value but are still too scarce (Velázquez 2009, Luts Ley et Salazar Adams, 2011).

Finally, who are the “true” environmentalists ? The ones who are building development alternatives with marginalized communities, or the ones who get involved in struggles against the more aggressive manifestations of a destructive model ? This controversy, that shakes as well activists and analysts, is actually pointless. These two components are both opposing dominant social order and constitute the two sides of what has to be called the “Mexican social environmentalism”.

List of Terms

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| CCMSS | Consejo Civil Mexicano para la Silvicultura Sostenible (Mexican Civil Council for Sustainable Forestry) |
| CECCAM | Centro de Estudios para el Cambio en el Campo Mexicano-Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste (Center for the Study of Change in the Mexican Countryside- Maderas del Pueblo Southeast) |
| CIEPAC | Centro de Investigaciones y Economicas Politicas Accion Comunitaria (Center for Research on Political Economics and Community Action) |
| CONCLAVE | Coordinadora Nacional Contra Laguna Verde (National Coordination Against the Laguna Verde) |
| ERA | Estudios Rurales y Asesoría (Rural Studies and Consulting) |
| FECOMEX | Federación Conservacionista Mexicana (Mexican Conservationist Federation) |
| GIRA | Grupo Interdisciplinario de tecnología Rural Apropiaada (Interdisciplinary Group for Appropriate Rural technology) |
| NAMA | Asamblea Nacional de Afectados Ambientales (National Assembly of Environmentally Affected People) |
| PAIR | Programa de Aprovechamiento Integral de Recursos Naturales (Program for the Utilization of Natural Resources) |
| PSSM | Proyecto Sierra de Santa Marta (Sierra de Santa Marta Project) |
| RAFI | Rural Advancement Foundation International, renamed the ETC Group in 2001 |

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