Wind energy in San Dionisio del Mar, Mexico

- a qualitative study on social mobilization

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Abstract

Since the beginning of 2000 a wind energy project has been planned to be constructed in the indigenous village San Dionisio del Mar. A resistance movement in the village was born and in 2013 they managed to expulse the Spanish wind energy company Mareña Renovables. Using the method process tracing, a qualitative study is presented with an aim to find out what it was that gave the resistance movement its strength. Drawing on New Social Movement Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory, three hypotheses are tested. This to contribute to the study on why some resistance movements succeed and why some do not.
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Abbreviations and translations

APIITDTT: Asamblea de los Pueblos Indígenas del Istmo de Tehuantepec en Defensa de la Tierra y el Territorio/ Assembly of the indigenous villages in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, in defense of the native land and territory

CNI: Congreso nacional de los indígenas/ national indigenous congress in Mexico

COCEI: Coalición Obrera, Campesina, Estudiantil del Istmo/ Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus, political party in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec

IDB: Inter-American Development Bank

PAN: Partido Acción Nacional / National action party

PRD: Partido de la Revolución Democrática/ Party of the Democratic Revolution

PRI: Partido revolucionario institucional / Institutional revolutionary party

Sicario: latin american phrase; hitman or hired assasin

UCIZONI: Unión de comunidades indígenas de la zona norte del Istmo/ Union between indigenous communities from the northern part of the Isthmus (NGO in Matias Romero, Oaxaca)
Introduction

"El mar es nuestro banco" ("The sea is our bank" own translation)

- community police from San Dioniso del Mar, Oaxaca (Interview 7, December 2016)

In San Dioniso del Mar, a small indigenous village in southern Mexico, a social resistance movement against a multinational wind farm project had its peak in 2011. Other villages in the region had not been able to organize a resistance strong enough to stop wind farm projects on their territory. The resistance in San Dionisio was organized in a town assembly and they managed to expulse the wind farm company in 2013. What factor (s) enabled this small community to stand up to a coalition of multinational corporations, banks, local authorities and the Mexican government? This is what this thesis aims to find out. Using the method process tracing, I intend to try three hypotheses; ‘transnational bonds’, ‘shared identity’ and ‘local assistance’.

The main question to be studied is what it is that makes social mobilization successful? The paper focuses on social mobilization by groups especially vulnerable, such as indigenous populations, living with poor political opportunity structures. There is a vast literature on social movements but the literature does not agree on what the most important factor is when it comes to successful mobilization.

Indigenous resistance movements with poor political opportunity structures seldom succeed with their objectives. We need a better understanding on how these movements can succeed; what their most important assets are.

The reason I chose to study the case of San Dionisio is the unique situation that followed the confrontation between the wind farm company and the villagers. As mentioned, it has been a fight not only against the corporation but also one against the Mexican government and big financial institutions. The resistance managed to stop the project in 2013, even though papers
had been signed nine years earlier, with interests such as the IDB, Danish capital and the World Bank. Like one of my informants Oscar said:

“...era una lucha contra los gigantes” (“...it was a fight against the giants”) (Interview 3, December 2016)

Studying how it came about that an indigenous and marginalized population living in conditions of poor political opportunity structures managed to stand up to a far “stronger” counterpart can give an insight on how such resistance movements can success although it seems like they have every odds against them.

**Hypotheses**

As previously mentioned, this paper aims to find out what factors contributed to the success of the resistance movement in San Dionisio. It can sometimes be problematic to assess whether a movement has had success or not. Swain (2010) chooses to look at whether the organization has been able to live on and spread itself since its birth. According to Swain, it is problematic to analyze a movements failure or winning by examining its stated goals. That would mean ignoring more complicated aspects, seeing social organizations as “homogenous entities with a single goal” (Swain, 2010). However, in my case, I argue that one can draw the conclusion that the movement against the wind farm in San Dionisio has succeeded. The movement had a clear goal which they accomplished; to stop the company from constructing the park. The fact that the movement continues to be active and that the villages still cooperate with each other reinforces that as a social movement, they have triumphed.

I have developed three hypotheses drawing on literature on New Social Movement Theory (NSM theory) and Research Mobilization Theory (RM theory). The hypotheses ‘local assistance’ and ‘transnational bonds’ have been developed from RM theory whereas ‘shared identity’ follows the assumptions from NSM theory. Where Resource Mobilization theory (RM theory) claims that resources are the most important for social movements to function, according to New Social Movement theory (NSM theory) the existence of a notion of collective identity is the most crucial factor (Golhasani, 2016). I want to find out whether RM theory is right about resources being most important, or if it is identity that is most important, as NSM theory teaches.
There is also a third model; The Political Process Model, which points at different political systems when explaining differing opportunities for social mobilization (Rice, 2012). It has been argued that the Political Process Model is inappropriate when studying social movements in Latin America, since the model has been developed with a focus on European political institutions. But other literature on social movements (Swain, 2010) also has emphasized the need to include the study of the state. We have reasons to believe that the abilities a movement has to function depend on the Political Opportunity Structures it faces. That is why I have chosen to include the aspect of POS. My focus is how social movements with poor POS can succeed. The part about POS is not meant to be part of the theory answering my research question, but more as a complement to my research. I will describe the theory about POS in order to be able to portray the POS in the region of my focus. This to be able to claim that my research is focused on social resistance movements in regions with poor POS, as I believe that these conditions influence how a group chooses to act. I will present the theory about POS and an analysis of the POS in Mexico overall and in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec where San Dionisio is located. I will also feature an analysis of the POS the movement against the wind farm in San Dionisio faces.

The main assumption Research Mobilization Theory draws is that the success of organizations rely on their ability to mobilize resources (Ingalsbee, 1993). Traditionally, RM saw resources as labor or money (Golhasani, 2016). However, there are different views on what kind of resources matters the most. My first hypothesis is that the resistance movement succeeded because of resources in terms of connections to local NGOs, alternative media and independent actors; ‘local assistance’.

Recent literature on social movements have emphasized the need to study social movements in the context of a globalized world, where the movements not only depend on the state within which it operates, but can obtain support from transnational organs such as so called “issue networks” (Swain, 2010). My other hypothesis examines the relationship between resources as linkages with foreign actors, with success for resistance movements. I have called it ‘transnational bonds’, aka. support from the international community, such as larger NGOs and other support groups.

Lastly, the third hypothesis examines the factor ‘shared identity’. In the literature on New Social Movement Theory (NSM), actors play decisive roles -” …not as resources but as sources of collective action” (Ingalsbee, p.141, 1993). It involves the social and psychological dimensions of collective action. Mobilization occurs and functions because actors are motivated to actions
because of ideological believes, values or goals. Ingalsbee refers to Melucci: “personal identity is the property being claimed and defended. It is the ground where individual and collective resistance is taking root” (1980: 218).

Other studies about indigenous resistance groups in Latin America have shown that identity is an important resource (Loker, 1991). Here the hypothesis is that it was the cooperation between the villages that enabled San Dionisio to stop the project, and, that this cooperation emerged as a feeling of shared identity among the indigenous people of the different villages due to common values and beliefs.

With this paper, I want to contribute to the literature on social movements, focusing on those that arise among particularly vulnerable groups in society in states with unfavorable political opportunity structures. This study is a contribution to the research on what the most important assets for these kinds of groups are. There are many cases where the rights of indigenous peoples are being ignored in favor of large enterprises seeking to improve economic profit for themselves. A case that has gotten lots of media attention lately is the one about the North Dakota Pipeline that threatens the land of Native Americans (Woolf, 2016). Even Sweden has its own problems related to the clash between indigenous people and capitalism. You can read about one of them in *Internal colonization and indigenous resource sovereignty: windpower developments on traditional Saami lands* (Lawrence, 2014).

**Background**

San Dionisio del Mar is one of several small villages situated in a peculiar area close to the coast to the Pacific Ocean in the south of Mexico. It belongs to a region called the Isthmus of Tehuantepec located in the state of Oaxaca. The area is characterized by its two lagoons, *Laguna superior* and *Laguna inferior*. The lagoons are separated from the sea by a sandbank called *la barra de Santa Teresa*. It is close to the “capital of the Isthmus”; the city Juchitán de Zaragoza.

In San Dionisio del Mar, the people belong to the group Ikojts (or Huave, as the larger indigenous group the zapotecs call them). Some don’t speak Spanish and many have difficulties writing and reading. The majority makes a living by fishing, that is, they are dependent on the local fish and shrimp populations. There are those who have other sources of income. Nevertheless, they also depend the lagoons resources, why they can rely on it during harder times when other incomes are low.
The villages around the lagoons are populated by two different indigenous groups; Ikojts and Binniza. The villages on the eastern side are Ikojts: San Dionisio del Mar, San Francisco del Mar and San Mateo del Mar (ILRC, 2012). Santa María Xadani, Colónia Álvaro Obregón are Binniza (ibid). The villagers use the surrounding natural resources in a shared communal system called bienes comunales (Howe, 2014). The lagoon is not only of economic, but also of social and spiritual, importance to the villages. There are several sites of religious importance on the sandbank, as well as, an archeological site (ILRC, 2012).

The project Mareña Renovables

Mareña Renovables is a Spanish company who, with different names, has been present in the region since 2006 (Howe et al. 2015). It is their intention to create a wind farm park on the sidebank la barra de Santa Teresa located in the extreme south of the lagoon. The first original company was Preñal, who later sold the project to Mareña Renovables. In 2013, Mareña Renovables changed name to Eólicas del Sur. The construction works were supposed to start in 2012 (Howe, 2014). The financers of the project consist of an Australian consortium, Mitsubishi and a Dutch pension fund. Mareña Renovables has also received loans from the world bank, as well, as the Inter-American development bank (ibid).

The Mareña wind farm project is one of a kind. If constructed, it would have been the largest wind farm in Latin America, able to produce enough energy to substitute for 879 000 ton of carbon dioxides a year (Howe et al. 2015). It would also have been the first wind energy project ever to be constructed next to water (ibid), and the first one to be constructed on communal - not private lands (ibid).

The company Mareña Renovables has been confronted by a unified resistance of the villages surrounding the lagoons, who all together oppose a project they see as a threat to their possibilities of leading the life they are used to. They have complained about how the project has been related to corruption, cacquismo and capitalism (Howe, 2014). They have not been informed or consulted about the project and its consequences, and they are worried about its possible consequences for the environment (Howe et al, 2015). The sound of the turbins and the change in the wind forces could scare off fish and shrimp populations.

Wind energy in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec
The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is said to be among the most suited places in Latin America, including in the whole world, for wind energy. Its geography implies very strong wind movements all year around (Henestroza Orozco, 2008). It is perhaps of no surprise that since the beginning of the 2000’s companies in the field of wind energy have shown interest in investing in this area. The local authorities have been very welcoming to these projects, saying that the wind parks will bring development to Oaxaca. The Mexican government has neither been short in embracing projects with positivity. It has for several years been going bad for Pemex, the national oil company which profits 40 % of the Mexican federal operating budget (Howe, 2014). The Mexican government has been desperately searching for alternative energy sources, while the whole state of Mexico is critically dependent on the incomes of oil (Howe et al. 2015). The wind park projects are also a chance for the Mexican government to gain international acknowledge in the field of renewable energy. The Mexican ministry of energy has promised that by 2024, 35% of the energy used in the state will be of non-carbon sources (Howe, 2014). Since the administration of Felipe Calderon, Mexico has had one of the most ambitious renewable energy plans in the world (ibid). This has made the government lay a firm eye on Oaxaca, a region into which, consequently, big investments have been made to study the opportunities for wind development (ibid).

The region Istmo de Tehuantepec currently has 22 windparks, located in five municipalities: Juchitán, Asunción Ixtaltepec, Santo Domingo Ingenio, Unión Hidalgo and in El Espinal (Howe, 2014). The energy produced in the parks is of such a big amount that it would be enough to provide energy for one million houses in Oaxaca (ibid). However, the energy is not used by private families, instead it goes directly to multinational corporations and their factories. They are for example Coca Cola, Bimbo, Heineken and Walmart who all benefit from lower taxes (ibid) and increased permission to produce and pollute (Informant 3, 2016) because of the “clean energy” they make use of. A very small part of the money made by the wind parks goes to the local owners of the territory (ibid). Most of it goes to countries from where the technology comes: Denmark, Spain and the US (ibid). Rest of it goes to the construction sector (ibid). A small part of people with political influence also benefit (ibid).

The foreign interests in the Isthmus have predominantly been of Spanish origin, but later other European interests have joined. Denmark has recently invested a thousand million pesos in wind power in this region (Manzo, 2016).

The Isthmus is a region rich in indigenous culture and it is historically a site of resistance both to the Mexican government and to foreign forces. Local groups have raised their voices against
the projects, accusing the foreign wind energy companies for causing political polarization, violence and social inequality (Howe et al. 2015). The companies have promised work opportunities for the locals but these promises have not been met. Instead the workforce has arrived from elsewhere, leading to migration and social rupture in the villages (ibid).

The NGO AIIPTD DT, operating in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, was created because of a worry about the lack of information given to the villages about the wind projects; cultural and environmental impacts they could imply. They travel to the villagers, giving them information and guidance.

In Winds of Oaxaca, Howe (2014) describes the Isthmus as a site of a “nueva conquista”- a new conquest. According to her, the villagers have described the situation as a “despojo de nuestra tierra”; a plunder of their land. The villagers have spoken of unclear circumstances of the signing of contracts with the wind energy companies; events such as threats of violence, lack of transparency, corruption and manipulation (ibid).

In the 1990s and early 2000, the region was divided between companies and investment interests, so that they could control their own districts to avoid that landholders could seek for counteroffers (ibid). The way in which the foreign corporations have dealt with the region has strong similarities to old colonial strategies.

**Indigenous rights in Mexico and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec**

The state of Oaxaca has one of the highest percentages of indigenous people and poverty. It has officially 16 indigenous groups, each one having hundreds of subgroups with linguistic and social differences (history.com, 2009). The biggest indigenous group in the region of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is the Zapotecs (Lynn, 2002).

Both Oaxaca and the Isthmus are regions that have throughout the history of Mexico been known as difficult areas due to frequent rebellions in the area. During the years 1915-20, the state of Oaxaca proclaimed itself autonomous from the Mexican state four times.

The indigenous movement in México gained strength due to both national and international attention in 1994, when the group Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) rose up in the state of Chiapas in a call for collective rights and withdrawal of the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Jackson, Warren 2005). The first negotiations between EZLN and the government lead to that some regional administration rights was given
to indigenous communities (Jung, 2013). A year later, in 1995, Mexican indigenous communities were granted the right to organize elections according to traditional practice (usos y costumbres) (ibid).

**Theory**

**Previous research on social movements**


Early research on social movements (later called the Classical Model) focused on socio-psychological factors such as economic grievance, relative deprivation, social exclusion etc. to explain why mobilizations occur (Rice, 2012). Before researchers spoke of a direct correlation between macro-level structures in society and micro-level behavior (ibid). The first model has now been abandoned by contemporary researchers in social movement theory, who argue that it overlooks important factors such as political conditions and power relations (ibid). It is argued that socio psychological factors don’t have anything to do with social mobilization. Today the leading view is that they only exist in an indirect relation with social mobilization (ibid).

The next school to emerge in social mobilization theory was the, earlier mentioned, Resource mobilization model (RM theory) (Rice, 2012). RM theory sees participation in collective action as rational, not something that only people in special or difficult situations are prone to take part in. But grievance and discontent only is not enough for social mobilization. As the name implies, it explains how social movements are born and how they operate by studying access to resources (ibid). The school argues that for social mobilizations to sustain, it requires help from other institutional organs, such as the church and labor unions, which provide the people with financial, organizational and human resources (ibid). According to the RM theory, not only connections to institutions are crucial for the success of a resistance, but also connections to other social groups, organizations and networks (ibid).

Scholars have not found the Resource mobilization model as an adequate way to explain social movements in Latin America (Rice, 2012). However, it has inspired some research in this area.
Yashar (05) enlightens trans community networks (preexisting community ties) to explain how these served as organizational linkages for the mobilization of indigenous people in Latin America. Other authors have used the model to explain that the political left had a decisive role in the indigenous mobilization in Ecuador (Korovkin, Becker). Many other researchers (Lucero etc) agree on that external inputs are necessary for collective resistance.

RM theory has been criticized for undermining local capabilities and resources and downplaying the importance of political context (Rice, 2012). Because of this, a third school; the Political process model, emerged looking at both internal and external factors to explain social mobilization (Rice, 2012). According to this the broader political system is believed to influence structural opportunities for collective action (ibid). The institutions of a state shape the conditions for collective action (ibid). How open or closed a political system is to social mobilization depends on factors such as whether it has institutionalized channels for representation, if there is a cohesion between elite groups or not, the availability of potential allies and if the state exercises repression or tolerance against opposition or not (ibid). Researchers have argued that the Political process model too heavily concentrates on the political and institutional systems in Europe to be applied on Latin American cases (Rice, 2012).

The New social movement model (NSM theory) is the most used model when analyzing Latin American cases of popular and indigenous mobilization (Rice, 2012). An example of this new type of mobilization is the emergence of indigenous movements in Latin America in the 1990s. These groups had not earlier expressed themselves in such a public and collective manner (ibid) and appeared due to transitioning societies and cultures (Swain, 2010).

Researchers of NSM theory, argue that this new form of social mobilization emerged with the postindustrial era (Rice, 2012). According to Swain (2010), increased foreign investment led to the formation of new working classes and a weaker state. This had the consequence that social classes were no longer seen as the main catalysator for social mobilization. Instead, focus was put on ideological, political and cultural processes (Rice, 2012). Movements of NSM theory often focus on the defense of human rights, gender, environment and other popular struggles (ibid). According to NSM theory, social mobilization occurs because of a lack of will to seek change through political institutions (Snow and Benford, 1992). Electoral politics are believed as weakening protest movements.

In RM theory, social movements are successful when they manage to obtain sufficient resources and motivate actors to get involved (M. Buechler, 1993). There is no focus on who the actors
involved are and how they see themselves and the ones joining them. It is here that NSM theory has a different view. According to NSM theory, collective identity is something that cannot be taken for granted. Actors have to feel that participating is meaningful and that it reflects their personal and collective identity. Identity is thus a crucial component for the success of social movements (ibid).

Transnational links

In *Struggle against the state- social network and protest mobilization in India* Swain (2010) calls for a more transnational view on social movements. He argues that they no longer can be studied only in the context of the state they were born in, but their connections over their own states boundaries need to be considered. A globalized world enables social movements to demand attention when they are being ignored by their governments and makes it possible for them to obtain regional and transnational connections and support (Swain, 2010). This has been especially important for smaller, localized and resource-poor social groups which through media can gain worldwide attention (ibid). This is how “issue networks” have aroused, which function as helpers to local social movements (ibid). They bind together people with similar struggles and values. An example is Amnesty International, which as an NGO brings attention to cases of human rights violations from all over the world and pressure governments to act upon them (ibid).

It is not only the media that brings transnational help to local movements. Organization structures, protest tactics, financial resources and even personnel are exported (Swain, 2010). Social movements in the South are more prone to give value to taking part in transnational connections as it gives the movements legitimacy and resources (Swain, 2010).

Shared identity and local assistance

In an increasing globalized world, foreign and domestic forces continue to clash. Different forms of resistance to globalization have emerged, such as organized efforts in terms of labor movements, peasants’ pressures for land reforms and urban consumer movements (Loker, 1999). Globalization has also lead to new political organizations, changing identities, new ideologies and migration patterns (ibid). But what is it that makes a resistance successful when it comes to succeeding in stopping projects that have raised due to globalization?
In *Globalization and the rural poor in Latin America* (1991) Loker points out some of the most important factors that decide the strength of rural communities in Latin America. Perhaps not of any surprise, he affirms that the existence of collective action is crucial. It is most likely to be strong enough in stable and enduring communities. There are also other factors determining how capable the collective action turns out. These include how the community manages resources, resolve conflicts and articulate collective concerns (ibid). All this relates to so called “indigenous social knowledge”. It arises from self-conscious ethnicity that leads to collective institutions based on ethnic identity (ibid). This arises in communities that govern common resources.

But previous collective action is not the only way to political organization. The feelings of identity can also be reinforced as a response to extern threats. In Panamá, religion was a way for the locals to strengthen their identity and mobilize against globalization efforts (Young, Bort, 1999). A so-called identity response emerged. The religious group Mama Chi introduced the idea that there are other alternatives than dependency and functioned as the mean for resistance against the Panamá government and the foreign companies (ibid). Their ethnicity was reinforced as a way of strengthening their collective action against the challenges.

Another strong relational factor is local assistance in terms of authentic media coverage. As Bort and Young (1999) writes, the Ngobé clan made us of “research, documentation and public media” to “expose government and corporate duplicity”.

**Political opportunity structures**

As mentioned in the previous section, Ashook Swain (2010) emphasizes the need to include the state as an important influencer on social movements, especially when studying social movements in the South. He mentions Jenkins´ (1995) three reasons why states should not be ignored:

“1) social movements are political by nature, 2) the state is the one which provides the environment in which movements operate, and that environment can provide opportunities as well as obstacles for the mobilization, 3) all modern states provide some system to address social interests.”
I considered it of importance to include an analysis of the Political Opportunity Structures (POS) in the region of my focus. Studying the POS can give us a better understanding to why movements are born, in which context and due to which reasons.

Political Opportunity Structures is a concept that has been used in social movement theory since early 1980s (Hooghe, 2015). It has since then taken different paths and some disagreements over how it should be interpreted have emerged between researchers. In its original definition, the core assumption is that social movements differ among states because of variations in the political environments into which the movements are born (Van der Heijden, 1997). The political environment affects how they choose to organize, what actions they take and what kind of impacts they have in society (ibid). Depending on how “open” or “closed” the political system is, the movement will find it easy or hard to gain access to the political decision making process. This is related to how many opportunities the system offers to oppositional interests. In *Comparative perspectives on social movements* (1996), Sydney Tarrows definition of political opportunity structures is

“…consistent- but not necessary formal, permanent or national-signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements.”

**Method**

I have chosen to use the method process tracing. The material used in my process tracing is elite interviews I have conducted in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, as well as information from newspaper articles, websites and protocols the resistance movement has published. I used this information to produce a timeline of the events in San Dionisio, from 2004 when the papers over the wind park were signed, to 2013, when the company was expelled.

The goal with process tracing is to be able to explain similar or comparable processes (Collier, 2011). David Collier (2011) describes process tracing as

“a systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in the light of research questions and hypothesis posed by the investigator”.

George and Bennet, the pioneers of process tracing, developed it as a tool to be used for within-case analysis (Collier, 2011). According to these researchers, it is the most effective tool when
it comes to understanding political processes and identifying so called causal mechanisms (Tansey, 2007).

When conducting process tracing, you carefully study the chain of events to understand the correlation between two variables. This correlation is called causal mechanism (Beach, Pedersen, 2013). Glennan (1996: 52) defines causal mechanism as

“a complex system, which produces an outcome by the interaction of a number of parts”.

A method of analysis is to create a timeline you use to identify “formative moments” that were crucial for how the situation developed. This can help you find the independent variable that has influenced each step in the chain of events and therefore explains the outcome.

Another important element in process tracing is the analysis of motives (Collier, 2011). You can get a picture over what has happened and why by using general knowledge over how people usually act (ibid).

In Process tracing methods (Beach et. al. 2013), the authors present three ways to do process tracing; theory-testing, theory-building and explaining outcome process tracing. I argue that my case is suitable for the theory-testing model. In the theory-testing model, one expects a mechanism to be present in a population of cases. You choose a case where both x and y are present. One wants to find out whether the hypothesized causal mechanism linking x and y was present in this case (ibid).

According to Beach and others (2013), when testing ones’ hypotheses, one must operationalize empirical tests. Each part of the mechanism should leave the predicted empirical manifestations. Predictions should be made to conclude what kind of evidence to suspect if the hypothesis is correct, and what kind of evidence should be seen if it were to be false, this is called negative evidence (ibid).

To be able to conduct process tracing, you need large amounts of information about political events and processes, ideally from different kinds of sources. In their text Case studies and theory development in social sciences, George and Bennet (2005) mention historical records, archival documents and interview transcripts as suitable sources of information. They do not elaborate further on the usage of interviews as a process tracing method. In Process tracing and elite interviewing: a case for non-probability sampling, Oisín Tansey (2007) points out that
George and Bennet have failed to develop constructions on how to use elite interviews in process tracing. In his article, Tansey offers guidance on how to do so.

Elite interviews have risen in popularity in the last two decades (Harvey, 2011). A general understanding of an elite is that it is someone who exercises a fair amount of influence over the rest of the population. However, there is no proper definition of what an elite is (ibid). Instead, each researcher develops their own criteria, related to their study.

In academic interviewing, there are different ways to choose one’s respondents. The biggest difference is whether one uses probability or non-probability sampling, that is if the sampling is done by chance or by choice. Oisín Tansey (2007) argues that non-probability sampling is the most adequate method when using elite interviews in process tracing. He admits that there are disadvantages with non-probability sampling, such as a bigger scope for selection bias. But it has a big advantage: one has control over the selection process and can choose to include the relevant political actors. Collier (2011), agrees on the importance on identifying the central actors for the process one studies. One should look for partial decisions made by them (ibid).

Tansey (2007) mentions four ways that information from elite interviews can be used in a study. It can reaffirm information collected from other sources. It can identify a set of peoples’ beliefs, values and attitudes. In comparison with survey studies, elite interviews have open questions; the respondents can talk freely which enables the researcher to get it hands on detailed information. It can also find information about a larger populations characteristics and decisions, especially when it comes to political activist groups. Lastly, but perhaps most important for process tracing, elite interviews can help one reconstruct events and processes, and identify decisions and actions that lead to an event.

Elite interviews can also compensate for lack of limitations of documentary material (Tansey, 2007). Not having to rely on official records can enable on to get access to “real” information, especially in corrupt societies where the chance that official records are false is bigger.

**Elite interviews**

In late November and beginning of December 2016, I did six individual and one group interview in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The interviews were conducted in Spanish. It was the second language for some of my informants; the inhabitants in San Dionisio, but mother tongue for the rest. I speak it fluently as well because of having travelled and lived in Mexico since 2008.
I had conducted an interview plan that I divided into four themes. These were: ‘chain of events’, ‘cooperation with other actors’, ‘identity’ and ‘Political Opportunity Structures’. I had the theme ‘chain of events’ to collect information for the timeline. However, I found it complicated to get the detailed information I was looking for. The informants were sometimes unwilling to give me specific dates and names of people involved. This is understandable due to the unsecure circumstances they are exposed to. The theme ‘cooperation with other actors’ was to find information to my hypotheses ‘local assistance’ and ‘transnational bonds’. The last one, ‘Political Opportunity Structures’, was to gather information to my section about the POS surrounding the resistance movement in San Dionisio. In the end of the interview, I asked them what they think that will happen with the resistance and with the wind farm project and if there was something in particular that they think was crucial for the movement to succeed.

As mentioned earlier, when using elite interviews in process tracing it is preferable to do a non-probability sampling. It gives you the opportunity to choose the informants you think are most central to the study. I began by researching on the internet, to find out who the most important actors in the resistance movement were. I then talked to people in the region who mentioned other people involved. I was lucky enough to be recommended with one of the leaders of the APIITDTT, a founder of the community radio station and with a woman from San Dionisio, highly involved in the resistance. These people then recommended me to other persons linked to the resistance. The people I ended up interviewing were all firsthand witnesses, they had participated in the struggle against the wind farm project both physically in the sense of being there in the mere confrontation and by other means, such as for example assisting them financially. I was assured of the reliability of the informants by those who recommended them to me.

This selection method I used is called the ‘snowball selection’ (snöbollsurval). It means that you identify one or two important persons and then let them introduce you to more people, who also introduce you to informants and so on. The ‘snowball selection method’ is convenient to use when you do interviews regarding sensitive matters. It made it possible for me to get “recommended” to other informants that probably would not have participated had I contacted them independently, because of the intimidation they have suffered.

According to Tansey (2007), there is a danger with the snowball method. It can be that the informant the researcher starts with will only pass on contacts who are similar and will not bring any new perspectives on the research questions. This problematic can however be avoided by
starting off with informants with different backgrounds. Luckily, I was by three different people recommended to my first informants. I was recommended to a local from San Dionisio, a representative from a local aid group and lastly, to a representative from the free media.

I recorded the interviews and took notes. I then transcribed the interviews. After that, I used the method categorization (Esaiasson, 2007) to organize the information. I used each hypothesis as a category and highlighted the parts that belonged to each category. I then gathered all the answers to each category.

I ended up not following my interview plan in a strict way. The circumstances made me choose to follow a more semi-structured interview model. I wanted to have a relaxed atmosphere and sought to make the interview seem like an open conversation. I felt it would be a better strategy since acting more as a friend than a serious interviewer would make it easier for the interview objects to open up. The informants engaged in the interviews in a very enthusiastic manner and ended up answering most of my questions themselves. It was also interesting to see whether or not they would take up any of the issues central to my paper.

As I have mentioned earlier, the people involved in the movement against the wind parks have all suffered threats of murder, kidnapping intentions and other forms of repression and it was first hard to gain their trust. They were reluctant to give me exact information about dates and name other participants in the resistance, which I understood and respected. However, I got the feeling that once the people I interviewed did trust you, it was like opening a book; they talked about everything and were very eager to tell me their side of the story. I found that many were most eager to talk about the repression they had received by Mexican authorities. They sometimes ended talking about subjects that weren’t part of my study. I didn’t want to be disrespectful by cutting them off so some of my interviews took longer than I had expected.

The fact that I interviewed people with different backgrounds gave me the opportunity to get a broad understanding of the events. The group I lacked to contact was representatives from a transnational organization. I have instead searched for online information about their role in the conflict in San Dionisio.

I found that many of my informants gave me similar answers on some of my questions, and after the last interviews I experienced a so called “theoretical saturation” (teoretisk mättnad). I had planned to interview more villagers in San Dionisio and to visit some of the neighboring villages as well. Unfortunately, during the period of my field study, there was a lynching incident in one of the villages. Due to this situation of insecurity, I chose not to visit any other
villages than San Dionisio, that I had been to earlier and which is said to be the most secure one. I got a last group interview in San Dinoisio that confirmed the information I had been given at my earlier interviews. However, there is a chance that inhabitants in some of the other villages concerned could have given me further insight and other opinions.

Because of the lack of security for my informants, it was important for me to think through and develop a plan on how to do the study following good ethics. I met with my informants at places they felt comfortable attending me at, it was always they who chose the place. I was cautious not to speak about my interviews and name any of my informants in public places. I did not talk about my thesis with people I don’t trust and when I did, I only briefly described its content. When doing the interviews, I always let the informants know that they don’t have to answer all my questions. I told them that the information was to be used in a school paper, but that their experiences would be described using aliases. I did not take any photos but recorded the conversations with the permission of the informants involved.

**Interview participants**

*Villagers from San Dionisio del Mar:*

Lupita: middle-aged woman from San Dionisio del Mar, belongs to the group *Mujerendjuk* (ikjoot for the defenders of the sea)

Luis: member of the village assembly in San Dionisio

Three community police officers from San Dionisio

*Outside key persons in the movement against Mareña Renovables in San Dionisio del Mar:*

Pedro: young man, works at the communitarian radio station in Juchitán *Radio Totopo*

Cecilia: young woman, works at the NGO Ucizoni in Matias Romero

Oscar: teacher in Juchitán, active member of the teacher union in Oaxaca *Sección 22* and cofounder of APIITDTT

Leonardo: cofounder of APIITDTT
Results

Political opportunity structures in Mexico and in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec

_in Zapata Lives!: Histories and cultural politics in southern Mexico_ (2002) Stephen Lynn writes about the Mexican indigenous movements and the Political Opportunity Structures they face. According to the author, the national movement working for indigenous rights and their autonomy suffers because of the repressive nature of the Mexican government. The indigenous regions in Mexico have been militarized and the people working in these areas are continuously being intimidated by the authorities (Lynn, 2002).

The political party the PRD, NGOs working with peasants, human rights organizations and other social organizations are also targeted by the military, state and federal police as part of a harassment and political strategy (ibid).

He includes that due to increasing economic cooperation between Mexico and the United States after the signing of the _North American Free Trade Agreement_ (NAFTA), Mexico has received weapons, technology and training for Mexican military and parts of the police. This

“to increase their capacity for surveillance, intimidation and militarization of public space”.

They have been instructed in for example

“counter-guerilla manuals, extortion, physical and psychological torture and military intelligence” (Lynn, 2002).

Experiences by the resistance movement

During my field work I have been confirmed about the low Political Opportunity Structures in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. To find out about the conditions of political opportunity in San Dionisio, I asked my informants in San Dionisio if they feel that they are represented by the Mexican government; if there was an institution, political person or other representative of the Mexican government that supported them in any way? I also asked them if they are aware of their rights as indigenous people and whether they know how to complain to the authorities if they feel that their rights are being challenged. I also asked if they have experienced repression, and if so, by whom.
All the informants mentioned repression received by the Mexican government and the wind energy companies. They also expressed fear and their low support and trust for the Mexican government and the local authorities. In San Dionisio, the villagers told me that they are aware of their rights as indigenous people but that they haven’t had the information about how to complain to the government about these being challenged.

Lupita (see section Interview participants p. 25) told me that she and the civil association she takes part in; Defenders of the sea, have received death threats several times. She also told me that in 2012, when the conflict in San Dionisio was at its highest peak, the villagers were worried that the government would try to get rid of them, for example by dropping a bomb in the village. The villagers had taken the presidential palace and they had people guarding the palace and the entrance to the village day and night.

According to Pedro, in 2012 his radio station Radio Totopo received repression from sicarios (see Abbreviations and translations) hired by Mareña Renovables when visiting the wind park areas. He claims that the sicarios were there to guard the wind parks and to intimidate those who spread information about the parks. Pedro also affirms that Radio Totopo has received death threats, as well as Leonardo, Oscar and other actives in APIITDTT, who also have suffered from kidnapping attempts. Pedro also informed me about them having one companion killed in April 2013. He was convinced that some of the sicarios have been hired directly by Mareña Renovables.

Another way the resistance movement has been oppressed is how the state has chosen to manipulate young students, I am told by Pedro. Mareña Renovables and the government have given financial support to schools in terms of education materials, with the condition that they teach the pupils that the wind firm projects should be welcomed, that they will benefit their communities.

Cecilia from UCIZONI told me that her organization has received repression in terms of people breaking into their office and destroying their computers.

Also Oscar confirms the repression. He tells me that the project has brought with it “lots of assassinations and threats”- they have lost companions in Juchitán, in Santo Domingo and in Union Hidalgo, he himself had to leave the country for one year to escape the death threats.

Leonardo told me that in the beginning of the resistance in San Dioniso, the villagers received a direct threat by the governor of Oaxaca who told them:
"ese proyecto va porque va, dejanse de chingaderas si no queiren que les vaya como los de San José del Progreso". (this project is going to happen, stop acting like idiots if you don’t want to end up like those in San José del Progreso) (Interview 4, 2016. my translation)

In San José del Progreso, a municipality in south-western Mexico, the leaders of a resistance movement against a mining project were killed in 2009 (Rojas, 2016).

In the interviews, I was also told about a “campaña sucia” (dirty campaign) by the government during the conflict in San Dionisio. Leonardo affirmed that the government used to release opposite declarations to the media to what the resistance movement had said. The government also spread rumors about the members of AIPDTDTT and UCIZONI operation in San Dionisio being ”strangers”, unwelcomed in the village.

To conclude, it is my understanding that the villagers affected by the wind farm suffer from low political opportunities. They don’t feel represented by Mexican government, nor did them prior to the help of AIPPDTT know about their rights as indigenous people or how to claim them. They don’t have the opportunity to buy the authorities, which leaves them out of the decision-making process. The way they conflict burst out in 2012 also shifts a light on what kind of POS the villagers in San Dionisio live with. The roadblocks and the physical violence was the only remedy they had to their hands.
### Table of Analysis and operationalization

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- **Local assistance**: Villagers from San Dionisio (interview 1 and 6) provide financial help to engineers.
- **Transnational bonds**: Villagers from San Dionisio (interview 1 and 6) collaborate with foreign students, Oxfam, and other international organizations, who report to the Mexican government for the sea and cooperation between villagers.
- **Shared identity**: Villagers from San Dionisio (interview 1 and 6) and APIITDTT (interview 3 and 4) emphasize the sea, cooperation between villagers, human rights, foreign media, and international organizations.

**UCIZONI** (interview 5) assists at village assemblies, and APIITDTT, Radio Totopo provide humanitarian help, inform villagers, interpret clauses from the wind farm companies.

**Concern for environment, territory part of identity**: UCIZONI (interview 5) and APIITDTT (interview 3 and 4) emphasize cooperation between villagers, foreign media, and international organizations, which protested in 2009 (French and Spanish).
In this table of analysis, the idea is to show how I have categorized and analyzed my material. I have “converted” each hypothesis to a variable. The units of analysis are ‘Villagers from San Dionisio’, ‘the APIITDTT’, ‘Radio Totopo’ and ‘Ucizoni’. The table describes the operationalizations for my hypotheses; the variable ‘local assistance’ had manifestations such as human rights organizations, financial help, engineers, inform villagers and legal help. The variable transnational bonds had manifestations such as international students, the UN, reports and letters sent to the Mexican government. The variable shared identity was manifested as the sea, cooperation between villagers, indigenous language, environmental concerns and territory part of identity. These manifestations call for a more extensive description. ‘The sea’ is when the wish to defend the sea was mentioned as the principal motivation for resistance because of social, religious as well as economic reasons. ‘Cooperation between the villagers’ refers to the help they gave each other in terms of physical assistance but also communication and exchange of information. ‘Indigenous environmental concerns’ refer to worries about the possible effects of the wind farm park and the threat those changes could pose to their everyday life as indigenous people. ‘Territory part of identity’ refers to when the territory was mentioned to be a crucial part of the indigenous identity for the ikioots.

**Chain of events**

As mentioned earlier, I chose to use the process-tracing model ‘theory-testing model’. It means that when analyzing the chain of events, I aim to find out whether it was local assistance, shared identity or transnational bonds that was part of the mechanism that explains the outcome.

I have been able to identify the main actors involved in the battle against the wind park project in San Dionisio del Mar. In San Dioniso they are the town assembly and the small group Mujerendjuk (defenders of the sea). Outside actors against the project that have been involved in the conflict are UCIZONI, APIITDTT and Radio Totopo. The ones in favor of the project are the previous municipal president from San Dionisio, the party PRI, the company Mareña Renovables and the Mexican government.

The villages La venda and La ventosa were the first villages in the Isthmus where wind farm projects were constructed (Interview 5, 2016). The population were promised work opportunities and free electricity but ended up with broken social structures, leading to migration, and more expensive electricity (ibid). The project in San Dionisio is signed 2004 by the company Preñal, who later sells it to Mareña Renovables (Interview 3, 2016). In 2007, the
APIITDTT visits San Dioniso for the first time, but their warnings are not taken seriously by the villagers (ibid). In 2011 they visit Pueblo Viejo, an island belonging to San Dionisio (ibid). The villagers of Pueblo Viejo recognize the problematic with the wind farm projects and this is when the people in San Dionisio start to react as well (ibid). In January 2011, the villagers find out that their town president has signed a contract that gives Mareña Renovables the rights to the territory of the sandbank Santa Teresa (Interview 1, 2016). It also comes to their knowledge that he has received a lot of money from the company (ibid). The people of San Dionisio criticize the president for having sold the village without consulting them and in a village meeting they demand that he breaks the contract. The president promises to do so and at a meeting the 29th of January, he shows them how he tears the contract into pieces (ibid., Rojas, 2016). But when the villagers found out that it wasn’t the contract paper he had broken and that the contract still is valid, they choose not to recognize his authority and end up occupying the municipal palace (ibid, Interview 4, 2016). The president leaves San Dionisio and the village is left in the hands of its people (ibid). The villagers gather to speak about the project as a “town assembly”, as do other villages nearby. These assemblies existed prior to the wind farm project but became a platform for discussion and anti-wind farm organizing (ibid). In San Dionisio, the opposition to the wind farm got divided into two parts in an early phase of the mobilization, on one hand; the town assembly, who still were in favor of political elections and on the other, the group Mujerendjuk (ikioot for Defenders of the sea), who chose not to cooperate with local politicians (ibid).

In May 2012, the villagers in San Dionisio are threatened by the governor of Oaxaca (Rojas, 2012). They are afraid that the government will try to get rid of them by all costs and so they organize themselves in order to have people guarding all entrances to the village day and night (Interview 1, 2016). In August, the villagers present a solicitude to the Interamerican commission of human rights (Matías, 2012). In the beginning of November; 2,11 2012, Mareña Renovables try to enter San Dionisio (Interview 3, 2012). The 4th of December, the villagers present a legal demand about the suspension of the project and apply in court for a judicial protection (Chaca, 2012). The 26th of December, a complaint was sent to MICI, an independent accountability office of the IDB, with the help of the lawyer Leonardo Crippa from Indian Law Resource Center (ILRC, 2012., Interview 3, 2016).

The first confrontation is the 28th of December (Interview 7, 2012). Despite of the legal suspension, Mareña choose to enter San Dionisio. The company has now allies in San Dionisio, namely bribed politicians from the party PRI. The engineers from Mareña Renovables denies
the fishermen the entrance to the lagoon, claiming that they already have been paid for the territory and that it belongs to Mareña (Interview 4, 2012), leading to a confrontation where ikioot women are hurt by Mareña employees (ibid). This causes outrage within the community of San Dionisio and the movement grows significantly (ibid).

In February 2013, the conflict escalates (Interview 1, 2016). On February the 2nd, Mareña Renovables try to enter San Dionisio with force once again (Ecoosfera, 2016). The people of San Dionisio receive support from neighboring villages, whose people travel there to assist with the roadblocks (ibid). The group AIPPDT with Radio Totopo and other support groups arrange a caravan to the villages to San Dionisio with humanitarian aid for the ones maintaining the roadblock (Interview 2, 2016). Many national NGOs were involved, mostly human rights groups (ibid). Mareña fails to enter San Dionisio and changes strategy and plan to gain access to the lagoon by entering Álvaro Obregón (Interview 3, 2016, Howe et al. 2012). They are accompanied by local police forces who use gas and arrest several people (ibid), managing to break up the road block. It remains open for a couple of hours until more villagers from San Dionisio among other places, arrive. They manage to throw out the construction workers and the police (ibid). The camp at the Álvaro Obregón roadblock is later visited by armed sicarios who threatens them with consequences if they choose not to cooperate with Mareña Renovables (Interview 2, 2016).

In April 2013, a companion from the resistance movement is assassinated (Interview 2, 2016). In 2013, the company is thrown out and they change their name from Mareña Renovables to Eólicas del sur (ibid). In 2015, a final legal suspension of the project is given, this leads to Mareña transferring the wind farm project to Juchitán and El Espinal (Rojas, 2016). In January 2016, on the fourth anniversary of the Assembly of San Dionisio, Pedro Orozco, one of the members, report that they will celebrate the win against Mareña Renovables (ibid). In September 2016, the IMBD release a report where they acknowledge that the project has failed to fulfill three of their operation policies: the Environment and Safeguards Compliance Policy (OP-703), Access to Information Policy (OP-102) and the Policy on Indigenous Peoples (OP-765) (MICI, 2016).

The formative moment that I have identified is the one where a judge accepted the resistance pledge for legal protection, which led to the project being halted. Everyone except the resistance movement were proven wrong; Mareña Renovables, the state of Oaxaca, the Mexican president and the international financers. It was legally proven that the wind farm project was of serious
threat to San Dionisio. This gave legitimacy to the movement. It was a victory for San Dionisio and a crucial turning point as it implied the retreat of the wind farm company.

**Transnational bonds**

In align with Swains call for a more transnational focus on the study of social mobilizations and Research Mobilization theory, I tried a hypothesis about transnational bonds being what brought success to the movement. What I wanted to find out was whether the resistance in San Dionisio received help from international organizations and networks and whether this help was crucial for its survival and success. It is of common knowledge that such international networks exist, the UN, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are among the most known. Support from groups like these could serve the resistance by making the Mexican government accountable for any danger they might face, but also help them by sending skills and knowledge.

Amnesty International made a report in April 2013 regarding the insecurity for journalists in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, because of the intimidation an activist who had shown his opposition to the wind farm project in San Dionisio had suffered (Animal Político, 2013 AI, 2013). In May 2013, a UN delegation paid a visit in San Dionisio when the villagers could talk to them about the problematics with the wind farm project (Radio Zapatista, 2013). These happenings serve as clues to my hypothesis.

Evidence would be comments about support received by transnational organizations, support viewed as crucial for the movements’ survival. An international report gaining worldwide attention could also have been crucial for the movements’ success. Economic assistance and exchange of knowledge could also have helped. I asked my informants questions such as *Have you received any support from international groups? Of all the support you have been given, which do you perceive as the most important? Have you been in contact with international and transnational organizations?*

If the hypothesis transnational bonds were to have been true, the causal links could have been like this:

*Transnational links ➔ international pressure on Mexican government and wind farm companies ➔ accountability for these ➔ no, or little repression ➔ successful mobilization*

Or:
Transnational links → exchange of skills and information → successful mobilization

However, as my informants have told me, the resistance did suffer repression from local authorities, the government and the wind farm company. In 2012, the governor of Oaxaca threatened the resistance movement (Rojas, 2012) and in beginnings of 2013, the people at the camp at the Álvaro Obregón roadblock were threatened by sicarios (Interview 2, 2016).

Cecilia told me there had recently been a UN meeting in Mexico City to discuss the situation for the native villages in Mexico. One of the results was a protocol about human rights developed by the Mexican government. However, Cecilia referred to the chance of them following it was an “utopia”. But she told me the resistance has received international support by other NGOs, which have sent students and specialists such as biologists (Interview 5, 2016).

Lupita told me many foreigners took part in the struggle in San Dionisio in 2012. They were travelers and students from Spain, Germany and other countries. Leonardo and Pedro confirmed this (Interview 4 and 2, 2016). Pedro also told me some foreign alternative news channels visited San Dionisio (ibid). Oscar told me organizations such as Oxfam have visited the Isthmus to ask them for information about the wind parks and conducting reports about the situation (interview 3, 2016). Leonardo said that international human rights groups have informed about their case and solidarized with them, they have also sent letters to the Mexican government (Interview 4, 2016).

Not the government nor the wind farm company conducted brutal repression in the sense of killing many people in the resistance at the same time. It is possible that it was international pressure that persuaded the authorities not to act in such a manner. For example, the fact that many international students participated in San Dionisio could have led to some accountability for the authorities.

I found that the resistance group has had some contact with international organs. However, no one mentioned it being among the most important supports given. Nobody thought these connections had strong implications for the outcome. I did not find any evidence on international economic support, however, San Dionisio did receive international help in terms of foreign students and biologists who visited the village. But most importantly, I did not find any evidence on that the transnational links changed the chain of events in any way, affecting the outcome.
Shared identity

To test the New Social Movements theory about collective identity, I aimed to find out if a notion of shared identity was present in the movement in San Dionisio and whether it was crucial for the movements survival. An informant told me about the value indigenous identity brings to rural communities. According to Pedro, the PRI and other political parties in Mexico have sought to prevent native villages from collaborating, this to weaken them politically (informant 3, 2016). This information serves as a clue to my hypothesis.

I asked my informants from San Dionisio if they felt that they were alone in the struggle against the wind energy project or that they fought as a group with the neighboring villages. I wanted to know whether they had cooperated with other villages or not, and why. I asked them about their relationship with the other villages before and after the conflict. I also asked them what it was that made them reluctant to accept the wind farm project, if it was because of concerns for the environment, because of fear to lose their income, or to defend their territory.

Was it the feeling of a shared identity that motivated people from surrounding villagers to help San Dionisio and was it what ultimately lead to the resistance’ success? If the hypothesis is true, I should find that the other villages helped San Dionisio when they were threatened by the company and supported them. I should find evidence about cooperation and communication between the villages. My informants should mention their indigenous heritage and a sense of sharing the struggle with the members of the neighboring communities. Negative evidence would be if I would find information on that the villages of San Dionisio fought on their own in the peak in 2012, that no inhabitants from neighboring villages participated. My informants should not mention any sense of a collective struggle or sharing identity with the other villages.

Pedro told me:

*La fuerza en San Dionisio fue por la ayuda física de los pobladores de Álvaro Obregón y otros lugares.*

(The strength in San Dionisio was because of the physical help they got from the villagers from Álvaro Obregón as well as from others) (Informant 3, 2016. My translation)

When the villagers along the lagoon participated together in the conflict in San Dionisio at its peak in 2012, (Informant 4, 2016), it was the first time in history they collaborated in such a
manner (ibid). Traditionally these villages, belonging to different indigenous tribes, have been in conflict. The Zapotec people have always been ethnocentric and have never had a good relationship with the Ikioots (ibid). In fact, the term Huave, which the Zapotecs use to refer to the Ikioots, means “those who rot in the dampness” (Cruz Rueda, 2011).

So why did so many neighboring villages decide to help San Dionisio? The answer can be found in the dependence they all have with the sea.

“Álvaro obregón estaba de acuerdo con nosotros, el mar unió a estos pueblos”

(Álvaro Óbregon were on our side, the sea was what unified these villages)

(Interview 6, 2016. My translation)

- a community police officer in San Dionisio.

Lupita also expressed something similar:

*El mar donde los de álvaro Obregón pescan es de san dionisio nosotros somos como hermanos nunca lo prohíbimos, somos hermanos todos, estamos de acuerdo en que todos nos pertenece el mar, por ellos somos hermanos.*

(The sea where those from Álvaro Obregón fish belongs to San Dinoisio, we are like brothers, we never forbid them to use it, we all agree on that the sea belongs to everyone, that is why we are brothers.) (Interview 1, 2016. My translation)

The lagoons have other values than the economic one; also, cultural, religious and social ones. It is part of their indigenous identity. According to Oscar, the villagers seek to protect their territory not only because of fears of losing the land, but a wish to protect their indigenous heritage, which, naturally, is incompatible with the neoliberal idea of privatizing land for industrial profit (Informant 3, 2016). A declaration by the villagers of San Dionisio from September 2012, posted by the APIITDTT says that they oppose the wind farm project because of the spiritual relationship they have with their territory, land, sea and natural resources. (APIITDTT, 2013).

Oscar said:

*Entre más identidad indígena, menos posibilidades tiene las empresas para entrar, entre más mestizos- más fácil, ellos ya no ven la naturaleza en la misma manera, por ejemplo el maíz para los indígenas es sagrado, forma parte de su identidad, lo cuida, no le pone peso a la tierra.*
(Where there’s more indigenous identity, the company will have less possibilities to succeed, where there’s more mestizo it will be easier, they no longer understand the nature in the same way, for example, for the indigenous people the corn is holy, it’s part of their identity, they care for it.) (Interview 3, 2016. Own translation)

The causal link between shared identity and successful mobilization can be illustrated like this:

\[
\text{Shared identity} \rightarrow \text{proud about indigenous heritage} \rightarrow \text{cares for nature and environment} \rightarrow \text{motivated to struggle} \rightarrow \text{more villagers join} = \text{physical force} \rightarrow \text{successful mobilization}
\]

Identity formed an important part in the struggle against the wind farm company. It brought the villagers together. It legitimized their demand for respect, when the people of San Dionisio were informed about their rights they were encouraged to pursue them. I found evidence suggesting cooperation, communication and a sense of shared identity among the villagers living near the lagoon. Due to my research, I have reasons to believe that the resistance in San Dionisio would have been much weaker without the notion of a shared identity between the participants.

**Local assistance**

My hypothesis ‘local assistance’ is based on the idea that the resources the resistance had in terms of local aid was what made it successful. In an interview published by MÅSDE131, one of the activists, Pedro Orozco, says how important the support by other organizations and collectives was for the success (Lozano, 2015). They could overcome the communication barrier due to social media, they were supported by university students;

“everybody helped out with something. This resistance was nothing organized by a single group, it was collective” (Own translation, ibid).

For the hypothesis to be true, I should in my information find that outside organizations and independent people took part in the struggle, both by presence during the physical confrontations and by other support such as financial help. I should find information that tells me that this kind of assistance was crucial for the movements survival.

I asked my informants questions such as *Do you know of other groups of resistances in Mexico, and if, have any of them participated with you? Of all the support you have been given, which one do you perceive as the most important for the movements' success?*
The support most mentioned in the interviews was that of the NGO Ucizoni, the APIITDTT, Radio Totopo and local human rights lawyers. There are three reasons to why the local support was so crucial for the movements’ success. First; the AIIPPTDDT informed the people of San Dionisio about the dangers with the wind farm project and about the rights they have as indigenous people, this initiated the resistance movement. Second, the alternative media made sure right information about the wind farms and the movement was spread, leading to more people joining. Third, the APIITDTT provided the resistance with legal support through the NGO Tepeyac, who had access to lawyers (Interviews 3 and 4, 2016). This legal support was crucial to the movements’ success, it enabled the movement to confront the state and the wind farm company which eventually led to the project being halted. Two crucial turning points (aka formative moments); were when a judge accepted the pledge of legal protection to the communities around the lagoon and when the IDB recognized that it had failed to live up to its regulations with the Mareña project.

The causal mechanism between local assistance and successful mobilization is illustrated like this:

Local assistance $\rightarrow$ information to villagers $\rightarrow$ movement

Local assistance $\rightarrow$ spreading of correct information $\rightarrow$ movement gains members $\rightarrow$ successful mobilization

Local assistance $\rightarrow$ legal help $\rightarrow$ lawsuits $\rightarrow$ project stopped $\rightarrow$ successful mobilization

This is how Oscar describes the work of APIITDTT:

La organización acompaña a las comunidades en la lucha, para que no se dejen ser manipulados por el estado y tratados como niños de menores de edad, les dicen que tienen que organizarse, que sean independientes del estado, y que conozcan sus derechos.

(The organization accompanies the communities in resistance, so that they don´t let them be manipulated by the state and treated like minors, it tells them that they must organize themselves and get to know their rights.) (Informant 3. 2016. Own translation)

The producing of alternative media was mainly done by Ucizoni and Radio Totopo (Interview 5, 2013). Ucizoni’s equipment included cameras, videos and internet devices which was of much help since it enabled them to transmit statements in real time, with photos and videos. It was a support of great importance especially during the peak of the conflict, making it
impossible for the Mexican government to repress the movement, stated Leonardo (Interview 4, 2016).

Radio Totopo made interviews in the villages and transmitted information about the wind parks and the movement in both Spanish and native languages. They also functioned as interpreters at meetings between fishermen and peasants who spoke either Spanish or the zapotec language (Interview 2, 2016). Ucizoni also gave economic support to the resistance, for example to finance trips to Mexico City to visit Human Rights organizations (Interview 1, 2016).

Human rights groups have also been important for the resistance in San Dionisio. Lupita told me the villagers of San Dionisio reached out to human rights groups in the beginning of the conflict and that they continue to receive visits by them in San Dionisio (Interview 1, 2016). The assistance provided by them has implied essential help to the resistance movement because of their physical protection.

**Conclusion**

As mentioned, many local individuals and NGOs came to the assistance of the people of San Dionisio. They gave them legal, economic, social and physical support. This was the support first mentioned, and the one considered to be of most importance. This is confirmed by the chain of events; thanks to the local support, the people of San Dionisio could confront the wind farm company legally which led to the suspension of the project.

Due to my research, I found that identity served as motivation for the villagers to join the resistance. The fact that they are proud of their indigenous heritage motivated them in their struggle against Mareña Renovables and the Mexican authorities. Their wish to protect the sea and the feeling of brotherhood among the neighboring villages are also connected to their feeling of a collective identity. Where identity brought the villagers together, the local assistance gave them crucial support in terms of protection of human rights, when lawyers protected them against the abusive authorities. Thanks to alternative media, more people joined the movement, since information was broadcasted in native languages and the media stations denied the negative information the governmental media was spreading about the group. Finally, the legal help enabled the resistance to sue the company which ultimately led to the project being suspended.
I found no evidence supporting the theory about transnational links being crucial resources for the success of the resistance in San Dionisio. However, I found that resources in terms of ‘local assistance’ were very important. This supports the Resource Mobilization Theory, in terms of resources as local connections. Relaying on these findings, I suggest that social resistance movements with low political opportunities need local assistance that can compensate for the political opportunities they lack. Thanks to the legal assistance, the resistance in San Dionisio were informed about their rights and on how to pursue them. They were also given protection against the intimidation due to the low political opportunity structures (POS).

The results also point to that the New Social Movements Theory is right about collective identity being important for a resistance’ function. It played an important part in San Dionisio, as it brought the villagers together and legitimized their struggle.

Finally, based on the findings of my study, I believe that one can draw the conclusion that in San Dionisio, both shared identity and resources in terms of local assistance were important. This supports both RM theory and NSM theory. I want to argue that they do not necessarily contradict each other. Especially when it comes to social movements with poor POS, local support and shared identity can be equally important. To get a deeper understanding on how these affect the outcomes of a social movement, further research is needed.

That local assistance is crucial for a social movements survival does not mean that the local groups should replace the resistance movement, but that they support them in their struggle, with information, economic and legal support. The sense of a collective identity is also important, it not only motivates them but encourage the movement to stay independent.

Something Luis, the village assembly member from San Dionisio told me was:

“Demostramos que tenemos capacidad de negociar y trabajar en una mesa de trabajo... ...escuchamos consejos de gente de afuera como UCIZONI, pero al momento de reunirse el pueblo solo somos nosotros, eso nos ha venido manteniendo. “

(We (the town assembly) have shown that we have the capabilities to negotiate and work together, we listen to advice given by other people like UCIZONI, but when the village comes together it is only us, this is what has kept us strong)

(Informant 6. 2016. Own translation)
Biography


Swain, Ashok. 2010. *Struggle against the state- social network and protest mobilization in India*. Routledge: Farnham, GB.


Interview 1: middle-aged woman from San Dionisio del Mar, member of the civil association *Mujerendjuk*. 2016. Alias Lupita. Individual interview 27.11.16.


