Nature tourism and space production. Case study in an Indigenous Community in the Highlands Region of Chiapas

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— Abstract—

This article analyzes the production of the tourist space in the Río Arcotete community of the municipality of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas. The process by which the federal and state governments of Chiapas have created the conditions for an indigenous community that suffers from an agricultural crisis and with accentuated pluriactivity to become involved in tourist services is shown. Under the conditions imposed by the tourism market, the indigenous have appropriated this productive activity, which has generated a dynamic of intra-community changes that strengthen their income, but on the condition of an increasing dependence on tourism. The challenge that the native population now faces is to comply with the circumstances that the market establishes, which weakens it and generates a slow maturation of the tourist destination. The research is qualitative based on primary sources and fieldwork.

Keywords:

Governmentality; tourist space; nature tourism; community organization; Río Arcotete; Chiapas.

There are studies on rural areas of Chiapas that highlight the dynamics of changes and transformations among farmers and indigenous people with the implementation of tourism projects (Sánchez, 2011; Oseguera, 2014). An important aspect they point out is the implementation of tourism policy in the rural sector, which has not had the desired effects due to short-term factors that make it impossible for it to mature in the long term (Sánchez, 2011; Oseguera, 2014). The gap between tourism policy and farmer projects generates slow economic development. This fails to best benefit the tourism-receiving population and mitigate conditions of poverty and lagging (Villafuerte, 2015).

Although Chiapas has a high biodiversity in natural resources that justifies its natural tourism potential, it has not managed to consolidate a market for quality services in this sector. The challenges to overcome are the endogenous weaknesses that persist in the local tourist services market. Chiapas being one of the poorest states in Mexico, fails to overcome the endemic difficulties of the rural sector such as poverty, marginalization, lack of public services, and road infrastructure.

According to the 2010 census figures (INEGI, 2011), the rural population reached 2,460,645 inhabitants, who lived in localities of less than 2500 inhabitants which, if expanded to less than 5000 residents, would be 60% of Chiapas. In 2015, the total population in Chiapas was 5,217,908, that is, 4.4% of the national population. In 2020, the total population is 5,543,828 with 20,951 rural localities and 206 urban localities (INEGI. Population and Housing Census 2020) 51% correspond to rural localities; and 49% to urban ones. In other words, more than half of the inhabitants live in rural areas, therefore, their socioeconomic vulnerability is aggravated. Finally, in 2018, 76.4% of the residents of the entity lived in poverty, which is equivalent to 4,174,600 people (CONEVAL, 2020). In general terms, 94.0% have a situation of poverty and vulnerability due to a lack of income (CONEVAL, 2020). These elements contribute to a scenario of critical poverty in Chiapas. These figures also show an X-ray that does not contribute to a positive reconfiguration of solid projects in the rural sector. On the contrary, problems accumulate that hardly contribute to the consolidation of programs in the medium term.

The difficulties faced by the peasants and indigenous people of Chiapas when inserting themselves into the tourism services market drastically place them in a reality that they cannot overcome: lack of capital, lack of road infrastructure, problems in the generation of social capital, in the agency capacity for tourism and, above all, the accompaniment of the government in the construction processes of tourist destinations in their territories. In the study presented here, in the Río Arcotete community of the municipality of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, the creation of the tourist space is the result of the intervention of the state government and important actors,

such as entrepreneurs and civil society. This mediation disrupted the living conditions of the indigenous people and the way they inhabit their space. However, the participation of the community was of vital importance for the realization of the project.

The importance of the analysis in this study lies in understanding how the tourist space in Río Arcotete was created and the factors that contributed to it. To explain this problem, we rely on the theoretical reflection of Michel Foucault (2004) on governmentality, as well as the notion of construction of space by Henri Lefebvre (2013). Both proposals contribute to the contemporary discussion of tourism in the new/old rural context of Chiapas. In this sense, nature tourism in Río Arcotete is considered a government technology that not only generates territorial changes but also normalizes practices among subjects and a social imagination towards environmental conservation. In addition, this economic activity contributes in the long term to productive pluriactivity among the population.

As for the structure of this article, eight sections are presented through which the analysis of governmentality and the construction of the tourist space stand out based on the justification of "nature" as a commodity. Subsequently, it refers to the research method used and the central theme of the research about the relationship of the Río Arcotete community with the State and the factors that contributed to the creation of a space of tourist value. Finally, it reflects on the importance of the process, and the participation of local actors and the government to generate a nature tourism destination in the indigenous territory, which brought with it new living conditions in the community.

Governmentality and the construction of the tourist space

Governmentality stands as a category that defines two important aspects. First, government projects, whose purpose is to normalize practices between subjects and technologies to maintain a real production regime (Foucault, 2004). Second, it produces a social and spatial order. This order refers to the notion of space as multidimensional integrality, as a social space that involves the various processes and elements of social relations (Lefebvre, 2013). Therefore, the construction of space stimulates power relations, since they have in it a vehicle for the naturalization of the process of domination. The space is no stranger to the underlying contradictions that the very nature of the dispute generates in the definition, use, and control between the actors involved. For Lefebvre (2013), "(social) space is a (social) product" of the social relations that take place in it through a historical process.

The relationship between government technologies, understood as procedures through which power relations are articulated in certain societies,

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and the construction of space, derives from the consideration that social space is a transformed space, real, and of social practices. A society that generates practices constantly produces space from a temporal and historical dimension (Lefebvre, 2013). In this process, the role of agents and actors leads to territorial reconfiguration of other global and local transformations, placing and positioning, at the same time, agents and phases on a time scale of medium or long historical duration (Braudel, 1974). For Milton Santos (2000), space is a relational reality. It is the indissoluble set of systems of objects and actions in which the landscape, the territorial configuration, and the territorial division of labor converge. These elements depend on the ability to sustain local and global processes according to their own functionality and dialectics. Space is a part of the social totality that encompasses the economic and ideological-cultural aspects. It involves coexisting relationships, bonds, and relationships and interactions that lead to the construction, transformation, perception, and representation of reality.

Faced with the construction of space, subjectivity (of the actor/agent) is constituted from the technique and practices that the subject applies to himself. This mechanism of subjective control causes subjects to naturalize a regime of truth production as a field of possibilities for individual freedoms.

In this context, the State is an actor that acts as a leader of different objectives to produce and govern subjects in spaces built under a "regime of truth". Therefore, it adds the birth of homogenizing discourses (as government devices) that violently reconfigure the natural and social space and inaugurate a new economic geography, which in cases such as the one analyzed becomes a tourist geography. The latter not only depends on the State, but also on other actors (companies) to facilitate the opening of new investment spaces (capital), processes, and the creation of new natures for the leisure market. In terms of Michel Foucault (2004), this articulation configures a society mediated by the production of specific regimes of "truth". In this way, the State creates space and political conditions for internal or external agents to act freely, as long as it coincides with economic interests or political power.

It is important to point out that government is not the direct imposition of the norm or the law, but is the customary achievement of the agreement of wills between rulers and ruled (Foucault, 2004). Therefore, the construction of a tourist space obeys a regime that establishes the bases, rules, and relationships of the game where the actions of free agents take place, as well as the provision of ideological apparatuses so that a goal is achieved. In general, the objective is the normalization and naturalization of the populations from the control devices, which allows to produce in advanced societies, what David Harvey (2001) has called "capital spaces".

This process becomes the sphere of practices and discourses for the productive sectors in produced spaces. In addition, it generates a process of coordination of actors, social groups, and institutions to achieve collectively defined goals in fragmented environments characterized by uncertainty (Ruano de la Fuente, 2002). Local experiences have resulted in the use of its natural resources, such as goods, but with the nuance of a new socio-territorial reality that emerges with the production of the contemporary tourist space, as shown below.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitatively based on a broad review of the written literature on the issues raised, fieldwork in the study communities in July 2018 and from February to October 2019 in which passive, moderate, and active participation was applied (Vallés, 1997) and 15 semi-structured interviews with different relevant actors in the processes studied. To have a more precise picture, interviews were conducted with businessmen and employees of the tourism sector, journalists, academics from local educational institutions, officials of the Ministry of Tourism of Chiapas, tourist guides, and tourists, both national and foreign. Likewise, snowball sampling was applied in 2018 and 2019. stays. This method made it possible to engage with the main local and regional actors of both San Cristóbal de Las Casas and the Río Arcotete community. In this way, positive results were achieved by having a wealth of empirical data to highlight the tourism timeline in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, and Chiapas, in general. However, it is important to note that the information obtained was triangulated with other sources, such as reports and statistical data generated by official institutions such as the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) and the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR) in order to have a correct comparison in the data obtained.

Geographical location of the study site

The Río Arcotete ejido is located in the municipality of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas (Figure 1). It is located 4 kilometers northwest of the city's urban layout (Montoya & Hernández, 2013). According to the farmers, it is argued that the ejido was founded by 45 people from other communities surrounding the municipality such as El Aguaje, Agua de Pajarito, Carmen Arcotete, Las Ollas, and Yut-osil II. The latter two correspond to the municipality of San Juan Chamula (Fieldwork, 2019). Many indigenous people were expelled or displaced for having opposed the religious beliefs and "traditional" policies in their communities. Particularly, in Chamula thousands of indigenous people were expelled due to religious and agrarian

problems (Cortéz & Velasco, 2012), and the nearest point of refuge and settlement for the displaced population was San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

Note. Picture taken from Google Earth.

Figure 1. Geographical location of Río Arcotete

The foundation of the ejido Río Arcotete took place on privately owned land. The tension experienced in the early nineties of the twentieth century by the armed conflict of the EZLN brought a demand for the appropriation of land by organized groups. The community joined this claim and the indigenous people decided to manage the creation of the ejido. This group settled on the outskirts of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, and it had the objective of obtaining land and wanted to reach an agreement with the owners of the inhabited properties. Faced with the widespread problems in the Altos de Chiapas region, due to expulsions, migrations, and illegal appropriation of land, the federal government decided to buy land and give it to organized groups. In Río Arcotete, after many efforts, they achieved this benefit. Consequently, the owners of encroached lands were paid and the indigenous people made way to legalize their new space. In 2001 the ejido Río Arcotete[1] was founded with 300 hectares of land (RAN, 2013). The purchase was financed by the federal government through the Rural Credit Bank of the Isthmus. The total population was 120 families that after already established were dedicated to the milpa, sheep grazing, planting vegetables, extracting wood for firewood or domestic use, and the production of charcoal and ornamental plants.

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1   The Arcotete owes its name to the French soldier Jean Francoise D' Arcotete, who died in the place for "the love of a young woman from San Cristóbal" in colonial times, according to the legend that is very present in San Cristóbal de Las Casas (González, 2022).

The role of the government in the construction of tourist spaces

Since the 80s in Mexico, the neoliberal policy accentuated inequalities and led to the dismantling of government apparatuses that helped to encourage farmers in their agricultural work. This policy consisted of leaving to the market the determination of the prices of agricultural goods and the fixing of agricultural subsidies and supports based on productivity[2] (Huerta, 2003). The deep agricultural crisis, the trade deficit, public and private indebtedness, the decrease in public spending, and the privatization of public companies, among other aspects, generated more poverty in the majority of the population (Gil-Méndez, 2015). The bulk of these settlers were now in the rural sector, making living conditions more difficult.

At the regional level, the agony of the farmer sector became more chronic. In Chiapas, changes in agricultural policy triggered transformations in lifestyles that would affect the displacement of thousands of farmers towards the poles of economic development. In this way, a crisis in the agricultural sector and a deficit in production were accentuated (Villafuerte Solís, 2015). The fall in grain prices and the dismantling of institutions that guaranteed subsidies to the rural sector led to a relative orphanhood of farmers.

Coincidentally, the change in the economic model (from welfare to neoliberal) promotes nature[3] tourism as a device for economic development, environmental conservation, and poverty alleviation (Sandoval, 2006). Nature tourism is proposed as a project that generates long-term economic changes. In addition, it is considered a tourist modality that proposes a closer interrelation with nature, concerned with the conservation of the natural and social resources of the area in which the tourist activity is carried out (Miroglio, 2017). Due to the national conjunctures, Chiapas consolidated nature tourism in the rural sector, proposing it as a component of economic and territorial development.

The State was the piece to create a tourist geography and a leisure market in Chiapas. The construction of tourist spaces was in the logic of generating a spatiality of tourism as a component of the vitality of the farmer economy. This generated the implementation of economic mechanisms that contributed to a market economy where tourism would be the most relevant productive

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2   In Mexico, subsidies to farmers and smallholders are not set according to productivity, but are oriented towards direct support (per hectare) regardless of the level of productivity. One example was the Programme of Direct Support to the Countryside (PROCAMPO) in the 2012-2018 six-year term.
3   Internationally, the discourse favors the adoption of green tourism as a balance between social, economic and ecological tourism as opposed to conventional mass tourism. Tourism takes on various adjectives, but it continues to be the industry that now seeks market segments in natural reservoirs and tourist attraction enclaves. The sustainability claim favored its appropriation in the political, business, and academic sectors.

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component. It was no wonder that, on a national scale, in the first decade of the 21st century, the annual value of the formal market for tourism activities linked to nature exceeded 750 million pesos. The expenditure of international tourists represented 64.2% of the total, that is, 486 million pesos, while the expenditure of national tourists was 35.8% that is, 271 million pesos (SECTUR, 2006). This escalation of capital forced a restructuring of the planning scheme in the government bodies responsible for promoting tourist destinations.

The government's participation was expressed in the common objective of the market: to normalize the practice of nature tourism among Chiapas farmers.[4] Many of the experiences that were born since the 1990s were of rural microenterprises focused on ecotourism. In each case, government agencies such as the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR), the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), the Ministry of Economy (SE), the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries, and Food (SAGARPA), the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL), the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI), the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP), the National Fund for the Promotion of Tourism (FONATUR), the Tourism Promotion Council of Mexico (CPTM), and the National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR) have been key to the promotion[5] of nature tourism projects, which was concretized with proposals for investment and development of tourism infrastructure. In addition, the strengthening of the "nature" component was a symptom of the new economic order that the tourism market was imposing. The consumer market of "the indigenous", "the cultural" and "the natural" was joined in the 90s by the implementation of nature tourism in Mexico. Likewise, environmental conservation and sustainable development at the international and national levels were two categories that forced change in public policy.

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4   The data indicate that after the year 2000, an outstanding turnaround was registered in the traditional centers with the highest tourist attendance. For example, Tuxtla Gutierrez with 1,780,040 tourists; Tapachula with 788,268; San Cristobal de Las Casas with 1,394,363; Palenque with 1,019,621; Comitan with 459,267; and Chiapa de Corzo with 426,293. In this way, the state received around 7,722,289 visitors, which represents a greater influx compared to the same year in 2018 (6,620,042) (Ministry of Tourism, 2019). The accumulated economic revenue in 2019 was $23,908,000.00, increasing compared to 2018 ($21,607,000.00). The cumulative average hotel occupancy was 42%, higher than in 2018 (41%) (Ministry of Tourism, 2019). For their part, ecotourism centers in 2016, according to the Ministry of Tourism, reached 90 throughout the state, of which 55 offered services (López, Mazariegos & Milla, 2016). These data represent the importance of the globality of tourism and its practical consequences in the territories of Chiapas.

5   In 2006, a total of 1,239 enterprises and projects offering nature-based tourism services were registered in Mexico. 70% were operating enterprises and 30% were initiatives under development. 74% were community or social, mainly comprising rural or indigenous groups, and 26% were private. By 2016 these were reduced to 1,186 offering nature tourism (SEMARNAT, 2022). This economic change had an impact on new territorialities and also demonstrated the importance of the state in creating the conditions for the promotion of nature tourism.

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Due to the social, economic, and political situations that had been dragging on since the 90s in the farmer and indigenous sector, the government of Chiapas promoted a strategy of socio-productive transformation, consisting of promoting business proposals focused on trade and sale of services, to diversify income among the rural sector. The crisis, in part due to the poor performance of the Chiapas economy coupled with a poor distribution of income, justified and forced these changes. For example, between 1990 and 2000, 74.5% of the population earned less than a minimum wage, a situation that reflected the conditions of poverty experienced by the majority of Chiapas residents (Villafuerte Solís, 2015). This scenario led to government-driven projects being adopted without major problems.

In the official discourse, tourism activity was now presented as an economic option to correct the conditions of poverty and marginalization in Chiapas (Mendiguchía, 2005). However, the structural conditions of poverty and marginalization of the farmer population paradoxically prevented the development of the projects. However, the route had already been promoted for several decades. The history of investment in tourism dates back to 1988 with the so-called "road modernization". The implementation of 11 583 kilometers, of which 6.3% were dirt, 69.9% coated, and 23.8% pavement, led the Bank of Internal Commerce to invest in tourist centers, entertainment centers, shops, and supplies in general (Vázquez, 2019). The function of the federal and state governments was to "facilitate" the construction of tourist spaces to give economic value to the regions of Chiapas.

The conjuncture condition and the "zapatour"

In the 90s, political changes in Chiapas forced the implementation of economic support programs for the agriculture sector. The birth of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) political movement, in several indigenous regions with serious problems of material poverty, questioned the structures of the Mexican State (Solís & Aguilar, 2021). The EZLN, which coincides with the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), marked an obligatory route to carry out socio-economic development projects by the federal and state governments.

This situation in which Chiapas was identified only by the armed conflict was taken advantage of by the State government. In the late 90s and early 2000s, it was sold to Chiapas as a nature destination. The objective was to minimize the negative image of a "poor and abandoned" Chiapas, as the EZLN had disseminated it. The arrival of a type of politicized tourist (Coronado, 2008) who was interested in observing marginalization and poverty, paradoxically led to market conditions in tourism consumption: lodging, transport, and food.

After the so-called "zapatour", which consisted of people visiting Chiapas to get to know the Zapatistas for everything that was divulged about the indigenous peoples in rebellion, the State government took advantage of that image of the native groups to promote the natural resources and culture of Chiapas. In this way, "the indigenous" and "the cultural" were used by tourism companies and the state government as a commodity to offer in the tourism market. The objective was to promote an image of Chiapas as a natural destination under the protection of "the ancestral" peasant and indigenous peoples. Through a whole marketing campaign, rural spaces, which only figured in the imaginary and anthropological "rescue" literature as static societies without changes in historical depth (Trench, 2005), were reconfigured towards nature tourism and cultural tourism.

According to the government of Chiapas, the modernization of tourism in the region would come through the promotion of the cultural and artistic beauty of the native peoples. The new tourism geography would give way to local tourism projects and initiatives in the peasant and indigenous sectors. Many of them would obtain resources from the federal and state governments and would give way to new social, family, business, community, or individual microenterprises. This is how new tourist centers were born in several regions of the state such as the Tojolabal Comiteca Plateau: Causas Verde, UNINAJAB, Gallo Giro, Mam Tziscao; in Soconusco: Mariposas Alas de agua, Barra de Zacapulco, La Palma, Volcán del Tacaná, La Ruta del Café in the Aargavia, Liquidámbar, Hamburg and La Casa Grande estates in Unión Juárez; in the Isthmus-coast: El Castaño, Mapastepec, Cabeza de Toro and Madresal in Tonalá; in the Altos Tsotsil-Tseltal region: El Corralito, Oxchuc, Rancho Nuevo, Las Grutas del Mamut in the Agua de Pajarito community, El Arcotete and the Arcotete community in San Cristóbal de Las Casas; and the Zoque valleys: Sima de las Cotorras in Ocozocoautla.

Overall, in just three decades the tourist geography of Chiapas made qualitative leaps in the development of tourist spaces in the peasant and indigenous sectors. The case analyzed in this research, Río Arcotete of the municipality of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, is located in this context of changes and transformations. With the coverage of the government and other important actors, it will develop as a primary tourism destination, as we will see later.

The construction of the tourist space in Río Arcotete

The Río Arcotete ejido was born in 2001 and consolidated as a nature tourism project in 2008. It is located in an area whose existing natural resources are the limestone arch that is crossed by the Fogótico River, a pine-oak forest, a tributary of water, and caves that - according to the inhabitants of the area

- have a long tradition in the cult of "spirits" (Fieldwork, June 2019). These resources are considered potential assets for a sector of tourists seeking recreation and aesthetic contemplation of nature. Although the tourism proposal is proposed as a local and collective initiative that was born by the indigenous people of Río Arcotete (Picado, 2014; Montoya & Hernández, 2013), what was observed in dialogue with the inhabitants is that the context of social and economic vulnerability due to the crisis of the countryside and its subsistence conditions forced the search for new productive options in early 2000 among these options, tourism.

The above was important, in the regional scenario, the crisis in the countryside that had been dragging on for decades also affected the indigenous people. With the change in agricultural policy, the lack of subsidy for agro-chemicals and the little support they had from the government sharpened their living conditions. The changes that had originated forced them to look for other economic activities since the yield they obtained from their lands covered the basics of their food needs. There was no surplus to market, as they point out:

> When we came to live on this side and when we legalized these portions of land, we already had problems working the land. The government didn't support us in getting fertilizer or grains or buying. The little we produced was used to eat, nothing else. Yes, there was support from other things, but not for the land or the purchase of animals, because they told us they would help us, but they never did. We were forced to look for work [...] we heard that the new government would support the creation of tourist centers and as we had some acquaintances, over the years we managed to start working in tourism, although many colleagues were not convinced, but it was achieved after several years of work (Pedro Gómez, personal communication, February 2018).

This response is evidence of the lack of support and monitoring by government institutions in the agricultural sector. Consequently, indigenous people sought income in other productive activities.

Public policies were given: the regime had been promoting the development of tourist destinations. The state government needed to justify its intervention and help strengthen the Pueblos Mágicos Program since San Cristóbal de Las Casas had acquired this distinction and Río Arcotete belonged to this municipality. In addition, peasant and indigenous discontent, which began in the 90s with the armed uprising of the EZLN, provided an environment for some businessmen, alongside the indigenous people, to express their interest in opening spaces for the business of nature tourism. Another important aspect was that the natives of Río Arcotete managed to create a tourist center.

90% of the indigenous people interviewed in Río Arcotete recall that the production of goods for self-consumption failed to meet their needs. In fact, due to the lack of subsidy for the field and the low yield of corn cultivation - scarce 600 kilos a year - many of them had to work in other productive activities. A fraction of the population of Río Arcotete migrated to the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in search of income and another to cheap labor receiving centers such as Cancún, Distrito Federal, and Puerto Vallarta. Those who stayed in their place of residence worked in the firewood trade selling roastery chickens or worked for the foreign population that liked to use fireplaces in San Cristóbal de Las Casas (Juan Hernández, personal communication, 2021).

Under the conditions they experienced, it was not difficult for this sector of the population to adapt socially to tourism. 80% of the indigenous people interviewed did not hesitate to affirm that one of the objectives of promoting tourism in their territory was the search for income and well-being in their families (Juan Hernández, personal communication, 2021). Other activities that are now dedicated to nature are the planting of beans, potatoes, and chilacayotes and then selling them in the José Castillo Tielemans market in San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

An important factor that influenced the creation of the tourist space was the increase in the flow of tourists in the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. First, because of the curiosity to meet the indigenous peoples who were "protagonists of the armed movement"[6]; and second, because of the result of the national and international dissemination of this city as a Pueblo Mágico (SECTUR, 2014). The latter resulted in the celebration of the Miss Universe 2007 contest, the Festival of Cultures 2009, Nuestra Belleza Mexico, and the International Adventure Tourism Festival, the most important national and international events. These programs fostered an interest in local entrepreneurship (hoteliers, restaurateurs, tour operators) and favored an agreement with the indigenous people to rethink a tourist destination in the Río Arcotete community.

The Río Arcotete community is located 4 kilometers from the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. The proximity between it and this city generated a tourist route. In addition, the beauty of the place has been the pretext for the rest of the social class that likes leisure (professionals, doctors, teachers, and microentrepreneurs) (Hernández, personal communication, 2020). The investment in this tourism project was made by the state government, and

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6   This has been mythologised, because in reality, of the 18 indigenous municipalities in the Altos region, a fraction in the town of San Andrés Larraínzar participated in the armed movement. However, this discourse is used only for tourism purposes.

the business sector helped to promote it. The Jovel Valley Basin Committee made up of members of civil societies, has also participated in reforestation and biodiversity conservation programs in territories of indigenous populations. These actions have created expectations for a new nature resort in the peri-urban area of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. From being a "vacant" land, but private and usable only for agriculture, in a few years, it became a space for tourists. This has been the path towards the normalization of tourism in the indigenous context of Río Arcotete.

The influx of tourists to San Cristóbal de Las Casas[7] changed the appearance of the city. This phenomenon brought with it the increase in establishments for lodging, restaurants, bars, and shops, as well as the conditioning of the Historic Center (Hernández & Fenner, 2018). These circumstances were taken advantage of by organized businessmen made up of hoteliers and tourism service providers under the Arcotete Ecotourism Board, who requested the creation of an ecotourism park in the Río Arcotete community. This project raised an investment of 15,000,000 MXN for infrastructure. The inhabitants of the ejido accepted the proposal and contributed to generating the conditions and financing for such construction in their territory (RealEstate, Market & Lifestyle, 2010).

The alliance between indigenous people and local entrepreneurs yielded good results. Proof of this is that in 2014, the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) and the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR) allocated 27,000,000 MXN for training and promotion of ecotourism in indigenous communities. This was as part of the Alternative Tourism Program in Indigenous Zones (PTAZI) (Ministry of Tourism, 2014). This social policy of the federal and state governments to invest in vulnerable populations led to the creation of the Arcotete Tourist Center, whose contribution was 596,024 MXN. The executor was the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL) of the federal government. With this amount, walkers, palapas, rustic staircases, and bathrooms were built. This stage began as a new tourist destination in the peri-urban area of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. In the short term, other institutions such as the National Commission for the Development of Indian Peoples -formerly called CDI- were convened to contribute 1,407,917.55 MXN (Montoya & Hernández, 2013). This amount would be used to strengthen the tourist infrastructure with parking, zip lines, cabins, horses, rappels, and more.

The creation of this space required the ejidatarios to cede 23 hectares exclusively for tourism demand. On the other hand, the state and

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7   This came about in the following years out of curiosity about the colonial city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, the insurrection Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) and the political, religious, and territorial disputes in the region.

municipal governments were responsible for creating market conditions. That is promotion, dissemination, route, and accompaniment in training and tourism training through a network of institutions. Since the founding of the Arcotete Ecotourism Center, indigenous people have had around 20 courses, workshops, and training in customer service, restaurant service, gastronomy, culture, and tourism guides, among other skills (Pérez, personal communication, June 2021). An advance in this tourism company was the formalization of the Indigenous Cooperative Society by 120 members who own the tourist center. This was done for administrative, legal, and operational purposes before the government bodies. Until this stage, the federal government enhanced the conditions for the creation of a new destination, as the Arcotete tourist center was considered. In the interviews conducted, 80% of the partners reiterated that the federal and state governments supported them in creating their ecotourism center, as can be seen in the following quote:

> The entrepreneurs and the government's support is not denied, they have also trained us in many things. Since we were founded, people have come from universities, research centers, students, tourists, and professors. Therefore, tourism support is not denied, although there hasn't been any more support for the crops. Now, according to the Secretary of Tourism of the city council, they told us they were going to train us if we wanted, to handle computers and for young people to get into tourism, but we have not decided in the assembly (Hernández, personal communication, June 2020).

The above shows the significant progress they have had as a microenterprise and the tourist influx in the community, for which the institutions seek to know the experience of the indigenous people.

From farmers to sellers and consumers

Pluriactivity is a trait today. So far, 90% of the inhabitants of the Río Arcotete community are engaged in various productive activities. However, subsistence agriculture, particularly milpa, and vegetables, as well as ovino-culture and livestock farming are less developed. Rio Arcotete residents have quickly transitioned from agricultural to commercial and service work. The traditional form of family organization, conceived as a structure where members cooperate in the domestic economy, has been disrupted. This is how some members of the family do not cooperate, others migrate and no longer contribute financially. However, those who stay -which is the new labor composition of the families of the community- are forced to help others (women, children, young people, and the elderly) for the domestic economy. Now everyone works at the ecotourism center. This is part of the changes in the rural landscape.

On the other hand, in 2018, around 18,000 tourists arrived in the aforementioned community, and with it an economic spill that encouraged the collective work of the indigenous population of Río Arcotete. The entrance to the tourist park has a cost of 10.00 MXN, which, in real terms, generates approximately 180,000.00 MXN of annual gross income. Added to this are the services offered in tours to the caves (10.00 MXN), boat ride (20.00 MXN), horseback riding (30.00 MXN), zip line (100.00MXN), abseiling (150.00 MXN), and camping (25.00 MXN), among others, which causes tourism income to increase (Field Notes, September 21, 2021). The income, subtracting the operating costs, returns them and excites them to devote themselves to tourism. Therefore, the peasants are assumed as tourist servers. In addition to having standardized these practices, they see themselves as guides for visitors (Artemio Girón, personal communication, June 2019). However, tourism has gained ground by slowly displacing other productive activities.

The Río Arcotete Ecotourism Center is currently a place of recreation for San Cristóbal de Las Casas families and tourists. With the incorporation of tourism activity in the community, conditions have improved in basic public infrastructure services such as roads, electricity, and drinking water. The transition from the productive agricultural model to the tertiary sector gives a new functionality to the territory and, in turn, determines new uses of the land. The use of space for specialized activities such as tourism has led to advances in infrastructure, investment, and changes in domestic structure. One of the latter is the consumption of goods that they did not have before, such as junk food, alcoholic beverages, and cars. So, the people of Río Arcotete went from agricultural workers to consumers and self-employed.

In the speech, the population of this community accepts the challenge of seeing themselves as entrepreneurs of nature tourism, although in the end, their practices do not help, as deforestation continues. Some farmers are engaged in cutting down trees to obtain firewood that is sold in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. This is contradictory: on the one hand, nature tourism is promoted; and on the other, it is destroyed. Meanwhile, the ominous silence of the official authorities causes the image of environmental conservation and tourism in the hands of indigenous people to continue to be created. For them, the most important thing is the "generation of employment and self-employment", despite the tree felling and the damage it causes to the environment.

The role of the Assembly in conflict mediation

In general, it is assumed among indigenous people that tourism is an extremely important activity that has required agreements, consensus, and dissent. Even though there is a collaborative work, based on legitimate

economic interests among the inhabitants, conflicts have been generated. However, they settle, because collectively they want to improve their living conditions and certain patterns to harmonize work in tourism.

The type of organization that the community has had for decades requires the Community Assembly as the axis that regulates social behavior and contributes to resolving tensions among the inhabitants. This has resulted in organizational, administrative, and participation benefits, not only functional but also effective for tourism activity. This has also helped the assembly to achieve a better articulation with economic and political actors interested in tourism. Thus, the interrelationship between community and external actors articulates a balanced working dynamic. Although there are displays of autonomy in decision-making, as there are alliances, negotiations, and appropriations in the territory about tourism that takes place in the indigenous territory. The assembly, then, has a preponderant role in mediating conflicts and helping the tourism project to move forward, despite the absence of actors who at one stage were involved, and who over the years have withdrawn.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The process experienced by the farmers of Rio Arcotete speaks of a consensual social restructuring based on nature tourism. This transformation explains the depth of the crisis in the farming sector in Chiapas and its repercussions in all rural areas. The imprint of state governmentality in creating market conditions and new tourist spaces that normalize behavior in the long term is also evident. Undoubtedly, Río Arcotete stands as a transformed, real, and practical social space. It is a produced area where power relations are generated, as it defines the use, control, and exploitation of natural resources. Indigenous people now reconfigure their labor dynamics territorially, by global and local times. Tourism has placed them in a dynamic work schedule where they are forced to make social, family, and work-related adjustments. Thus, a new territorial division of labor is generated. This process has sustained the people of Rio Arcotete for several years. However, it has been functional for their economic interests and lifestyles in the community.

The production regime created by tourism has led farmers to subjectively assume the importance of this activity and gradually normalize environmental conservation while relying on the state for income through government programs.

The normalization of tourism in the Río Arcotete community is gradually acquiring the character of a social and economic fact. The transition from a primary to a tertiary production model points to an important fact: the strategy

of planning the tourist space by local and external actors whose interests are economic. The change from a rural space for milpa to one for recreation and tourist visits, speaks of a market logic and the government's support to sustain it. However, the activity itself brings other problems among the inhabitants, such as the need for infrastructure, agency skills, and capital development. Consequently, more social energy and new socio-productive strategies for work are required. These components are nuanced and the state fails to be the real expression of the desired economic development among the subjects.

The rural territory sets limits to the accumulation of capital, as the conditions for the expanded reproduction of the capital they derive from tourism are not yet in place. Farmers are in a slow stage of economic progress, and despite being pluriactive, there are historical conditions that weigh on them. For example, in the general scenario of Chiapas, the structural condition of poverty (74.7 %) and extreme poverty (46.7 %) (Levy et al., 2016) prevents the coexistence of positive conditions to overcome inequality and, therefore, the social conflicts generated by precarious employment, in the countryside and services.

Tourism and environmental policy, as a technology of government (Foucault, 2009), operated in the Río Arcotete community to minimize the political and social situation experienced in the 1990s. With tourism as a life project, patterns of normalization of this activity and a socio-organizational dynamic within the rural territory are instrumentalized. These changes reinforce the idea that projects 'from above' are effective - at least in discourse - although on the condition that they have limits and contradictions 'from below' since the *habit* generates resistance to social change. At least in Rio Arcotete, this verticality of public policy has been positive, as economic interest forced different sectors to negotiate and compromise.

The diversity of leadership that emerges in the community, whether through individual or collective experiences, generates ideas, actions, and political relations. It also gives rise to power relations and various forms of exercising control over natural resources and tourism activity. In this situation, the government appears as the creator of space and plays a central role, because capital alone does not produce space, but the government is needed, through economic policy echoes the needs of capital.

The indigenous territory in Arcotete is the expression of the dominance of a regime of truth, just as Foucault suggests, it is the historical dispersion of discourses that are created as a function of power, in this case, the discourses that oscillate in the tourist market, as cost-benefit criteria are prioritized and responsibility is awarded to the users (the indigenous people who have to protect the natural resources for tourism). Consequently, in the long term, the same criteria, truths, and logic that dominate the market

economy and competitiveness will be reproduced, a logic in which the criterion of conservation and economic development ends up being imposed.

These effects have been internalized in the population of Rio Arcotete. For example, from being landless farmers, they now take on the role of micro-entrepreneurs in nature tourism. This fact generates multiple identities that are constructed in the fragmentation of discourses in favor of subsistence alternatives, but under a common history: the rural. However, the paradox is that they are constructed as subjects and objects of agrarian and environmental public policies and recreate an internal and external reality where tourism is seen as an economic development activity. In this imagination, the idea of 'the indigenous and cultural' is sold as intangible goods appreciated by the tourist market. The farmers of Rio Arcotete are subjects forced to negotiate, but subordinate to the local businessmen who reinforce the tourism routes. As subjects/products of the market and the state, they do not achieve economic autonomy, as they remain a society dependent on external financing. There is no economic self-management as a tourism project. They therefore maintain a relational tension that forces them to construct semantic fields in order to reinterpret their social and economic world and thus to negotiate. This is why farmers strengthen their institutions (the assembly and the rules) in order to act, think, and feel according to the context.

Río Arcotete is an example of governmentality violently reconfiguring indigenous territory, generating new territorial divisions of labor, social relations, and institutional arrangements that are slowly internalized. Although indigenous people enjoy a positive social construction by government institutions, they have not been able to fully adapt to the radical changes in their lifestyles. From the government's point of view, voluntary participation is important and may or may not be effective. Indigenous people are often seen as lacking the political power to effectively demand the full backing of the government and their impoverished situation gives them no real choice. The crises have left them in a state of helplessness and they are now left with the option of accepting and distributing their time in various productive activities, to earn various incomes to subsist.

The political use of tourism is the palliative to poverty that has been dragging on for decades. This discourse is internalized with all the social and cultural complexity among farmers and is generalized day by day by the implementation of environmental conservation standardization programs. The result is that in the community there is community tourism where all the indigenous people are integrated into the project. In the last decade, the boom in nature tourism permeated the territory, in such a way that economic changes were brought about by the influx of tourists. This

experience made up for the few benefits obtained from other activities such as agriculture or the sale of their labor force.

In general, the type of tourism developed by the inhabitants of Río Arcotete has a long way to go before it can be consolidated. Indigenous people continue to depend on the government through its economic and social development programs. This endogenous weakness obstructs local capacities and prevents the development of nature tourism, as there is no economic self-management.

From a market point of view, despite possessing the potential to build a nature tourism destination and an underpinning corpus of individual and collective rules, policies, and regulations, the people of Rio Arcotete are unable to move beyond the problem of reorganization to raise capital to invest in infrastructure and generate agency to be self-managing. These issues prevent them from advancing and consolidating their offer as an ecotourism center and not depending on other actors such as local entrepreneurs, who are, in many cases, the direct beneficiaries of the sale of tourism services.

However, the indigenous people have adapted to the rules of the tourism services market. Day to day they experience how to do business in their territory, deal with the kind of government that almost abandons them, and face other difficulties. They now rely on other local and regional actors to drive the process of creating demand for these new tourism spaces. As a result, the process of economic autonomy is still underway. The challenge is to emerge from the apparent prosperity that tourism could bring and to balance its productive pluriactivity.

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