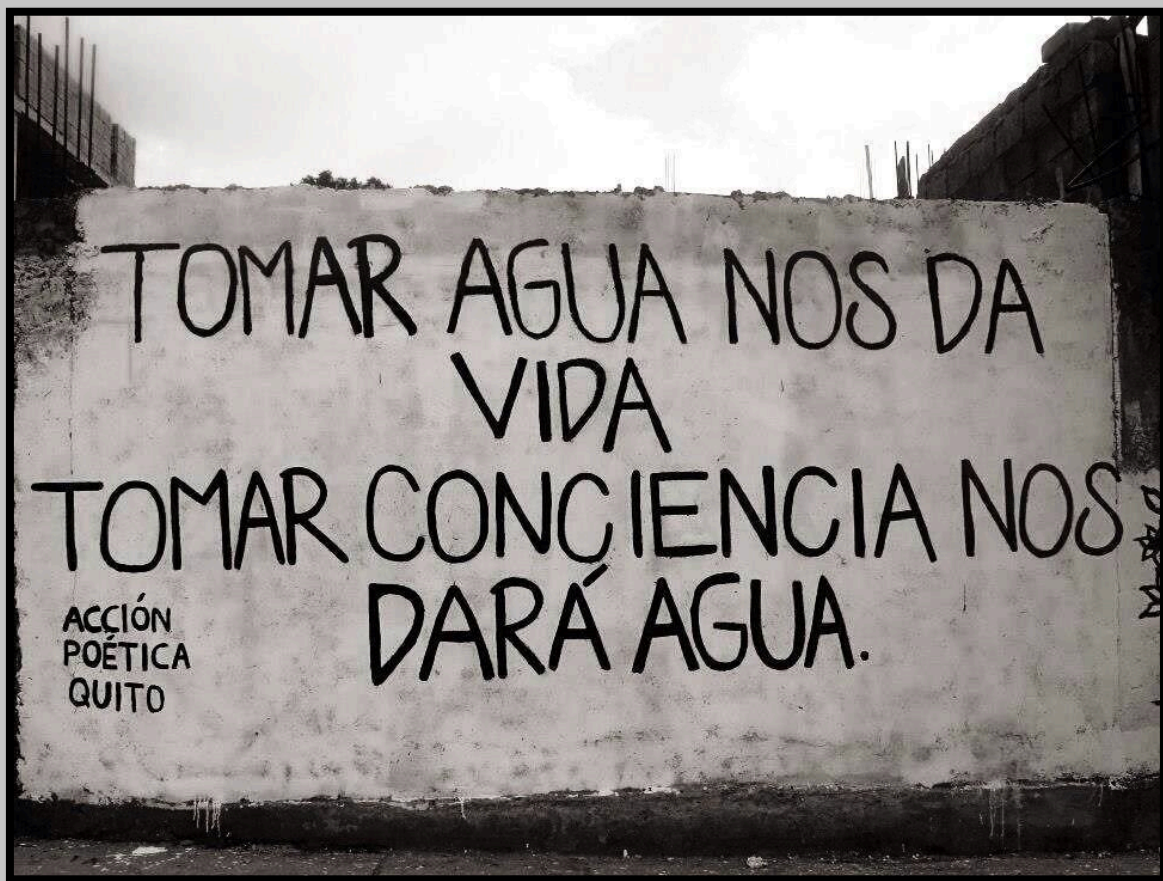


CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS OF POWER IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

Grassroots Activism against Water Privatization in Mexico



Alima de Graaf & Luisa Hlawatsch

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¹ *'Drinking water gives us life, becoming aware will give us water,'* from Facebook group *No a la privatización de SMAPA en Tuxtla Gutiérrez*, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1389360401283577/> consulted June 23th 2014.

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Universiteit Utrecht

June 2014

Bachelor Cultural Anthropology
Utrecht University

Alima de Graaf – 3629333
K.A.S.deGraaf@students.uu.nl

Luisa Hlawatsch – 3483185
L.Hlawatsch@students.uu.nl

Supervisor: Eva van Roekel

Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Introduction	9
Theoretical Framework	14
Power and the Theory of Structuration ²	14
Neoliberalism, Implications for Citizenship and Grassroots Globalization ³	16
Mass Communication as a Power Tool ⁴	21
Context	25
Neoliberal Politics and Water Privatization in Mexico	25
Mexico's Grassroots Movements and Mass Communication	27
Setting the Stage	30
Water Privatization and the Development of a Grassroots Movement in Tuxtla Gutiérrez	31
The Resourcefulness of NGO-activism ⁵	37
Introducing the NGO-Activists: Deep Involvement and Shifting Networks	38
NGO-involvement: Unity, Connections and Organic Task-distribution	41
NGOs and Political Action: Resources, (Dis)trusting Politics and Active Citizenship	44
Knowledgeability: Information-sharing and Informed Action	46
Institutional Constraints and Resources in a Grassroots Movement ⁶	52
Introducing the Institutional Actors	53
The Catholic Church: Ambiguity, Constraints and Resources	54
The Political Arena: Tensions and Capabilities	58
The Necessity of Institutional Participation?	62
Conclusive Remarks	65
Bibliography	71
Appendices	
A: Resumen de investigación en Español	77
B: Research Summary in English	81

² Written by Alima de Graaf.

³ Written by Luisa Hlawatsch.

⁴ Written by Alima de Graaf.

⁵ Written by Alima de Graaf.

⁶ Written by Luisa Hlawatsch.

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Introduction

Human life depends on water. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly recognized water as a human right, acknowledging the importance of the natural resource for humanity (United Nations Regional Information Centre 2014). Human beings need water to live. We consist of 60% water, we are supposed to drink two liters of water a day, and we will not survive more than three to five days without it. Our 'blue planet' is for 70% covered by water, but not all water is qualified for the same usage. There is an important distinction to be made between salt and freshwater. Only 3% of all the water in the world is freshwater, of which 70% is stored in ice. It is an important resource as not only human life but many other life forms depend on it (Gleick et al. 2014).

Freshwater is contaminated at a high rate and natural water flows and ecosystems are disrupted. A recent study has shown that global warming by 2 per cent will increase by 40 per cent the number of people living in absolute water scarcity and will severely decrease the water resources of 15 per cent of the global population. The 2 per cent warming estimate may even be exceeded (Schewe et al. 2013). As much quoted Ismail Serageldin, former Vice President of the World Bank, indicated in 1995: 'If the wars of this century were fought over oil, the wars of the next century will be fought over water' (Serageldin 2014). Research of the Pacific Institute suggests a growing risk of sub-national conflicts among water users, regions, ethnic groups, and competing economic interests (Gleick, et al. 2014). Many actors on local, national and international levels have conflicting interests in water. Companies such as Coca-Cola are searching for rights to exploit groundwater resources (Nash 2007) and a general shift towards neoliberal policing by governments facilitates the privatization of water. This is what happened at the research location of this study, Chiapas, Mexico, where the privatization of the water system of the state's capital Tuxtla Gutiérrez was announced in June 2013.

Perhaps the most well known case of water privatization is the case of Bolivia, Cochabamba, where the city's municipal water supply system was privatized. However, between February and April 2000 massive public protests against the privatization and high water prices arose and finally led to the withdrawal of the

privatization (Shultz 2000). The public uprising, known as the Bolivian Water War, exemplifies conflicting interests with regard to water access and usage and the contestation of power from below – similar processes of power contestation and negotiation that are occurring in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas thirteen years later.

‘Knowledge is power’, the famous saying attributed to Francis Bacon (1561-1626) goes. But how does one become knowledgeable and what is the nature of this power? To become knowledgeable some form of communication of relevant information needs to take place, to make the previous ‘unknown’ ‘known’. The Oxford Dictionary defines communication as ‘The imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium.’ Globalization processes, of which the development of mass communication technologies (MCT) is a part, change this process of becoming knowledgeable as it changes the ways in which we exchange information. MCT do not abide to national frontiers and make virtual interaction, exchange and relating possible on a global scale. Yet, the mere acquisition of information does not produce knowledge. The subsequent ability to interpret the information is a crucial next step. It can be argued that knowledge is insight based on old information that allows the interpretation of new information and to oversee specific processes as linked to larger wholes, which in turn helps to predict and guide the outcome of actions and events. Here the question of power comes into play, as this knowledge then determines the ability to influence processes. As such new forms of communication have given birth to new spaces for organization and resistance. These and other aspects of globalization, like the spread of neoliberalism, change the role of the nation-state on the ‘global playing field’ and thus change power dynamics, within as well as between the different actors on a local, national and global scale.

In order to understand how local social realities with regard to water use and access are communicated and determined we analyze the case of Chiapas, Mexico where the grassroots movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*⁷ arose in June 2013, responding to the announcement of the privatization of the water system in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Focusing on the organization of communication and processes of power negotiation on the part of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* we choose a local standpoint of analysis while discussing intersecting processes between local and global realities. Our emphasis lies on bottom-up, self-organizing, or grassroots,

⁷ Read as: *Chiapanecas y Chiapanecos en Defensa del Agua*.

responses to processes of globalization and neoliberal policies and what they can tell us about processes of power. Within our research we want to unravel the dynamics between different actors within one movement, how they relate to each other and try to produce change through the organization of mass communication. Analyzing these processes we aim to answer the main question of this research: How does the organization of mass communication by official institutions and NGOs influence the abilities of the movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* to contest processes of water privatization in Tuxtla Gutiérrez?

With the term official institutions we refer to institutions, such as the church, politics, the market and bureaucratic administration, which are historically more established within society as compared to NGOs. Each major social institution functions as a supra-organizational pattern of activity and has its own logic, which both constrains action and provides sources of agency and change. NGOs can function as non-institutional forces, which are driving institutional change (Friedland and Alford 1991, cited in Thornton and Ocasio 2008). The population of this research consists of members of, as well as people who are closely related to, the movement. A theoretical distinction is made between members of local NGOs and members of official institutions. It is assumed that the fact that these groups differ in their position within society, influences their way of communicating and their ability to transform power relations with regard to the privatization of the water system. However, it is important to note that such a distinction is theoretical but not as clear in daily life. We chose to do complementary research on the two groups in order to get insight in the heterogeneity of the movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*.

With this research we want to contribute to the scientific debate on power in a contemporary context of globalization and neoliberalism. Furthermore, in a time where the role of the nation-state is changing, a critical evaluation of the relationship between citizens and the state is in place (Appadurai 2006). The development of MCT additionally has a prominent impact on the organization of our social lives, making an analysis of its uses and impacts parallel to the development of offline mass communication all the more relevant. The added value of our investigation lies there where we can link these debates of power to globalization, the spread of neoliberal policies, the notion of citizenship and the use of different organizational forms of mass communication.

The process of neo-liberalization is a process influencing society as a whole,

but is appropriated and contested by local agents. Through this anthropological research we try to understand the impact of neoliberal practices on social relationships and what relation of power people have to it from a local point of view. We are specifically interested in the ways in which MCT create possibilities for grassroots movements to resist neoliberal reform. Our perspective focuses the attention on developments in the organization of mass communication between and within *vertebrate* structured social institutions on the one hand and *cellular* structured NGOs on the other hand, critically applying Appadurai's notion of *vertebrate* structures as opposed to *cellular* structures, which we will discuss within our theoretical framework (Appadurai 2006). We aim to get insight in the way the establishment of different groups in society influences their resources and constraints to communicate in public and how that in turn influences their ability to transform power relations with regard to the water privatization debate. Additionally, the prospects of water scarcity are an indication for future social problems, which in combination with the privatization of water require extra attention and analysis. As such we aim to bring attention to these processes and to broaden the understanding of local realities that are part and parcel of global processes of neoliberal restructuring.

We conducted two and a half months of field research in Chiapas, Mexico. Data was gathered by using the qualitative methods of participant observation, 'hanging out', having informal conversations as well as semi-structured interviews that have been recorded and transcribed (De Walt & De Walt 2011:131,140). Especially during the interviews we have been able to gain insights in the dynamics within the movement as well as in our informant's perceptions of processes of globalization and (changing) relationships of power in Mexican society. The contact to *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* was established prior to the fieldwork period and contacts in the field have been expanded by the snowball method (Boeije 2010:40). We participated in meetings of the NGO CEPAZDH⁸, whose members are part of the core of the movement. Furthermore we participated in protest marches and public activities organized by *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*. In order to preserve the anonymity of our informants, we use pseudonyms since the privatization of the water system is a delicate topic in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Additional data relevant for our research comes from online and offline documentation, including reports of

⁸ Educative Collective for Peace and Human Rights (Colectivo de Educación para la Paz y los Derechos Humanos).

activities organized by the movement and their communications on the Internet, such as people's use of Facebook with regard to contesting the privatization of the water system in Tuxtla Gutiérrez (Boeije, t' Hart and Hox 2009:58).

In order to answer our main question, we begin with a theoretical account of Anthony Giddens' notion of power. We focus on the local human elements of agency at play in the creation, maintenance and change of social systems. We use Giddens' theory of the duality of structure, which can be seen as a reaction to previous theories on power that tended to overemphasize the importance of structures. The theory underscores human actions, to guide us in dealing with citizens' relationships to the *social systems* that surround them and their possibilities to transform these systems in the context of globalization (1984). Discussing new forms of power contestation from below, we focus on Arjun Appadurai's notion of *Grassroots Globalization* and its *cellular* structures as opposed to the *vertebrate* structure of the nation state (2006). On the basis of the notion of citizenship the role of the nation-state is approached from a local viewpoint of the citizens as agents in the negotiation of power relationships. The concept of political distrust is part of this relationship as it relates to the citizens sense of how much governments are to fulfill or deny their needs (Zeineddine & Pratto 2014: forthcoming). Furthermore our analysis focuses on the organization of online and offline mass communication in the public space. Subsequently, in our contextual discussion of the situation of Mexico and Chiapas, we elaborate on the shift towards neoliberal policing in Mexico and processes of water privatization, as well as the influence of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas on the role of grassroots activism and mass communication. In our empirical chapters we elaborate on the data collected during fieldwork, analyzing it on the basis of the mentioned theories. It begins with an introduction of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, its problems with the privatization of the water system, and the development of the movement. Secondly an analysis of the NGOs within the movement will be followed by an analysis of the official institutions of the Catholic Church and politics in relation to the movement. In the concluding chapter we recapitulate our main empirical and theoretical findings in order to come to a conclusion, answering our main question.

Theoretical Framework

Power and the Theory of Structuration

How do we map contemporary power relations between different actors? We will start with a basic approach to power relationships and their constitution through Anthony Giddens' concepts of *structuration*, *knowledgeability* and *contextuality* (1984). After our discussion of Giddens' definitions of these concepts we will discuss in the following chapters how to apply these in analyzing the constitution of socio-political power relations between the state and grassroots resistances, from the latter's perspective, specifically through the use of different forms of MCT's.

Implications of Structuration Theory on Analyzing Relationships of Power

To understand the notion of *structuration* we need to distinguish between the concepts of structures, *social systems*, and lastly *structuration*, within which Giddens attributes an important role to human action or agency. Firstly, the concept of *structure* emphasizes that our social lives are patterned in distinct ways, rather than consisting of random events and actions: they are structured. Structures are made up of rules and resources that entail its constraining and enabling characteristics. Giddens additionally emphasizes that structure has a dual nature of being both medium and outcome: it is the means through which actions are made possible as well as the results of these actions (hence the duality of structure). Secondly, Giddens defines *social systems* as the 'reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organized as regular social practices' (1984:25). The state is an example of this, but also the relationship between citizens and the state in which they live (or: citizenship). Giddens emphasizes the apparent 'solidity' of *social systems* across time and space: their institutionalized features. However, in contrast to previous structuralist views, in Giddens' view these structures are to a large extent shaped by human actions. The state, as one of the most seemingly solid social systems we know, is also continually reaffirmed through human actions. In Giddens' theory of *structuration* the notions of *agency* and *structure* are seen as two inextricably linked elements within societies.

Lastly, *structuration* entails ‘conditions governing the continuity or transmutation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of social systems’ (1984:25). In short, *structuration* thus shows how all-social interaction is constrained by rules and draws from resources to create, maintain or change *social systems*. Giddens stresses that the formation of structures never ends because people always act: ‘[human societies] are reconstructed at every moment by the very ‘building blocks’ that compose it - human beings like you and me’ (2009:9). Aligning ourselves with Giddens, we state that human beings themselves are the most important element within the formation of their relationships, and that with every act they take they either maintain or change them.

With his theory of *structuration* Giddens thus establishes attention for the role of the individual. He thereby makes human (inter)actions important focuses in the analysis of power. As a starting point to analyzing power relations we argue that actors always make choices and thereby shape the social world around them. As opposed to seeing subordination as a passive role, it is more instructive to see it as an active position. Within *social systems* Giddens states that power ‘presumes regularized relations of autonomy and dependence between actors or collectivities in contexts of social interaction’ (1984:16). As stated, within our research the relationship between the state and its citizens, captured in the notion of citizenship, is an important example of this. The citizen then plays an active part in forming its relationship to the state. Giddens stresses that ‘all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinated can influence the activities of their superiors’ (1984:16). Moreover, *social systems* can be changed through changes in human actions and their repetition.

Giddens' concepts of *contextuality* and *knowledgeability* help us to situate social interactions and actors' understanding of these social interactions. With his concept of *contextuality* Giddens emphasizes that social interaction is situated in time and space and involves the setting of the interaction, the actors co-present and the communication between them (1984:373). Importantly, actors' understanding of society's *structuration* of actions is drawn upon in the production and reproduction of action. This entails Giddens' notion of *knowledgeability*, which Giddens defines as ‘[e]verything which actors know (believe) about the circumstances of their action and that of others, drawn upon in the production and reproduction of that action, including tacit as well as discursively available knowledge’ (1984:375). Thus, how people

understand the circumstances of actions influences them in taking action, making the information available to people a crucial point within political processes. That being said, human beings are not solely rational actors as emotions and unconscious behavioral patterns determine actions as well. Here we will nonetheless focus on the conscious and active aspects of human behavior, or 'human choice'. An analysis of actors, their interactions, communication and the tacit and discursive knowledge embedded within social interaction, is crucial in coming to an understanding of structures, *social systems* and processes of *structuration*. We will paint the first layer of this picture in the next chapter by elaborating on different faces of globalization and changing dynamics in human relationships. As such we will discuss the spread of neoliberal policies, importantly influencing notions of citizenship and political trust, as well as the opening up of new spaces for power contestation from a local perspective.

Neoliberalism, Implications for Citizenship and Grassroots Globalization

Globalization is a process that is driven by and results in an increase of cross-border flows of goods, services, money, people, information and culture (Guillén cited in Sanabria 2007:282). These flows are taking place in political, cultural and economic dimensions. The model of neoliberalism is embedded in the political-economic dimension of globalization. The ideological assumption behind neoliberalism is that a self-regulated free market is a better regulator of the economy and its consequences on social life than the state (Sanabria 2007:420). The liberation of the economy from governmental controls is implemented to ensure the free movement of money, goods and resources (Kottak 2011:354-355). Furthermore neoliberalism entails the tendency of governments towards policing which above all favors the accumulation of capital and investment. These conditions are created by a decline in state investment in social services, privatization of property rights and by market-determined and profit oriented use of resources (Sanabria 2007:282, Stahler-Sholk 2010:510). Speaking in Giddens' terms, neoliberalism can be seen as condition in the process of *structuration*, which influences human action and thereby shapes social relations between different actors such as the relation between citizens and the state as we shall see below.

In many definitions and literature on neoliberalism the retreat of the state from the nation's economic affairs is the central feature of the phenomenon (Kottak 2011:354, Flint&Taylor 2011:312, Sanabria 2007:420). However it is important to note that national economies still exist and that there is no exclusively global economy, without national governance or geographical centers (Eriksen 2007:75-76). Instead of a plenary retreat of the state, governments are rather influenced by the assumptions underlying the neoliberal model which leads to a shift in national economy policies that are orientated towards the market-based global economy, striving to create the conditions mentioned above and creating new forms of capital accumulation and increased concentration of economic power (Eriksen 2007:76). While transnational institutions like the IMF, World Bank and WTO influence state decision making with regard to the economy, it is moved further away from the local social subjects (Stahler-Sholk 2010:505). Within economic policy making, the shift towards neoliberalism, or speaking in J.S. Juris' terms towards *corporate capitalism*, has led to new areas of global production, consumption, and labor circuits while commodifying healthcare, education and the environment. More broadly, these policies have favored a global increase in poverty, inequality, social dislocation, and ecological destruction (Juris 2008:8).

The reorientation towards neoliberalism and its local impacts on social and political realities have resulted in a renegotiation of the relationship between the society and the state (Stahler-Sholk 2007:49). This process can be analyzed as a broader struggle over the meaning of citizenship, which articulates the legal rights and responsibilities of both sides: the state and the citizens. The relationship expressed by citizenship is manifested in a social contract: citizens barter rights of freedom for protection of their civil liberties by the state. Thereby 'the power of the state is legitimized by the will of the people'.⁹ Citizenship as a *social system* is shaped by human action. The power to transform the *social system* of citizenship thus lies in the citizens as well as in the state's actions. However, the conditions of globalization described above are destabilizing the meaning of this form of citizenship. The reliance on markets to solve political and social problems has led to a change in the role of the state and its responsibility for the basic well-beings of its citizens (Sassen 2006:285). While politics are becoming more globally oriented, the concept of citizenship as

⁹ Lecture Globalization& Sociocultural Complexity, February 27th 2013, Utrecht University

described above stays within the national dimension and therefore does not fully capture the processes of globalization.

This also becomes apparent in Neil Harvey's conceptualization of three different forms of citizenship: *corporatist*-, *market*- and *pluri-ethnic citizenship* (2001). His conceptualization is based on the example of the changing relationship between the Mexican state and its citizens, and therefore is particularly useful for understanding the transforming power relations between citizens and the state in Chiapas. According to Harvey, *corporatist citizenship* is characterized by a nationalist ideology and a strong identification with the authoritarian party-state governed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) from 1929 until 2000. Within this form of citizenship Mexico's numerous ethnic groups have been assimilated into a single society under one national Mexican identity. The shift to a neoliberal course in the 1980s weakened the corporatist and clientelist mechanisms of the government and led to a redefinition of *corporate citizenship* towards a strong *market citizenship*, which entails the encouragement, training or coercion of individuals into new relationships with global networks of similarly marketized societies. This new form of citizenship led to a shift in the relationships between local communities, the government and transnational institutions and corporations. While both forms of citizenship do not offer a viable future for ethnic diverse communities, which are excluded from the global economy by the shift towards neoliberal policy making, the third, and more inclusive notion of *pluri-ethnic citizenship* can be seen as a local response by these communities, in which the relationship with the state includes the right to be different. This form of citizenship does not necessarily include a rejection of global markets. It rather implies the premise of social and economic justice of local communities (Harvey 2001:1047, 1059).

The shift towards neoliberal policy also influences levels of trust between citizens and the state. In citizenship as *social system* lies the level of the citizens' trust towards the government. In developing democratic governments a shift towards neoliberal policing can increase political distrust because of the underestimation of the citizen's aspiration for economic redistribution and civil and political rights and because of the possible presence of economic insecurity, conflict and corruption (Zeineddine & Pratto 2014: forthcoming). Political distrust is defined by Zeineddine & Pratto as the constituent's sense of how much governments are to fulfill (or deny) the needs of the citizens. It derives from citizens' perceptions of the degree to which

political institutions enable them accessing, developing, or using their own capacities and the capacities of the state to fulfill their own needs (Zeineddine & Pratto 2014: forthcoming). Different environments offer different constraints and resources to fulfill these needs. In order to understand political distrust it is thus important to analyze the agent's needs as well as the environment, which provides the fulfillment of these needs to a certain degree (or not). Therefore political trust in local and regional political authorities is of high importance. Citizens are more closely related to local authorities. Thus it is the relationship that people have with local politics, which influences their attitude and ultimately their action towards politics in general (Levi & Stoker 2000:495). An asymmetric power relation between the citizens and the ruling political elites is not enough to explain political distrust. Furthermore trust relations as well as closely related power relations are not static. They can change over the time and are influenced by various dynamics, such as the process of globalization, which also entailed a global spread of democracy (Flint & Taylor 2007:194). This in turn brought about increasing standards of wealth, security, gender equality, transparency and maybe most important an increased access to information. The fact that these standards have risen does not mean that they are fulfilled in every democratic state. However, they brought about higher reference standards, and *knowledgeability* of citizens, which lead to more political distrust (among the disadvantaged) and to more space to be critical and reject inequality. (Zeineddine & Pratto 2014: forthcoming).

Thus besides reshaping local ideas of citizenship and citizens' trust in politics, processes of globalization can simultaneously open new political spaces of resistance and the exercise of power from below (Stahler-Sholk 2010:493). The effects of neoliberalism at the local level such as increasing poverty, exclusion from the economy, exploitation of land and resources and a loss of self-determination by marginalized groups provide motivations for new forms of resistance (Nash 2001:3). The response to these developments is a change in the way power is contested on the local level by grassroots movements (Stahler-Sholk 2010:505). The locus of political struggles is shifted from direct contestation of state power to new spaces of contestation, integrating the global level (Stahler-Sholk 2007:49). Appadurai refers to this process with the concept of *Grassroots Globalization*: the worldwide effort of activist nongovernmental organizations to seize and shape the global agenda on such matters as human rights, gender, poverty, environment and disease (2006:xi). He

describes *Grassroots Globalization* as the positive face of *cellular* structures. These structures exist alongside *vertebrate* structures. While *cellular* structures are chaotic, fragmented, interconnected and unbounded, *vertebrate* structures on the contrary are structured, well-defined and limited. With these concepts, Appadurai is referring to patterns in social relations similar to Giddens' notion of *structuration*. Both structures, *cellular* and *vertebrate*, represent power relations in a 'globalized world'. According to Appadurai grassroots movements are establishing partnerships on the local and global level and are thereby transcending the *vertebrate* structures of the nation state (2006:129-133). They are connected to global NGOs, which are concerned with broader issues like environmental damage and human rights. In doing so, '[...] they are all commonly involved in shaping a third space, in which markets and states are not only forced to recognize their importance but are in the process of having to concede genuine political space to these voices and actors when global decisions about key issues are made. [...] They are thus developing a new dynamic in which global networking is put at the service of local imaginings of power' (Appadurai 2006:136). Nash refers to this process as the establishment of new forms of governing in transnational spaces. The potential of local grassroots movements to rethink and reshape forms of power thus needs to be analyzed in the context of globalization (Nash 2001:3). The processes described by Appadurai and Nash can be seen as examples of a transformation of power relations. Speaking in Giddens' terms, grassroots activists are operating within the conditions of globalization, which have their own rules and resources. These rules and resources are constraining and stimulating the *structuration* of the *social systems* by grassroots agents. This production and reproduction of structures involves the shaping of the space in which grassroots activists operate and contest the outcomes of neoliberal ideology.

However, local grassroots movements in the majority of cases do not literally resist neoliberalism. Operating in particular places, the transformative power of these movements is exercised alongside electoral politics in order to resist local and concrete manifestations of neoliberalism (Flint & Taylor 2011:234, Stahler-Sholk 2007:48). *Grassroots Globalization* implies power contestation from below. The movements are locally rooted as well as globally connected (Juris 2007:58). However the development towards the *cellular* structures of *Grassroots Globalization* does not necessarily exclude national cooperation between local actors. Our empirical data shows that the distinction between *cellular* and *vertebrate* structures in everyday life

is not always as clear as in theoretical accounts. Also within the *cellular* structures of *Grassroots Globalization*, movements are often contesting the state's actions and therefore the power of the grassroots agents' actions lies in shaping *social systems* such as citizenship, which are still patterned in *vertebrate* structures.

The concept of *structuration* shows how grassroots activists' interactions with *social systems* such as politics or the concept of citizenship reproduce and change them, as they can have a major influence on the relationship between them. When we link this to grassroots activists use of different forms of mass communication we may see communication as guide and inspiration for social action which is part of the process of *structuration* and can thereby influence the agent's capabilities to transform *social systems*. Thus means of communication can function as a 'power tool'.

Mass Communication as a Power tool

What do these processes entail for the role of mass communication in changing dynamics of power? In the introduction we shortly discussed the relationship between knowledge and power, and the role that communication plays in it. Gathering information is a prerequisite to acquiring knowledge on the mechanisms behind processes, which in turn increases the ability to influence them consciously. By putting human action at the center stage of the formation of structures and *social systems*, Giddens also increased the importance of communication. He emphasized, with the concept of *knowledgeability*, that people's actions are influenced by what they believe to understand of the circumstances of their actions. We might then not only say 'knowledge is power,' but also 'making people believe something is power', as a change in this belief will change their actions. This stresses the power that forms of mass communication bring, as they influence the *knowledgeability* of agents in turn implicating their formation of structures and *social systems*. Mass communication thus is a political question, as different actors have vested interests in people's *knowledgeability* because of their own positioning within structures and *social systems*.

Marshall McLuhan stated that 'The Medium is The Message' as he saw technological developments in themselves as changing human relations and

interactions (1964:7-23). As 'it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human associations and action' (1964:9), the development of MCT affects the patterning of human relationships. As we will see in the empirical chapters the usage of MCT such as Facebook and WhatsApp have become firmly embedded within the social organization of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*. This usage of the Internet and people's constant connectivity through smart phones has changed the way people communicate with each other and organize their social actions. As such, the virtual world provides human agents with a tool to interact with each other within a new dimension, bound to its own logics.

The development of MCT's changed the nature of our social relationships, building networks between vast geographical distances, crossing national boundaries, while also creating new spaces and localities in the virtual dimension. As such there are increasing possibilities to acquire information and *knowledgeability* related to situations located further away from one's own. In combination with an increased speed in the cross-border flows of goods, services, money, people, information and culture, which characterizes globalization as stated above, this *knowledgeability* increases agents' abilities to influence these far away situations as well as involve others in their local situations. As an extension to mass communication as a political question, MCT's are a political tool through which power is exercised to maintain and change structures. One important example of this in Mexico is the usage of MCT by the Zapatista movement in the nineties. As will be elaborated upon later on, they succeeded in drawing international attention by using MCT's to their local struggles for farmer's rights as well as set up an international network for support. Moreover, the emerging *Grassroots Globalization*, as an emerging *social system*, has amongst other reasons been possible through these technological developments.

Though these technological developments have changed social interactions in these ways, the importance and presence of action within the physical public sphere should not be overlooked. In our research we found the social organization within the physical public domain still to be very present. Within influencing the *knowledgeability* of social actors, mass communication takes place in both physical and nonphysical dimensions of the public sphere. Non-physical dimensions would entail media-platforms such as news-outlets and Facebook. Physical dimensions of the public sphere direct attention more to protests and banners on streets, and events and posters in public spaces. Together they form the whole of human interactions.

Within the empirical chapters we will see how these online and offline dimensions may come together.

Here we may also return to Giddens' concept of *contextuality*, or the time and space in which social interaction takes place. As stated above, this entails an analysis of the setting of interaction, the actor's co-present and the communication between them. Focusing on mass communication we link it to two other *contextual* aspects of social interaction. As such we focus on online as well as offline settings within the wider arena of Mexico implicated by neoliberal policies. Then an overview and analysis of the actors involved in large-scale communication for our case will entail a heterogeneous grassroots movement, amongst others made up of and surrounded by NGO-activists, politicians and members of the Catholic Church. Ultimately we hope to give insight into how the movement of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* is implicated in this *contextuality*, moves within processes of *knowledgeability* and is a part of and takes part in the formation of structures and *social systems*, importantly citizenship and *Grassroots Globalization*.

Summary of Theories

In this research we apply Anthony Giddens' concepts of *structuration*, *knowledgeability* and *contextuality* to understand the formation of social relationships and structures in our contemporary age of globalization. We have seen how globalization entails the spread of neoliberal policy, implicates levels of political trust and is changing *social systems*. As such we discussed the changing relationship between the citizen and the state as well as the emerging *social system* of *Grassroots Globalization*. We will make an analysis of how *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* encounters and forms these *social systems*. In our research we specifically look at how mass communication is organized by different actors within this movement to contest neoliberal policy and relates to *knowledgeability* and *contextuality*. Appadurai's concepts of *cellular* and *vertebrate* structures are a useful basis to analyze these differences in the organization of communication. However, they need to be critically applied to our empirical findings, which in this case show that the distinction between the two forms is not always as clear as in theory. Ultimately, we look at local processes of *structuration* through the use of mass communication and

how grassroots activists wield political power in doing so. This brings us to our main question of how different actors within *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* are able to contest processes of water privatization through the organization of their mass communication.

Context

Neoliberal Politics and Water Privatization in Mexico

Mexico's internal political system has been characterized by a seventy yearlong hegemony of the PRI until 2000, followed by two terms of the National Action Party (PAN) after which the PRI recaptured power. During the latter part of this period a shift has been made from redistribution programs for development to the adaptation of a neoliberal course (Nash 2001:23). After the oil market crashed in 1982, Mexico was left incapable of adhering to its international payment obligations, justifying the PRI's adoption of neoliberal policing to ensure economic development. This entailed the 'privatization of state owned enterprises, a liberalization of investment policy, austerity in fiscal policy, and an embrace of free trade and export-oriented development' (Huck 2008:138), with cuts additionally being made in social programs. These implementations have been accompanied by diffusions in boundaries between the business sector and politics (La Botz 1995:60; Huck 2008:127). Following this neoliberal course, the government of Peña Nieto passed a New Energy Reform (*Reforma Energética*) in December 2013, which opens Mexico's state-controlled energy industry of gas, oil and electricity to foreign investment (Mexican Embassy Romania 2014). President Peña Nieto's reform has met a lot of criticism because in order to pass the bill, the government had to change key articles of the Mexican constitution, which ensured the state-ownership of Mexico's energy industry. The recently passed *Reforma Energética* is another example of the governments increased movement towards neoliberal policies, which facilitates the sale of natural resources to private companies.

Concerning the effects of Mexico's turn to neoliberal policies Huck argues that 'while [it] improved macroeconomic stability in Mexico and restored private-sector confidence in Mexico, it did so at high social cost' (2008:138). Stahler-Sholk elaborates on the scale of these social costs, as he states that the policies have 'increased the concentration of wealth, seriously eroded the purchasing power of workers' wages and massively disrupted peasant agriculture, all affecting the balance of social forces in the country' (2001:506).

The privatization of water services in Mexico already started illegally in 1982, but privatization was legalized in 1992 by the reform of Article 27 of the Constitution under Salinas' presidency. The implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 played an important role in the privatization of water in Mexico, as it lifted trading restrictions between Mexico, the United States and Canada. In this agreement water is defined as a tradable good, 'obliging all parties to sell their water resources to the highest bidder under threat of being sued by private companies that want it' (Nash 2007:633). Additionally, Nash emphasizes forces that drive privatization like the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) that allows foreign investors to sue and demand compensation from governments in response to any law or rule that affects their profits, and the World Bank that now loans on the condition that water services and resources are privatized (2007:634). During Vicente Fox's term the Law of National Waters was introduced in 2004, which 'authorizes the privatization of the entire hydraulic infrastructure of federal property – dams, canals, and irrigation ditches – and prioritizes the rights of extraction of water by corporations' (Nash 2007:632). Nash argues that this new law enlarges the water market and takes advantage of small farmers who can sell their right of extracting water (2007:633).

Not only water wells but also public water services have been privatized in several states in Mexico. As in other cases, government officials often legitimize the privatization of public water services by stating that this kind of competition ensures the quality of the water services and the allocation of water resources. Wilder et al. however argue that decentralization has not yielded the expected environmental or efficiency benefits, and emphasize the need for an enhanced commitment of the state in regulating water services (2006:1981). CONAGUA – the National Water Commission – is the administrative organ of the Mexican government that organizes the country's waters. They argue that many improvements have been made on the issue of water distribution within the country. According to them, government administrations have declared water a 'strategic matter of national security' because of 'the essential nature of water for Mexico's economic, social and industrial development' (CONAGUA 2014). There is, however, no place in Mexico where one can drink water from the tap, allowing for an industry for bottled water to grow (Nash 2007:633). Additionally, there is a large difference between rural and city areas concerning the water's accessibility. The city areas have much higher rates in piped

water access compared to the country's rural areas which are less populated en where people have less political power (Wilder et al. 2006:1981). This inequality of political power as well as increasing political distrust towards the government led to the emergence of grassroots movements, which are acting in response to the neoliberal course, followed by the Mexican government.

Mexico's Grassroots Movements and Mass Communication

While indigenous grassroots movements have been suppressed for a long time by the state, the weakening of the corporate notion of citizenship - through neoliberal restructuring -was followed by an opening of spaces for resistance. This led to an opposition to capitalism and a call for political democracy, land rights and cultural integrity at the grassroots level (Stahler-Sholk 2007:48, 502, Harvey 2001:1047). To understand Mexico's historical background with regard to grassroots organization the Zapatista movement in the state of Chiapas needs to be considered. Within the area of Chiapas in general terms the countryside mainly inhabits indigenous people. Most mestizos (a mix between indigenous peoples and Europeans) live in city areas. We furthermore need to be aware of Chiapas' large ethnic diversity of indigenous peoples living there, mostly separated in social life by ethnic descent (Nash 2001:43).

On January 1 in 1994 NAFTA went into effect. The agreement implicated a further intensification of the effects of neoliberal policies to indigenous communities in Chiapas, such as struggles with regards to land rights, denial of access to health care and education, exclusion from the economy and denial of the right to define their own cultural conditions. On the same date the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) occupied seven towns in eastern and central Chiapas (Mattiace 2003:1). This uprising can be seen as the apex of years of peaceful protest against the PRI's denial of human services and political rights to indigenous communities (Harvey 2007:631). From that moment on the Zapatista movement was able to direct the attention to the rural crisis in Chiapas and express the demands at national and international levels by means of MCT. While electoral politics had little effect, given the power-monopoly of the PRI, the movement and other surrounding organizations attempted to create new forms of political participation that go beyond the corporatist

forms of control of the dominant party regime that governed Mexico after 1929 (Harvey 2007:631; Nash 2001:53).

The Catholic Church, as official institution, took a particular position in the course of the Zapatista movement. Following the ideas of Liberation Theology, the church accompanied the indigenous people of Chiapas in their struggle for land rights, justice and democracy (Floyd 1996:161). Liberation theology can be seen as a reaction from a group of bishops in Latin America to the persisting hierarchical structures of colonization, aiming at defending the rights of the marginalized population (Aldunate 1994). As such the ambiguous role of the Catholic Church in Mexico becomes apparent: a simultaneous involvement in the colonization as well as in the Zapatista's demands of land rights, justice and democracy. The new approach of the Catholic Church was met with criticism on the part of the government as well as from within the Catholic Church, where a division between the supporters of the liberationist approach and the traditionalists started to emerge and remain until today (Floyd 1996, 164).

Though the Zapatista movement is an indigenous movement its demands to democracy and dignity appealed to broad sectors of the Mexican population that has been affected by neoliberal restructuring (Nash 2001:117). With the movement a more diverse political arena emerged in Mexico. Power relations increasingly were contested 'from below', changing citizens' relationship to the government. The Zapatista movement did not attempt to replace the power of the nation-state, but to gain autonomy by using structural resources to transform power on the spheres above and below the nation-state (Stahler-Sholk 2010:516.). They were among the first grassroots movements who used MCT as a tactical tool to facilitate the locally rooted struggles with global linkages (Juris 2007:45). In its use of technology and its ideals with regard to democracy, dignity and justice, the Zapatista movement remains a source of political identity and inspiration, which opened new political spaces for other movements to follow in their footsteps (Harvey 2007:629).

As the Zapatista movement attracted international attention and inspired many over the globe, curiosity motivated many to visit Chiapas, a phenomenon also known as *Zapaturismo*. The historical context is important for understanding the motivation of many foreigners in the area, whom often might also be involved in social movements themselves.

In July 2013 a local grassroots movement started to emerge and organize in response to the plans of water privatization in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. The fact that prior to our field work period we have learned about their struggle and communicated with them behind our computers in the Netherlands is only one example of the use of MCT as a tool in the negotiation of power relationships applied by activists. J.S. Juris argues that activists not only use these technologies as practical tools but that they also use them to express their (utopian) ideals and models for reorganizing social, political and economic life, by experimenting with new digital technologies (2007:268). In doing so, they are using the resources of globalization in order to challenge the constraints brought about by neoliberal ideology. In the following empirical chapters we will analyze how different groups within the movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* are using these resources with respect to means of communication in order to contest the privatization of the water system in the state capital Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

Setting the Stage



10

¹⁰ First march of the movement against the privatization of SMAPA, from Eacebook page of *CEPAZDH*, <https://www.facebook.com/CEPAZDH> consulted June 2014.

Water Privatization and the Development of a Grassroots Movement in Tuxtla Gutiérrez

Tuxtla Gutiérrez, or Tuxtla, is the state capital of Chiapas. The city houses the municipal and state government offices and is characterized by commercial industry and government administration. Accelerated population growth led to a fast expansion of the city's many different neighborhoods. The rapid growth of Tuxtla implicates high demands for infrastructure, housing and governmental services such as water supplies into the outskirts of the city¹¹. With regards to water distribution the government has not been able to meet the demands of Tuxtla's growing population.

The public water system in Tuxtla is organized by the Municipal System of Drinking Water and Sewage, or SMAPA (Sistema Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado). It is important to note that the system has hitherto not been privatized. The announcement of the approbation of a public-private partnership contract between SMAPA and an, until now unknown private investor, has been made in June 2013. However the introduction of the privatization was postponed for several months. In the eyes of our informants this was, amongst other reasons, due to the opposition from the movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*. The current state of the public water system is described by most of our informants as broken-down. The direct effects are mostly experienced in the poorer outskirts of the city, where many people do not have or only have limited access to water. Water pressure sometimes can be high in the early morning and decreases in the course of the day. The pipes that channel the water are partly broken down or they contain toxic materials that contaminate the water. People in the city center and in the outskirts have to buy bottled drinking water. Besides the direct effects of access to and quality of the water, the members of the movement experience the public water system as not efficiently organized, complaining about unexpected denial of water access because of confusions with regard to the payment of water bills¹².

Most of the members of the movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* live close to the city center of either Tuxtla or San Cristóbal de las Casas. Being situated in these different social contexts they do not experience the worst effects of

¹¹Semi-structured interview, Valeria Hernandez, March 14th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

¹²Semi-structured interview, Mara Flores, May 13th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

the broken water system. However, many of them learned of the problems with water distribution and privatization through their participation in other social movements. Especially in San Cristóbal de las Casas - a city that became famous through the Zapatista uprising in the nineties - many people are working in NGOs on social issues. The citizens of Tuxtla on the other hand, seem to be more apathetic, leaving social matters mostly to the state. In several interviews, informants were using the term *apáticos* (apathetic) when referring to Tuxtla's citizens' lack of interest and action with regard to socio-political issues such as the privatization of the public water system.

The plans for the privatization of SMAPA were announced to the citizens through the mainstream media. Olivia Santos, a member of the NGO CEPAZDH, told us how she experienced the announcement:

*'When I heard about the approbation of the privatization on the radio I was upset. I was asking myself "How is this possible?" I was surprised and angry at the same time.'*¹³

This first step is important, as information needs to reach people first, for them to be able to take action against it. Olivia stressed that information concerning these plans and the financial situation of SMAPA was lacking. The municipal government argues that the reasons for the privatization are related to the financial crisis that SMAPA experienced since 2004. According to the authorities, a debt of approximately 120 million Mexican Pesos¹⁴ has been the reason why SMAPA has not been able to install and improve an efficient distribution system. While the officials announce that privatization will lead to improvement of the water system, *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* scrutinize the reasons for SMAPA's indebtedness and complain about a lack of access to official information about its financial situation:

'They neither inform the citizens about what is really going on nor do they explain the real intentions behind the privatization. We do not have enough information. On the mid to long-term the privatization of the system means not having access to

¹³ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

¹⁴ This estimation is derived from the investigation by *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*.

*clean water in our houses. It also means having to pay for insufficient service. The money we pay is misapplied for other things, responding to the political interests of the people who are in charge of those systems.*¹⁵

In order to inform Tuxtla's citizens about these matters Olivia from San Cristóbal got together with Jorge Garcia, a member of the Catholic Church in Tuxtla, to discuss a strategy to act against the privatization and the idea to organize a forum was born. In collaboration between a few NGOs and the Catholic Church the first forum was organized in July 2013. It discussed experiences of privatization in other places, the different faces of water privatization and the plans of the municipality for the privatization of SMAPA. Around a hundred and fifty people participated. The forum is seen as giving birth to the movement of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, as it was a starting-point of awareness amongst the citizens of Tuxtla of the plans and directed action against it. Additionally people started to meet face-to-face in this context, allowing new relationships and collaborations to form.

A committee (*Comité Promotor*) was founded, counting twenty people, which would allow for focused organization surrounding the movement's actions. Amongst other things the committee formed sub-committees in some of Tuxtla's neighborhoods in which they provided information on the privatization, gave workshops and discussed how similar things happened in different cities and what the results of that had been. However, the committee encountered difficulties in creating lasting relationships with the neighborhood committees. Generally, the movement has shrunk over time as people have other work to do and, as Olivia said, *'people want things fast'*.¹⁶ Although there was great motivation in the beginning, only a small core of people is working still now.

A few days after the first forum a march was organized in which around one thousand people participated.¹⁷ Both mainstream and independent media was present and reported on the event. The crowd was diverse as members of the Catholic Church, students, and people of various social organizations participated. Also employees of SMAPA participated in the first protest march. The prospect of privatization of their workplace makes them afraid of losing their jobs. Within

¹⁵ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

¹⁶ *'La gente quiere las cosas rápidas'* semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

¹⁷ Semi-structured interview, Ricardo Gomez, April 1st 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

SMAPA two labor unions have been founded. One was set up in 2007 and one in the 1980s. Francisco Reyes, a member of the Catholic Church who has close contacts with the labor unions, describes the internal tensions and the employee's fear of losing their jobs:

*'There will be a moment when both unions will have the same amount of members. Then they will start to fight for their jobs. This is going to be an explosion of people's labor rights.'*¹⁸

Some of the people we spoke with told us that a few days after the first protest march text-messages were sent to the employees, telling them they would risk their chances to contract renewal if they participated in a second march. As a consequence, the second march the movement organized attracted much less participants, as many SMAPA employees have been afraid to participate due to the anonymous threats.

In September 2013 *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* organized a second forum. This time the forum aimed at creating a dialogue with political actors in Tuxtla. All forty-one representatives of the state congress (*diputados*) have been invited to attend the forum. One of them stated he would only be prepared to listen to 'professionals'. As a response to his public announcement the movement invited people who could fit this label, to talk about the privatization of water in general and discuss specific cases. Amongst others they organized an online video-conference with Oscar Olivera, an important figure in the Bolivian Water Wars. Only four of the forty-one *diputados* participated in the forum. Amongst the members of the movement this was widely regarded as a sign of the reluctance of politicians to be in touch with the citizens, as Olivia explains:

*'This is the level of interest of our representatives in congress. This is their interest in listening to the people. Our representatives do not want to learn about what's best for the people or how they could improve their work.'*¹⁹

The relationship between citizens and local politics can influence their actions with regard to broader political issues (Levi&Stoker 2000: 495). This becomes apparent,

¹⁸ Semi-structured interview, Francisco Reyes, April 8th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

¹⁹ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

not only during interviews but also in everyday life, where we observed distrust towards politics as one of the underlying motivations for *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* to mobilize themselves. According to them one of the major problems of the process of privatization is the lack of transparency and the presence of corruption within SMAPA and the municipal government.

In order to get more insight into the situation of SMAPA, but also to offer an alternative for the organization of the system, *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* executed an investigation of the functioning of the water system in Tuxtla. They wrote a report on the matter, naming it 'Citizen Proposal for the Improvement of SMAPA'.²⁰ They included an alternative proposal to its organization to show how and where costs could be reduced and how citizen participation and alternative technologies could complement the current system. The proposal was presented online as well as at public events. Such public events are organized by the movement in order to inform citizens on the privatization plans in Tuxtla. During these events signatures for the approval of a referendum against these plans are gathered and marches are organized where related grassroots movements join to increase numbers.

The goal of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* is not only to stop the process of the privatization of SMAPA but also to address the lack of transparency and the corruption within it. They aim to sanitize the system and to make sure that every citizen of Tuxtla gets access to clean water. According to the ideals of the movement, transparency should be guaranteed by citizen participation. All of our informants, including the politicians we talked to, emphasized the importance of citizen participation in controlling and operating the water system in Tuxtla. Besides the direct goals related to the privatization, people stressed that they aim to create social awareness of corruption and the lack of transparency in Mexican politics. Furthermore, they contest the idea that water – a natural resource – becomes a tradable good that in turn becomes part of the economy, resulting from neoliberal ideas upheld by distrusted politicians. The process of water privatization is experienced as a clash of interests between different actors, in which financial interests seem to play the leading role.

The movement that was set up to contest these processes calls itself *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, drawing the link broader than Tuxtla but

²⁰ Original title 'Propuesta Ciudadana para la Mejora de SMAPA', see online sources in bibliography.

focusing specifically on the importance of water. A variety of actors join under this name, some coming from the Catholic Church, and others from social organizations in San Cristóbal and Tuxtla. Some local politicians sympathizing with the movement have joined, too. However, our interviewees emphasized the importance of distance between the movement and politics, thus not allowing politicians to be an official part of it. People from different contexts unite under a banner against water privatization, creating a heterogeneous movement with a sole purpose. In the next two chapters we will elaborate on how these differences in context influence the abilities to contest processes of water privatization in Tuxtla Gutiérrez by means of mass communication.

The Resourcefulness of NGO-Activism



21

²¹ A meeting of the RedTDT, a Mexican human rights organizations network, of which CEPAZDH is a part, March 14th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas, own picture.

Introducing the NGO-Activists: Deep Involvement and Shifting Networks

In the most general sense non-governmental organizations are groups of people organizing themselves independently from the government. Willetts defines the phenomenon as an '*independent voluntary association of people acting together on a continuous basis, for some common purpose, other than achieving government office, making money or illegal activities*' (2006:6). NGOs concern themselves with social, environmental or animal issues, and with an umbrella definition of their focus work on a limited number of concrete cases.

We worked mostly with CEPAZDH whom we found through their website.²² In general terms they focus on human rights and non-violence: to '*promote the construction of a culture of peace, based on the knowledge, diffusion, defense and exercise of the human rights and of non-violence with respect to gender and interculturality*' (CEPAZDH 2014). At that time, early 2014, their work mainly concerned women's rights and the human right to water. We met the two main members for the first time in an office they shared with others in San Cristóbal de las Casas. Olivia Santos, a Mexican woman in her early fifties, being educated as a preschool teacher and having studied law, now dedicated herself to social activism and defending human rights. She spoke of girls disappearing in the city and their work towards its prevention. Her emphasis lied slightly more on the rights of women, while Ricardo Gomez's work was concentrated on the human right to water. Ricardo, a thirty three year old Spaniard, had been in Mexico ever since he came for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2010. He had worked with the NGO of Otros Mundos,²³ part of Amigos de la Tierra,²⁴ before meeting Olivia and collaborating with her in CEPAZDH. They emphasized the double focus in their work of empowering people to be autonomous, through practical projects in rural communities, while simultaneously addressing the responsibilities of the government, which was apparent in their involvement in *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*.

²² <http://www.cepazdh.org/>

²³ They concern themselves with the alternatives to multi-faced crisis in a system dominated by capitalism. See online sources in bibliography.

²⁴ They describe their mission on their website as '*promoting a local and global shift towards a society which respects the environment, justice and solidarity.*' See online sources in bibliography.

Many other NGOs are a part of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* or align themselves behind its views. We spoke with Paco Cruz, a twenty nine year old member of MOCRI, a peasant organization.²⁵ He explained that *'as an organization, as MOCRI, we defend the territory and because we defend the territory, we defend the natural resources, which means defending life.'*²⁶ We saw him regularly at the events the movement organized. We spoke with a member of an organization of parents who worked for the betterment of the school situation in Mexico and against educational reforms of Peña Nieto, after which he held a speech on the World Water Day as part of the movement. Others have been less visible in the later stages of the movement, or not at all in the physical public domain. We, for example, never saw Otros Mundos in the marches or events we went to, but Olivia spoke of them co-organizing the first forum. Moreover the NGOs have been involved in different ways. As such mainly CEPAZDH executed the investigation of SMAPA mentioned above, though in the name of the movement. At the same time other NGOs still are present within the movement at its events and demonstrations, as well as its online platforms such as Facebook. Whereas the movement has a clear name, the alliances underneath it are of a shifting nature. In line with Appadurai's notion of *cellularity* these different NGOs connect in the movement in a chaotic, fragmented, interconnected and unbound way (2006:25).

The movement includes foreigners, such as Ricardo Gomez and Javier Arellano. Javier, a Chilean travelling and working with his girlfriend in Latin America, only recently started collaborating with CEPAZDH. Foreigners in Chiapas have been a general phenomenon since its acquisition of international fame since the Zapatista uprising (as discussed in the context). Foreigners bring resources with them. Javier explained how he found an appropriate role for him to play in the movement:

*'What I saw to be important to me was the theme of sharing experiences [...] from the reality that I knew more, which is that of Chile. And some of other countries [...] A lot about the privatization of the drinking water system as well as some struggles that they were doing for water in some rural communities.'*²⁷

25 Independent Regional Peasant Movement (Movimiento Campesino Regional Independiente). See online sources in bibliography.

26 Semi-structured interview, Paco Cruz, March 20th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

27 Semi-structured interview, Javier Arellano, April 1th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

In addition to knowledge, foreigners bring their social networks with them and make new connections, creating international relationships. Additionally, we as researchers noticed how our own identity as foreigners was seen as a tool for exercising political pressure. Olivia explained that through us interviewing members of political parties on state level, *'they realize that the eyes of other countries are turned towards the problem in Tuxtla of SMAPA.'*²⁸ We will elaborate upon what this implies in the third paragraph.

The *deep involvement* of these NGO-activists in the movement becomes apparent when looking at work they have done, their motivations and the bigger picture in which they situate those. The NGO-activists are broadly interested in social issues and proclaim a strong desire to better social circumstances, connecting different subjects together and strongly linking interests to actions. The organization of water had been a topic for them in different ways. Ricardo, being an engineer, had specialized on the subject of water in his studies in England and worked with Otros Mundos on the subject. Roberto Mendez, a twenty three year old Mexican member of the *Comité promotor*, told us he worked within a neighborhood of 30.000 people who did not have drinking water.²⁹ Olivia had worked for the protection of the natural resource: *'here in San Cristóbal, there are wetlands in the mountains that in 2007 began to be destroyed. We began an organization to defend and avoid the destruction of the wetlands of the mountains.'*³⁰ She spoke of strong emotions as the news of the privatization reached her: *'This makes me feel anger, indignation [...] How do we make people open their eyes, that they organize themselves, fight?'*³¹ This aspect we could see within several of the activists, as they were appalled at the news and felt a need to act against it. Amongst the NGO-activists the issue of water was linked to broader worldviews. Javier emphasized the need for people to change their *'culture of water'*, which he described as the ways in which people *'think, feel and act in relation to water,'*³² to have people considering the larger processes that water is a part of. Additionally he stated that *'not from everything money can be made, there are things*

28 Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

29 Semi-structured interview, Roberto Mendez, March 13th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

30 Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

31 Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

32 Semi-structured interview, Javier Arellano, April 1th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

that are sacred.’³³ Olivia also positioned the protection of water in respect to moneymaking:

*'A lot of governments are in the logic of the capitalist system. This system brings us to, well, destruction. Practically they care about the money, and don't care about the people. [...] For me the case of SMAPA and its privatization is a clear example of the injustice that the authorities commit without taking the population into account, all of the economical and political interests, the bad management which they do at the costs of anything.'*³⁴

In this way the privatization of SMAPA was positioned within a bigger picture of bad governance and political distrust. According to Olivia these problems are present globally, but whereas *'we cannot do anything for the whole world,'*³⁵ they could work for the case of SMAPA. This *deep involvement* is part of processes of what Giddens calls (1984:25) processes of *structuration*, conditioning the formation of structures of social behavior. Meeting Roberto on marches and events in Tuxtla he told us that next to his work in the movement he was part of several social initiatives such as the Yo Soy 132 social movement and an independent radio station. These activists take social action more than averagely, if only through their participation in NGOs.

NGO-involvement: Unity, Connections and Organic Task-distribution

*'What's in a name? That which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet'*

Juliet in Romeo and Juliet, by Shakespeare (II, ii, 1-2).

What's in a name and what is the nature of what lies beneath? Organizations are a way in which human beings organize addressing social issues: within *structured* social relationships, working in a cumulative manner and being unified under a name and a common goal.

³³ Semi-structured interview, Javier Arellano, April 1th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

³⁴ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

³⁵ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

A name unifies and gives the *appearance* of a 'thing'. The names of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* as well as CEPAZDH bind together its members and their actions and functions as a point of reference. As discussed, the movement brings together a shifting network of NGOs and other actors. Within the movement the individuals from the NGOs did not profile their alliances to these different organizations, but repeatedly emphasized the unity between them.

*'This includes some companions taking responsibility and saying okay we will invite different organizations so that their fights are not so dispersed [...] to unite all the demands and all the organizations and that all fight in only one block,'*³⁶ Roberto stated.

On a larger scale calling themselves *ciudadan@s* (citizens) unifies the movement with all the citizens of Tuxtla, pointing to how the privatization of SMAPA will affect all of them. The *cellular* network of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* is unified under a name to direct its members' resources towards a common goal, in general the protection of water in Chiapas and practically the prevention of the privatization of SMAPA. The NGO-activists are furthermore unified through their *deep involvement* in the subject of the protection of water; the common goal the movement proposes. This focus on a specific goal or subject allows for connections to other networks working on similar issues and being visible under a name as such.

CEPAZDH is a part of the network VIDA³⁷, through being part of COMDA, connecting themselves within their international networks. COMDA is a coalition of Mexican organizations that work for the right to water, thus functioning on a national level. In 2012 a Latin American conference had been organized in Mexico. Olivia spoke of people from organizations from Bolivia, Venezuela, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Canada and the United States coming together and sharing information on the situation of water in Mexico.

'So there a relationship started, and when the case of SMAPA was presented it was through the networks, and the network of VIDA, that we reported on the situation of SMAPA. And later, Oscar Olivera, who is from Bolivia, was in touch with us and

³⁶ Semi-structured interview, Roberto Mendez, March 13th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

³⁷ Network Against the Violation of the Right to Water, in Latin America (Red Contra La Violación del Derecho al Agua, en America Latina).

*through the organization and the network of VIDA the information was spread to other countries.*³⁸

On a national level CEPAZDH and MOCRI are part of MOVIAC.³⁹ Also the RedTDT network connected them to human rights organizations in the whole of Mexico. Even though the movement works to a higher extent within national boundaries, Olivia emphasized the importance of international contacts to exercise political pressure.

*'I think it is important to be in touch with other organizations in other countries. Because we see that this has a lot of political impact on the authorities, the deputies and the governments. International pressure and the fact that this information goes outside, to other countries, the governments do not like very much. Therefore there is more political pressure.'*⁴⁰

These networks seem to work like alliances to be used for its resources when circumstances ask for it, rather than regularized relations of contact.

Similarly within CEPAZDH we saw the characteristics of *organic task-distribution* and shifting relationships within their organization in their meetings and organization of events. CEPAZDH did have a clearer membership but similarly functioned organically around capabilities and skills. In a meeting organizing an event on the World Water Day Ricardo proposed to brainstorm, welcoming the creation of own initiatives, and in agreement the tasks were delegated. Olivia spoke of Paco being able to organize one part, Reyes another, as they were already in the city. Certain people would be in charge of the audio because they had experience in it. We could participate in organizing something for the children to attract their parents to the speeches. Javier would speak on his knowledge of the water situation and consequences of its privatization in Chile. As such resources in the form of time, energy, and knowledge were pooled.

³⁸ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

³⁹ Mexican Movement of Alternatives to the Environmental Effects and Climate Change (Movimiento Mexicano de Alternativas a las Afectaciones Ambientales y el Cambio Climático).

⁴⁰ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

NGOs and Political Action: Resources, (Dis)trusting Politics and Active Citizenship

'Some people are moved to political action, but most stay home'

Kinder and Sears (1985:696).

The name of NGOs defines them by their distinction from governmental organizations (GOs). Both address social issues, and draw from pools of resources, but in different ways. GOs make use of the governmental *vertebrate* structures in place, using its institutions, money and authority. NGOs consist of different *cellular* networks, enabling them to for instance pool attention and efforts through unbound international networks. As such Appadurai's term of *Grassroots Globalization* points to their growing power in our contemporary age of globalization (2006:115-138).

When taking political action NGOs can use the resources within their networks to frame social issues, impact social awareness and influence political decision-making processes to make governments use their resources as how they deem it right. Olivia explained how the privatization of the water in Tuxtla was part of processes coming from *'the center, it is a national policy, the privatization of the drinking water comes from the federal level.'*⁴¹ Additionally she emphasized the political powers having access to more resources, amongst others the media. *'In that sense we, who are against the privatization, are very weak, because we do not have sufficient resources to be able to transform this political line that comes from the centre.'*⁴² Exemplifying her *deep involvement* in the subject she argued that they still wanted to do what could be done, so that it would cost the politicians work and the privatization would not be so easy.

Repeatedly the NGO-activists told us they saw the politicians as corrupt and in-transparent. Olivia stated that *'in general the politicians in Mexico, the majority, are people who do not take responsibility of the work they are doing. They are people who are only interested in money, [...] having power, political power and economical*

⁴¹ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

⁴² Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

*power. It's not for nothing that Mexico is a country with high levels of corruption. The politicians are corrupt. It is not a sector in which to have confidence.*⁴³ In the short run Olivia emphasized that she felt that the politicians did not listen to the NGOs, stating that the little dialogue there had been between the politicians and the citizens was lost during the last administration. Now, she stated, *'the authorities, the government, do not have the political will to listen to the organizations nor to the movements.'*⁴⁴ In the long run the NGO-activists did feel politically efficacious.⁴⁵ All NGO-activists saw the movement's goals as eventually reachable, at least making the circumstances less favorable to the privatization, though obstacles were abundant and the process probably long.

The *structure* and power of the government is constructed within the *social system* of citizenship, as it entails citizens' relationship to the state. Olivia explained how she saw people's conception of politics:

*'People separate their lives from what is political life. They do not succeed in having this integrality where political life is about our lives, every day in our schools, in our work. So, like something separated. This is a big mistake. Therefore people do not involve themselves, this is a very difficult task.'*⁴⁶

Her conception then entails a different relationship between citizens and the state, a *citizenship* actively formed by the citizens. This is in line with what all NGO-activists, as well as the larger movement, described as the ideal organization of SMAPA, as entailing more citizen participation. For NGOs the question here is how to implicate social awareness in such a way as to move people towards becoming part of their *cellular* structures to strengthen them. This would allow for more resources for them to draw from and ability to exercise political pressure. Javier pointed to the citizens of Tuxtla as the sleeping powerful, as they basically were *'accepting the authorities and maintaining them, and on the other side they are able to overthrow them [...] and in radical ways change this theme like what happened in Bolivia.'*⁴⁷ Similarly Ricardo

43 Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

44 Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

45 This entails people's 'feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process' (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954:187).

46 Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

47 Semi-structured interview, Javier Arellano, April 1th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

stated that *'the people'* are the most powerful in determining the processes of the privatization of SMAPA, the only problem is *'that they do not know it.'*⁴⁸ Roberto spoke of the problem of organizations of not having enough people as their 'base' to make demands heard, pointing to people being interested but failing to take action. Roberto stated apathy in Mexico as a problem for organizing and unifying. Paco spoke of indifference as a great obstacle for the movement's work.

Knowledgeability: Information-sharing and Informed Action

*'Well that is the difficult thing. How do people become aware that we can have the power to control the water? If we do not inform ourselves, if we do not involve ourselves, it will not succeed, right? [...] I work for that. How do we sensitize the people, form people, so that we may have the control of water in our hands.'*⁴⁹ Olivia Santos

Keeping informed and informing others is an essential part of the NGO-activists' activities, as such guiding information and *knowledgeability*. The movement, through its individual members, provides information in the public sphere and the virtual sphere intertwiningly. In Giddens' terms this concerns the aspect of *contextuality* of social action (1984:373). In both spheres the networks mentioned above play an important role, as they provide resources to draw from. In the public sphere the work done mainly entails the organization of demonstrations, events (such as forums), and gathering signatures, as mentioned in 'Setting the Stage'. To organize these political actions the *organic* organization of the NGOs is extended to pour over into the movement as the networks are used based on their resources. Concerning the importance of actions within the public sphere Olivia stated that:

'You make visible that there is an action, that there are actions, and you make the problem visible for which you are working. Obviously you do not reach a lot of people, because you only reach the people that are passing at that moment in that place. But at least you show, when you promote the event, that work is being done, that the people are moved, that there is action, and that public opinion has not

⁴⁸ Semi-structured interview, Ricardo Gomez, April 1st 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

⁴⁹ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

*disappeared, that it is present.*⁵⁰

But here the intertwining of the virtual and the physical domains ensures the action in the latter to live on in the first, as such amplifying its reach to more than just the people present at the moment and place of the action in the open air.

Olivia, Roberto and Ricardo were very active on the virtual platform of Facebook in general as well as the CEPAZDH and *No a la privatización de SMAPA en Tuxtla Gutiérrez*⁵¹ pages. Information shared ‘on personal behalf’ through their own pages ranged from personal events in their lives, to philosophical thoughts, whereas the information shared on and through the pages of the NGOs and those focused against the privatization were mostly informative on the subject of water, natural resources, processes of privatization, political processes or activism. As people become ‘friends’ on Facebook, networks of contacts are connected, allowing for information to spread across them. This emphasizes how people connecting between different countries can make these networks become of international nature exponentially, allowing for information to have a much larger reach. Likewise Olivia emphasized this advantage of this virtual platform, while simultaneously pointing out that it only reached people capable in handling this technology. Sharing information within their networks of contacts in Facebook exhibits it on screens of clusters of people situated in other physical spaces and implicates their *knowledgeability* on local as well as global processes.

As discussed, the different NGOs are part of larger national and international networks. Responding to the question of how they approach people with their message, Olivia answered:

‘Within the movement there are other organizations. Of course CEPAZDH and MOCRI are part of MOVIAC. Through the networks that we construct or of which we are a part, we are spreading the message, the work, in defense of water. So

⁵⁰ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

⁵¹ The group description on Facebook tells us: ‘*The purpose of this group is the defence of the human right to water and sanitation and maintain the system of SMAPA operating as a public system. A space for the exchange of information, views, articulation, organization, the construction of citizen proposals to improve the management of water and the operation of SMAPA.*’ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1389360401283577/> consulted on 25/06/2014.

*through these spaces in the network, between organizations we are making alliances and spreading information.*⁵²

Through the different actors in these networks knowledge, international relationships, and political pressure is provided. Olivia told us that: *in the two places where they privatized it had not worked, and really what they say, the authorities, what they will do. The discourse of the authorities is that the service will improve, the quality will improve, no? It is not like that.*⁵³ These experiences from other cities were shared in the events the movement organized. CEPAZDH thus uses the resources and relationships they already have at their disposal to distribute the information they want to spread.

The general media situation in Tuxtla was often regarded insufficient in informing people on social issues. Olivia pointed to the city being the location of the administrative and political power of Chiapas, being its capital.

*'The dynamics of Tuxtla causes that people do not have, like we say, more objective information. The means of communication are co-opted by the government [...] So the means of communication only give official information, managed by the government.'*⁵⁴

As an extension of this, the citizens of Tuxtla are seen by the NGO-activists as badly informed on the plans for privatization by the state government. Concerning media coverage of the movement's actions Olivia said: *'I think it is little. In reality only the independent news-platforms give us coverage.'*⁵⁵ Thus the work of the movement and the independent NGOs was seen as one of the few sources of information to the citizens of Tuxtla. In relation to the church and politicians, the NGO-activists are subjected to less ideological and religious constraints in their communication. Their ties lie more to the social issues they focus on than the relationships they are embedded in. Here they differentiate themselves through their *cellular* nature. They are, however, still embedded within *vertebrate* structures as well, tying their communication to local structures and boundaries. Socially speaking their relatively

⁵² Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

⁵³ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

⁵⁴ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

⁵⁵ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

new large-scale emergence in the area since the Zapatista uprising of the 90's ensures this connotation, but overall less social 'baggage' than the other two actors. They have been colored through their long histories.

This kind of information sharing, when indeed reaching people, affects people's *knowledgeability*. This both entails informing the citizens of Tuxtla as well as drawing international attention to the case of SMAPA and the importance of the protection of water as a natural resource. Olivia stated that the first forum was crucial as a catalyst in the emergence of the movement of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* itself. Through the organization of this forum information was shared and new relationships were formed: new structures emerged. The importance of informing oneself and others on the problems, rights and possibilities surrounding the organization of water were repeatedly emphasized. Roberto emphasized the importance of integrating one's own actions into a bigger picture, such as dumping trash in the water: *'if we cannot change the ideas of the citizens to not contaminate the earth [...], much less can we change a system with all these companies [...]. The government takes part in the blame, but we also for not having this consciousness.'*⁵⁶ Situating the privatization within larger processes of the spread of neoliberal policies, Olivia stated *'this work that is happening in Tuxtla is precisely to avoid that it can extent itself to the whole of Chiapas.'*⁵⁷ As such Tuxtla was seen as a strategic point within the development of more neoliberal policies in the area. Having the information on the plans for the privatization of SMAPA, situating it within larger processes of neoliberalism and bad governance, seeing the consequences in other cities, situating their own work and the possibilities and efficaciousness of their actions, all contributes to the *knowledgeability* of the NGO-activists.

In her view of their work, Olivia essentially spoke of influencing forms of *knowledgeability*.

'So where are we going? Well continue doing the grassroots work. Informing the people, bringing people to the people, opening up spaces for dialogue, for learning. That they know that they can participate, that we can participate, that we can push, that we can become aware that the decision-making are about, concretely in this

⁵⁶ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

⁵⁷ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

*case, the management of water. Using the resources, workshops, forums, events in the park.*⁵⁸

The NGO-activists demonstrate how contemporary processes in the formation of *cellular* structures provide opportunities for becoming *knowledgeable* on global processes. Appadurai stated that '*We need to watch them [NGO-activists], for the coming crisis of the nation-state may lie not in the dark cellularities of terror but in the utopian cellularities of these other new transnational organizational forms*' (2006:137). Local processes implicate global processes, and NGO-activists create and navigate these newly emerging global structures through *deep involvement* and as such influence processes of *knowledgeability*.

Concluding remarks

We started this chapter by discussing several NGOs we encountered working within the movement of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, their individual focus-points and how they come together in shifting *cellular* structures. In this chaotic, fragmented, interconnected and unbound way of organizing people's work, in Appadurai's (2006) words, we saw the *deep involvement* of the individuals as an important *structuration* of these new kinds of relationships, as such ensuring their continuation. *Deep involvement* entails the ways in which NGO-activists' work, motivations and the bigger picture wherein the case of SMAPA is situated, relate to each other. In this case the bigger picture points to the importance of (the protection of) water, neoliberal processes and linkages with other social issues. Foreigners exemplify these relationships and the way in which *resource-bundling* takes place, bringing with them elements such as knowledge and political pressure.

Names are unifiers and reference points. Whereas the nature of NGOs might be determined largely by its part in *cellular* networks, their names make networks of collaboration visible, creating an understanding of order implicating the further *structuration* of relationships. The name of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* unites several people, some of which related to NGOs and providing access to these

58 Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

networks. Within this movement the resources of these different actors are brought together to work for one single cause. In the NGO-involvement within the movement we have seen this to be organized more *organically* around available resources rather than based on a predetermined set of rules.

NGOs are a way of organizing these efforts independent from the government, though still standing in a strong relationship to it through the ways in which they exercise political action. In a practical way the movement's actions were directed towards the prevention of policy on state level. NGO-activists' networks provide them with the possibilities to distribute and access information through its lines, impacting processes of *knowledgeability* on the processes of the privatization of SMAPA. The networks provide knowledge, international contacts and political pressure. *Political distrust* combined with political efficaciousness resulted into a call for more citizen participation within political processes, as such envisioning a more active form of citizenship.

The actions in the physical public domain also make collaborations and channeled efforts visible. Similarly groups in virtual spaces show these kinds of combined efforts. Both domains are meeting places for people and their actions. They are places to share of information and make people's involvement visible, in our case indeed *deep involvement*. Here the networks in which the NGOs are implicated play the double role of being the roads the communication of messages follow as well as the sources for the information. These (international) networks put extra pressure on the decisions made surrounding the privatization.

An understanding of the structures, *social systems* and processes of *structuration* in place is a precursor to effective political action. The lacking information on the processes of privatization in Tuxtla left a big role to play for the movement in informing them. The abilities of NGO-activists to contest processes of water privatization lie within their embeddedness within *cellular* networks, gaining strength through their *deep involvement* in the issues concerned and providing resources in sources of information and their distribution capabilities. As clear organizations around social issues NGOs function as reference points for further social organization, connecting virtual and physical domains and enabling the formation of vast *cellular* collaborations.

Institutional Constraints and Resources in a Grassroots Movement

¿SABÍAS, QUE? El Estado tiene la obligación de garantizar el derecho humano al agua y saneamiento, la privatización de este servicio no garantiza el ejercicio de este derecho.

#No a la privatización de SMAPA en Tuxtla Gutiérrez

Educación para la Paz Y LOS HERMANOS

NO A la Privatización!!
El Agua la Vida NO son Mercancia

59

⁵⁹ 'Did you know that...? The state has the obligation to guarantee the human right to water and sanitation, the privatization of this service does not guarantee the exercise of this right.' Information material created by CEPAZDH, from Facebook page of CEPAZDH, <https://www.facebook.com/CEPAZDH> accessed June 2014.

Introducing the Institutional Actors

In the previous chapter (non-institutional) NGO-activism has been analyzed. We will now take a closer look at institutional forces that are present within and around the movement. As already mentioned above, social institutions function in organizational patterns with their own logic, including constraints and sources of agency (Friedland and Alford 1991, cited in Thornton and Ocasio 2008). We can identify two main institutions related to *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*: the Catholic Church and politics. While there are also other important institutions involved, such as the economy and the media, we will focus on the church and politicians due to their prominent role within the movement. The two institutions can be characterized as being part of what Appadurai defines as centralized and well-defined *vertebrate* structures, which are more established in society than the new emerging *cellular* structures (2006:129).

Firstly it is important to note that the two actors differ considerably in their relation to the movement. When we entered the field of grassroots organization against water privatization in Chiapas we noticed a variety of actors within *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*. Based on the heterogeneity of the movement a complementary focus within this research was chosen. At first sight we observed members of official institutions as being similarly integrated into the movement. However, at a later stage of doing fieldwork a distinction became clear: While members of the church can be part of the movement, politicians are officially denied the ‘membership’ of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*. In the end, politicians are the opponent actor in the contestation of the privatization of SMAPA, since the announcement was made by the authorities, who have the political power of decision-making. However, the boundaries between the different actors are thin, with politicians who are supporting the movement and Catholics who are strongly connected to the activist-networks that have been described in the previous chapter. We will analyse these relationships within *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, focussing on the participation and communication of two official institutions in order to get insight in their capabilities to contest the processes of water privatization in Tuxtla.

The Catholic Church: Ambiguity, Constraints and Resources

The participation of the Catholic Church in the movement started immediately after the announcement of the privatization by the authorities. When Olivia from San Cristóbal heard about the privatization on the radio she contacted Jorge Garcia, parson of the parish *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* in Tuxtla. Within his parish a social ministry (*Pastoral Social*) is set up, which aims to support the marginalized population, thereby following the ideals of Liberation Theology (Aldunate 1994). Prior to the collaboration between the church and the NGO-activists there already was a relationship between the social ministry of the church in Tuxtla and San Cristóbal as Jorge explained:

*'In San Cristobal there are many social organizations and in Tuxtla there are only a few. There they have much more experience. The Pastoral Social in Tuxtla has meetings with people from San Cristóbal and Tapachula. During these meetings we shared our experiences. They told us that they have been fighting against mining and we...well we did not have a lot of experience. [...] When the privatization was announced in public, the companions from San Cristóbal told us that this is not going to happen in Tuxtla. We talked about it and decided to mobilize in order to let the people know what is going on.'*⁶⁰

Jorge agreed to Olivia's proposal to organize the first forum in the church. Besides providing space and inviting people to the forum, other members of the church became part of the *Comité Prómotor* that was formed in order to organize the movement's actions. Church members have been actively involved in the organization of events, spreading information on privatization and gathering signatures after church masses.

José Ruiz for example, is a lawyer and member of the parish who is actively involved in the work of the *Pastoral Social*. He is also a member of the *Comité Promotor*, supporting the movement with his juridical knowledge. *'We saw the*

⁶⁰ Semi-structured interview, Jorge Garcia, February 21st 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

*necessity of proclaiming that there is a situation of injustice in society. Water is a common good for everyone and a gift that god gave to humanity*⁶¹ he explained.

Also Francisco Reyes, a forty-year-old public accountant, is a member of the church who is engaged in the movement. His participation illustrates that the lines between being part of one group of actors or another can be very thin. In his case being a member of the church does not exclude active participation in *cellular* structured activism. We met Francisco at all of the events organized by *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* and on protest marches related to other topics. Daily he posts on the movement's Facebook page, about water privatization as well as other social issues in Mexico, such as violence against women. Francisco put us in contact with politicians, other members of the church and with some of the NGO activists. He is connected to people by online networks through Facebook and WhatsApp, and by offline networks that are established and maintained through the participation in events and protest marches. *'When I was fifteen I went to a congress and there I met a lot of people. Back then there was no Internet. We wrote letters and sent magazines'*⁶² he explained when we asked him about how he got involved in social activism. Francisco was introduced to us as a member of the parish but his motives to get involved do not only stem from religious belief. *'My ideals are anti-neoliberal'*⁶³ he told us, in the beginning of an interview that we conducted on the first day we met him.

With respect to the reasons to be involved in the movement, next to such personal ideals and interests people described a certain responsibility on the part of the Catholic Church:

*'Here in Mexico the church took a prophetic position on the part of the poor, who are suffering the most. It is an obligation of the church to proclaim peace and justice to the people. And also to prepare them for the fight for the construction of peace.'*⁶⁴

José's description of the church's obligation is consistent with the ideals of Liberation Theology (Aldunate 1994). However, it has to be pointed out that not the whole

⁶¹ Semi-structured interview, José Ruiz, February 20th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

⁶² Semi-structured interview, Francisco Reyes, April 8th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

⁶³ Semi-structured interview, Francisco Reyes, February 20th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

⁶⁴ Semi-structured interview, José Ruiz, February 20th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

church is following this course. The division within the church between liberationists and traditionalists described by Floyd (1996:164) is also present in the case of Tuxtla.

*'What is complicated is the fact that from the outside the church looks like one block. But from the inside you can see that there is a great diversity of positions and ways to deal with such problems.'*⁶⁵

The *contextuality* of the church's social interaction with Tuxtla's citizens brings about constraints and resources with respect to their capability to address the privatization issue (Giddens 1984:373). These constraints and resources are embedded within the structures of the institution of the church itself (Friedland and Alford 1991, cited in Thornton and Ocasio 2008). Jorge explained that there is a great variety of positions within the church. Accordingly, public communication on the topic in the name of the Catholic Church remains difficult.

*'The padre does not get involved. He does not give speeches, he is not joining discussions, and he does not proselytize. The only thing he says is "these are my children, be careful with them."'*⁶⁶

The church as institution has been involved in activities of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, but they did not proclaim their position during the mass or in the media. However, individual members did so, to various degrees. In comparison with the *deep involvement* of the NGO activists not all of the church members have been able to be actively involved during the whole process, like Jorge:

*'I would like to point out that I was involved in the beginning and that my involvement declined in the course of the time. The parish demands a lot of time so I did not join all the meetings during the struggle. But I still am supporting the movement, without being totally engaged.'*⁶⁷

Most of the members of the church are communicating on the privatization in the physical dimension of the public sphere. Gathering signatures and organizing the

⁶⁵ Semi-structured interview, Jorge Garcia, February 21st 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

⁶⁶ Semi-structured interview, Francisco Reyes, February 20th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

⁶⁷ Semi-structured interview, Jorge Garcia February 21st 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

first forum at the church are examples of communication in the physical dimension. We did not observe the church, as institution, communicating much online, with respect to water privatization. However, individual members, like Francisco, are using Facebook and WhatsApp in order to spread information in the non-physical dimension and to communicate with other members of the movement.

The participation by the church as institution in activism comes with an important resource embedded in the social institution: trustworthiness. NGO-activist Olivia explained her view on the church's benefits:

*'To a certain sector of the population it gives confidence that the church is supporting the initiative. Yes, I think it helps because the church has the capacity to convene the people. In Chiapas a great part of the population is catholic. So there is a kind of sympathy towards convocations of the church.'*⁶⁸

Also her companion Ricardo told us that the participation of the church was a '*great support*' and that it '*functioned as a trampoline*'⁶⁹ during the first months of the struggle against the privatization of SMAPA. The fact that the church does not communicate from the standpoint of a political leader (governmental or non-governmental) seems to be helpful in establishing a degree of trust towards *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* on the part of Tuxtla's citizens as well as on the part of the politicians themselves: '*The church is respected by everyone. Also by the Congress.*'⁷⁰

But at the same time, a certain ambiguity lies within the participation of the Catholic Church in the grassroots movement. The church has been the cornerstone of the colonization and now claims to be the supporter of the marginalized people in society. Activist Javier told us how he feels about this contradiction: '*I think it is a very beautiful thing that the church is participating, but on the other hand it is also quite perverse.*'⁷¹ However, he explained that he sees a transformation happening, within the church as well as in grassroots movements, which is developing towards more cooperation. Eventually most of the people who were very critical about the

⁶⁸ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

⁶⁹ Semi-structured interview Ricardo Gomez, April 1st 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

⁷⁰ Semi-structured interview, Francisco Reyes, February 20th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

⁷¹ Semi-structured interview, Javier Arellano, April 1st 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

history of the Catholic Church also explained the importance of its participation in the fight against the privatization due to the high percentage of Catholics in society.

José explained how the participation in the grassroots movement had been a new experience for the church in Tuxtla:

*'Well, this incident of the diocese being part of the struggle for water rights ... it is not the practice of the diocese. Traditionally it has not been characterized by a prophetic voice. The church in San Cristóbal is different, they are supporting the poor, defined by justice and peace, and they have a completely different evangelization, which is defined in favour of the people. But in Tuxtla this has not been the case.'*⁷²

By participating in the movement, agents of the church are shaping the structures of the *social system* of the Catholic Church. The regular social practices within this system are influenced by the agent's interaction with other actors (Giddens 1984:25). In this case, new relations with actors outside of the traditional social system of the church are established. Within the *vertebrate* structures of the church new spaces for resistance are opening up, brought about by the interaction with *cellular* grassroots agents. Appadurai states that the two forms of structures exist side by side (2006:21). Here, it seems that they have merged within the cooperation of the actors. This process of *structuration* is influenced by the church's particular form of mass communication. Trust is a resource brought into the movement by the church. However the constraints related to their position within society need to be taken into account in the analysis of the abilities of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* to contest processes of water privatization in Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

The Political Arena: Tensions and Capabilities

As already stated above, in contrast to members of the church, politicians are not allowed to be official members of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*. In general, politicians are considered to be the opponent in the movement's fight against privatization. However, there are a few exceptions. Some politicians share the

⁷² Semi-structured interview, José Ruiz, February 20th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

movement's opinion and are in contact with its members. Like Mariana Torres, a *diputada* who criticizes the privatization plans:

*'I also believe that not everything is like it is being presented, no? That SMAPA is completely in the red and that privatization is the last resort. I also think that SMAPA is still receiving a lot of money and it has to be investigated, not allowing them to follow the easy road of privatization with which they are neglecting our human right to water, no?'*⁷³

When we heard about another *diputada*, Claudia Martínez, who seemed to be in favour of the movement's goals we went to her office in Tuxtla to ask her if she wanted to talk to us about the privatization of SMAPA. She told us that she would like to talk about it, but that she would rather meet in an unofficial setting: *'I prefer to talk to you as a ciudadana of Tuxtla, outside of my office, in a small café in town'*.⁷⁴ In the end the interview was postponed and cancelled until we left the field. Martínez makes a distinction between communicating as a politician and as a *ciudadana* [citizen]. Accordingly there seem to be constraints in the way political actors are able to communicate on the privatization, which are embedded in the *social system* of politics. The *vertebrate* structures of the political institution do not allow for a communication that is as free, *organic* and *cellular* as it is in NGO-activism. When Claudia Martínez speaks to us as a politician she communicates in the name of her party, following a predetermined set of rules that lies within the political system. Thus, she preferred to speak to us as a citizen, communicating outside of the logics of the political institution.

The role of Raul Sanchez illustrates another form of constraints and the thin lines between different actors in the field. In contrast to the case of Francisco, who is a member of the church and at the same time a committed political activist, Raul is denied the membership of the movement since he started working for a political party and the *diputada* Mariana Torres. Nevertheless we met him at several events of the movement and other members told us about his commitment and support with respect to the contestation of the privatization. Raul told us that prior to his political work he was part of the Yo soy 132 movement and of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, but

⁷³ Semi-structured interview, Mariana Torres, March 13th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

⁷⁴ Informal conversation, Claudia Martínez, March 21st 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

that he is not allowed to be officially part of the latter due to his political engagement.⁷⁵ Olivia explained the reasons why *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* do not want to work with politicians:

*'I think this is something that we decided within the movement: to set limits. If the movement opens its doors to a diputado we will automatically lose credibility and trust, and the diputado and his or her party will strengthen his or her image, using the movement to gain sympathy from the people.'*⁷⁶

The exclusion of politicians from *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* emanates from deep-rooted political distrust that we observed on the part of all members of the movement. Furthermore we noticed that also most people outside of the movement that we talked to had feelings of distrust towards politics. Even Mariana, a politician herself, expressed doubts on practices within politics. She referred to a '*fabric of corruption*' when she was talking about past administrations.⁷⁷

The distrust towards politics is embedded within people's perceptions of citizenship, or their relationship with the state. According to Zeineddine and Pratto (2014), neoliberal policing can increase political distrust. The noticeable degree of distrust towards politicians might not be brought about exclusively by Mexico's neoliberal course, but given the criticism that economic interests are put above civil rights it is assumed to be part of the origin of the deep distrust of our informants towards politics. '*Public policy should be consistent with the needs of the population. But they are not taking into account the people, they are doing what they want.*'⁷⁸ Francisco's complaints are in line with Zeineddine and Pratto's notion of political distrust, which they define as people's sense of how much their governments are able to fulfil or deny the needs of the citizens (2014).

At the same time the movement is establishing alliances with some politicians, which means that there also must be advantages in working with them. The alliances range from exchange of information to public announcements on the part of the politicians with respect to the movement's goals. During interviews we asked people

⁷⁵ Informal conversation, Raul Sanchez, February 21st 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

⁷⁶ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, May 16th 2014, Skype conversation San Cristóbal de las Casas (Mexico) – Utrecht (The Netherlands).

⁷⁷ Semi-structured interview, Mariana Torres, March 13th, 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

⁷⁸ Semi-structured interview, Francisco Reyes, April 8th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

who, according to them, has the power to determine what is going to happen with SMAPA. While many of them emphasized the importance of an informed citizenry, they also recognized the power that lies within the political system. In the end the proposal has to pass Congress in order to be approved or denied. Mariana Torres exemplified the advantages of working within politics:

*'Politics are a very powerful and important instrument to bring about change. Maybe you can do the same work in a NGO...mobilize on the social side...but this will be much slower than the impact that you can have with politics, working in a position of power.'*⁷⁹

In the relation described by Mariana lies an inequality of power between politicians and the citizens. This inequality is embedded in the social contract between the state and society. However, this *social system* of citizenship is shaped by human action. Politicians who are supporting the movement can influence the (re)production of the structures of citizenship as well as the members of the movement who are cautiously including politics to a certain degree in their struggle. In doing so, they have the capability to increase citizen participation, as journalist Mara Flores explained:

*'Look, for me the movement Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua has been very important in terms of the construction of citizenship. They used all legal possibilities to promote the prevention of privatization.'*⁸⁰

Besides the fact that the topic of privatization is political itself, another reason to include politicians in their struggle is the increased attention by official media that is brought about by political involvement: *'The fact that the diputados went to the second forum led to more press coverage. At least this time the movement was visible'*.⁸¹

Though there are some advantages in collaborating with politicians the distrust and negative experiences in the past are predominant. *'It is a question of principles and confidence'* explained Francisco when we asked him about the reasons to work or don't work with politicians. According to him everyone in the movement has different

⁷⁹ Semi-structured interview, Mariana Torres, March 13th, 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

⁸⁰ Semi-structured interview, Mara Flores, March 13th 2014, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

⁸¹ Semi-structured interview, Olivia Santos, April 13th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

experiences with politicians, which influence their attitude towards collaborating with them.⁸²

The relationship between the movement and politics is very ambiguous. On the one hand politicians are not trusted and movement members are afraid that they might exploit the movement for their own political goals. On the other hand a certain interaction between the movement and politics is necessary since the privatization is a political issue. Due to their power when it comes to decision-making, collaborations with politicians can be helpful to influence the process of privatization. Cautiously building relationships of trust - with politicians who share the movement's opinions - can influence the restructuring of citizenship with a greater emphasis on citizen participation in politics. However, collaboration is only possible to a certain degree, due to political distrust and past experiences. Javier exemplified this ambiguousness when we asked him about his opinion about the participation of politicians:

*'From what I have seen until today I think it is a good thing to manage and establish relationships because in fact the topic of privatization will be discussed in congress and it is necessary to create awareness and to establish a good relationship with those who are making the decisions. It is good that they have been doing that in the movement but obviously it is also necessary to set limits because of the history of politics...it is necessary to keep it closed a little bit.'*⁸³

The Necessity of Institutional Participation?

So far the participation of the two institutional actors has been analyzed. They are both communicating within the logics of the *vertebrate* structures of 'their' *social systems*, which contain rules and resources with respect to communicating in the public sphere. At the same time they are reshaping these structures by working with *cellular* NGO-activists. While the church is doing this under the umbrella of a citizen movement, politicians remain outside of the movement due to their position in society, which is defined by deep-rooted feelings of distrust towards them. However, agents are able to produce, reproduce, or change these structures with their actions

⁸² Semi-structured interview, Francisco Reyes, April 8th 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

⁸³ Semi-structured interview, Javier Arellano, April 1st 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

(Giddens 1984:25). Politicians like Mariana Torres or members of the church are establishing relationships with the *cellular* movement, thereby (re)structuring *social systems*.

The collaboration between *cellular* networks of NGO-activists and the *vertebrate* institutional actors entails advantages with respect to the ability to contest the process of privatization. The actors' *knowledgeability* of the circumstances with respect to their relationships, influences the actions they take (Giddens 1984:375). The institutional actors are aware of the tensions and ambiguities with respect to their participation. Therefore they are able to consciously influence the establishment of new relationships of trust in order to contest the privatization of SMAPA.

The power of their institutional forms of mass communication lies in the ability to reach the citizens (in the case of the church) and the mass media (in the case of the politicians), thereby broadening the influence on the *knowledgeability* of Tuxtla's citizens. Furthermore, for the movement the participation of different actors from different angles is a source of information. Ricardo explained to us when we asked how he stays informed on the privatization of SMAPA:

*'Well, we have contacts which keep us informed. [...] We have the people of the labour union who tell us what is going on. And we have companions in Tuxtla who are involved in politics, involved in the church and involved in the networks.'*⁸⁴

Several of our informants stated that even though they are not closely related to the Catholic Church or to politics they find it important that these actors participate in the movement to a certain degree, since they have a lot of influence on society. Other informants clearly expressed their disapproval of the participation of politicians. There seem to be tensions between different actors within the movement that are related to their allies with politicians or other influential actors. However, all of our informants emphasized that in order to successfully prevent the privatization of SMAPA it is necessary to work together as citizens and to lose one's hold of association with certain groups, statuses or institutions. Thus, the movement does not emphasize its heterogeneity. In the public sphere they are communicating as citizens

⁸⁴ Semi-structured interview, Ricardo Gomez, April 1st 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

(*ciudadanos y ciudadanas*), taking an active part in forming, or restructuring the concept of citizenship.

The inclusion of *vertebrate* institutions increases the ability to contest the privatization of the water system. Processes of globalization brought about increased *cellularity* (Appadurai 2006:25). But this has not led to a replacement of *vertebrate* institutions. Therefore the limited inclusion of these actors is a useful tool in the contestation of privatization processes, combining the *cellularity* of the movement with the abilities to contest such processes from an institutional standpoint. Javier exemplified the usefulness of the participation of the two ambiguous actors:

*'In Latin America you cannot accomplish a revolution, which is one hundred percent atheistic. It does not work over here, in a society where religiousness is still very strong. [...] But I think it should only be a support to the movement and not its fundamental basis. I think this is important, especially in the case of Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua, who always speak in terms of an independent, non-partisan and autonomous movement. [...] There are also people who say something like "We have to be anti-political!" They do not see the change of the political class. One needs to know that they play an important role in the game of power, no? So, in this game of power one needs allies.'*⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Semi-structured interview, Javier Arellano, April 1st 2014, San Cristóbal de las Casas.

Conclusive Remarks

In the previous chapters we have been analyzing different forms of mass communication and participation of three different actors in the grassroots movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, who are contesting the privatization of the water system in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. We elaborated on the data collected during field work, on the basis of the theoretical framework, focussing on the different elements within the movement and analyzing their relation to each other. In these concluding remarks we will recap the findings of the empirical chapters, discuss possible shortcomings of this research and give an answer to the main question: How does the organization of mass communication by official institutions and NGOs influence the abilities of the movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* to contest processes of water privatization in Tuxtla Gutiérrez?

We introduced the field of Tuxtla, where the announcement of the privatization of the water system SMAPA was followed by the establishment of the grassroots movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*. The movement can be seen as an example of changes in the way power is contested on the local level, in response to the effects of neoliberalism (Stahler-Sholk 2010:505, Nash 2001:3). Aiming to understand local realities, we analysed local perspectives on the organization of communication and processes of power negotiation within the movement. These local realities we have then analysed in the broader context of globalization and the development towards neoliberalism.

We got the opportunity to accompany *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* in their struggle against water privatization. We joined meetings, went to protest marches and events. However, we want to point out that for our informants the struggle against neoliberal policing and its outcomes is part of their daily life, whereas for us it was part of our fieldwork period for a limited amount of time. We tried to understand the social realities of people who devote a great part of their life's to the improvement of a system that mostly leaves them with the feelings of disappointment, frustration and distrust when it comes to the state's responsibility to take care of its citizens. We came to Chiapas as anthropological researchers, to work with them for

two and a half months and to understand their social realities. After this time, we left their physical realities and went back to our own. This influenced not only the way people talked to us but also our interpretation of their words. The fact that we do not live in their social realities, and that we go back to our own context after studying theirs for a short period of time brings about limitations as well as ethical questions. We are not *Chiapanecas en Defensa del Agua* but we have tried to leave our personal context behind us as far as possible in order to understand what it means to be them.

When entering the field of grassroots activism against water privatization in Tuxtla, we were met with a great variety of actors within *Chiapanecas en Defensa del Agua*. Therefore, a complementary focus on different actors was chosen, in order to get insight in the heterogeneity of the movement. A theoretical distinction was made between local NGOs and official institutions. In the introduction we stated that many different actors have various interests in water. Within our complementary focus we analysed the involvement of mainly three different groups of actors within the movement. In doing so we also gave attention to politicians' interests in water, from the viewpoint of our informants. One important actor in the struggle for water is not discussed in this research: the economic actor. This is due to the lack of access to information on the private investor who is interested in SMAPA. Furthermore, our focus aims at gaining insight into grassroots movements' possibilities to contest neoliberal policies. Thus it was most important for us to talk to the people who are contesting these processes. However, further research on the economic aspect of the struggle over water in Chiapas will reveal other important aspects of these processes. Also, research on the effects of processes of privatization on labour rights forms a worthwhile complement to this research.

Within our focus on the different actors the assumed differences in communication due to the actors' position in society and related possibilities with respect to the contestation of the water privatization were affirmed during the analysis and will be explained below.

Firstly we made an analysis of the role of NGO-activists within the movement, which are seen by Arjun Appadurai as parts in *cellular* structures (2006:115). We emphasized their *deep involvement* and the connectedness within shifting networks as important characteristics of their functioning. Foreigners working within these spaces exemplify manifestations of these *cellular structured* relationships and the way in which resource-bundling takes place. Here we refer back to Giddens' understanding of

social interaction through analyzing their structures (1984). Concerning this chaotic, fragmented, interconnected and unbound way of organizing people's work, the *deep involvement* of the individuals is important in the *structuration* of these new kinds of relationships, ensuring their continuation.

Then the elements of unity under a name, connections and *organic task-distribution* further characterize the way NGO-activists are involved. Names suggest a unity, which appeared less clear in the field. In the NGO-involvement within the movement we have seen work to be organized more organically around available resources rather than based on a predetermined set of rules.

In order to get more insight into the activists' political power we looked at the question of resources, (dis)trusting politics and active citizenship. NGO-activists' networks provide possibilities to distribute and access information. They provide knowledge (and impact *knowledgeability*), international contacts and political pressure. Their communication reaches citizens of Tuxtla as well as international contacts, and through this dual reach they exercise political pressure. Through envisioning a more active form of citizenship, in consequence to political distrust, and forming a practical example of it, the NGO-activists as well as the entire movement might be seen to impact the *social system* of citizenship.

The actions in the physical public and virtual domain also make collaborations and channelled efforts visible. Both domains are meeting places for people, their actions, are places to share information and make people's involvement visible, in this case indeed *deep involvement*. Here the networks in which the NGOs are implicated play the double role of being the roads the communication of messages follow as well as the sources for the information.

Then followed an analysis of the official institutions of the Catholic Church and politics in relation to the movement. Both actors are part of what Appadurai defines as *vertebrate*, well-defined and organized structures (2006:129). They have their own institutional logic and patterns of social relationships, which bring about constraints as well as resources. Different roles with respect to the movement were found: While the church members are part of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, politicians are denied an official membership. However, the distinction between different actors were in some cases found to be not as clear as in theory, with actors being part of two or more groups within the field.

When it comes to active involvement the church is more integrated. Following

the ideas of Liberation Theology the social ministry within the Catholic Church supports the movement. Politicians on the other hand are not integrated into the movement. Only with some *diputados* alliances are formed, which are based on common interests with respect to the privatization of SMAPA.

Both institutional actors bring about constraints and resources with respect to their communication in the public sphere, which are embedded within the *vertebrate* structures of the institutions. The power of their possibilities, as established institutions within society, lies in their means of communication, which enable them to broaden the *knowledgability* of the citizens. On the part of the church, a degree of trustworthiness, which is embedded in their position in society, helps the institution to reach a great part of Tuxtla's citizens. Politicians are able to draw the attention of the official media. Furthermore they take the issue of the privatization to the political arena, where the ultimate decisions will be made.

At the same time the institutional actors are not able to communicate on the topic as freely as NGO-activists due to predetermined sets of rules with respect to their position in society. Furthermore, their participation is highly ambiguous. The history of the Catholic Church in Latin America and its ideology remain reasons for some of our informants to be critical towards their participation in a grassroots movement. Politicians' participation is questioned and restricted due to deep feelings of political distrust amongst our informants. However, due to their awareness of the ambiguity with respect to their participation, *vertebrate* actors are able to establish new relationships of trust with other actors of the *cellular* movement, changing the structures of the *social systems* with constraints and more resources.

Processes of globalization brought about *cellular* structures. They exist alongside *vertebrate* structures and are not replacing them (Appadurai 2006:129-133). Institutional forces like the Catholic Church or national politics are still very present in local social realities. Therefore a cautious and limited inclusion of institutional actors, which are communicating within *vertebrate* structures, can increase a movements' ability to contest processes of privatization due to their capacity to reach particular groups within society.

The actors differ in their means of communication as well as in the organization of their actions. While NGO-activists are connected within shifting networks, the communication of the official institutions takes place within determined schemes, according to institutional logics. Furthermore, differences in the structure of

organization are visible between the *organic* and unbound strategy of the NGOs and the more vertically structured organization of the institutions. With respect to the reasons to get involved in the movement, besides individual differences, we noticed differences between the three groups of actors. The worldviews that underlie NGO-activism and the activists' need to act against neoliberalism are not completely different from the underlying motivations of the members of the church. However, the motivations of the church members are combined with religious motives and feelings of obligations to support the marginalized and the poor on the part of the Catholic Church. In comparison with the political actors, NGO-activists are driven by the motivation to act against bad governance, acting out of feelings of political distrust. The political actors who were supportive of the movement also expressed feelings of political distrust, however they did not criticize the political system by itself. Despite the differences between the groups of actors presented above, *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* is combining the resources and constraints of various actors in a united struggle against water privatization.

In our field research we found the *cellular* and *vertebrate* structures in social systems to be very complex. In practice the distinction between the two is not as clear as in theory. New forms of *cellular* organization are emerging but they are connecting and merging with 'traditional' *vertebrate* institutions. The power of the actors is increased through their ability to establish new relationships within and between these structures and to combine the new resources brought about by globalization and *cellular* organization with the resources of established *vertebrate* structures.

Furthermore, the members of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* did not emphasize the variation within the movement, but stressed it being by and for the citizens of Tuxtla. In doing so they are shaping the structures of the *social system* of citizenship, redefining the relation between citizens and the state. They draw attention to the state's responsibility to take care of its citizens but at the same time point out that citizen participation is a crucial determinant for justice and equality. By calling themselves *ciudadanos* [citizens], the members of the movement are emphasizing equality and unify within a block against neoliberal policing by the state.

The organization of mass communication is an important aspect in the construction of an informed, *knowledgable* citizenry. This brings us to the main question of the influence of the organization of mass communication by NGOs and official institutions on the abilities of the movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del*

Agua to contest processes of water privatization in Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

The differences in the organization of mass communication between the two actors that have been analysed above lead to an increased ability to contest water privatization when they are combined. However, the collaboration is hindered by feelings of political distrust, ambiguity in the history of institutional actors, and bad experiences with respect to the exploitation of participation in grassroots movements by politicians. The establishment of relationships of trust between and within *vertebrate* and *cellular* structures results in a variety of means of mass communication that increases the ability to construct an informed citizenry.

With vast *cellular* networks of NGOs on the one hand, and traditional *vertebrate* institutions on the other hand, it is the variety of resources within the citizen movement that contributes to its strength. At the same time, their emphasis on citizenship makes *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* a strong grassroots movement, which aims at the strengthening of citizen participation in order to contest the privatization of the water system of Tuxtla. As such the movement exemplifies an active way of exercising citizenship, envisioning stronger citizen influence on processes of political decision-making.

Privatization of the water system in Tuxtla Gutiérrez has hitherto been impeded for twelve months. In order to keep the plans off the political agenda the grassroots movement needs the support of Tuxtla's citizens as well as (inter)national attention. In the Age of Globalization, with its trend towards neoliberal policing, an informed citizenry can restructure its relationship with the state by participating in political decision-making. Developments in mass communication technologies enable grassroots movements to contribute to the *knowledgability* of citizens. By using the new structures brought about by globalization and involving the traditional institutional actors who still play an important role in society, grassroots movements have the ability to renegotiate power relations between the citizens and the state in order to protect the human right to water from corporate and political interests.

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Appendix A: Resumen de investigación en Español

Esta tesis se enfoca en el movimiento de base *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, que surgió en respuesta al anuncio de la privatización del sistema de aguas SMAPA de Tuxtla Gutiérrez, México en junio de 2013. Los resultados se basan en el trabajo de campo en antropología, realizado en las ciudades de Tuxtla Gutiérrez y San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, durante un periodo de dos meses y medio.

Con esta investigación pretendemos entender las reacciones de las bases y sus movimientos a los procesos de globalización e implementación de políticas neoliberales y lo que éstas nos pueden mostrar sobre las relaciones de poder. Además, queremos desmenuzar los elementos que se encuentran dentro de un movimiento, cómo se relacionan entre ellos e intentan producir cambios a través de la organización de sus comunicaciones en masa. A través del análisis de estos procesos, intentamos responder a la pregunta principal de esta investigación: ¿Cómo afecta la organización de las comunicaciones en masa de instituciones oficiales y ONG's a las habilidades del movimiento *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* para enfrentar los procesos de privatización del agua en Tuxtla Gutiérrez?

El movimiento se caracteriza por su variedad de actores. Por ello decidimos complementar nuestro enfoque con atención a esta diversidad, de forma que podamos entender la heterogeneidad del movimiento. Hacemos una distinción teórica entre las ONG's locales y las instituciones oficiales de la Iglesia católica y las políticas. No obstante, es importante destacar que dicha distinción es meramente teórica y no tiene repercusiones claras en lo cotidiano o concreto.

Con base en el marco teórico, analizamos la participación de los distintos actores y su comunicación de masas en su lucha contra las privatizaciones. Nos enfocamos en los elementos humanos locales y su agencia en la creación, mantenimiento y cambio de sistemas sociales, guiados por la noción de “poder” de Anthony Giddens y la teoría de estructuración, que resalta las acciones humanas (1984). Un tema central de esta tesis es la relación entre los agentes y los *sistemas sociales* que los rodean y sus posibilidades para cambiar estos sistemas en el contexto de la globalización. De acuerdo a la noción de ciudadanía, el rol de la Nación Estado se aborda desde un punto de vista local, incluyendo el concepto de desconfianza

política de parte de los ciudadanos como agentes de negociación en relaciones de poder. Los conceptos de estructuras *celular* y *vertebrada* de Arjun Appadurai se usan como base para analizar las diferencias en la organización de las comunicaciones (2006). Sin embargo, hemos aplicado estos conceptos de forma crítica a nuestros resultados empíricos, que en este caso muestran que la distinción entre ambas formas no es tan clara como en la teoría. Adicionalmente, nuestro análisis se enfoca en la organización de las comunicaciones en masa, incluyendo aquellas online y offline en el espacio público.

Esta investigación debe entenderse en su contexto de globalización, tomando en consideración los procesos creados por flujos interestatales de bienes, servicios, monetarios, humanos, informativos y culturales (Guillén citado en Sanabria 2007:282). Las políticas neoliberales han favorecido un incremento global de la pobreza, desigualdad, desencajes sociales y destrucción del ambiente (Juris 2008:8). En el contexto mexicano también ha habido un movimiento hacia la adopción de políticas neoliberales. Este curso tomado por el gobierno se ha encontrado con muchas críticas, especialmente en el estado de Chiapas, donde las organizaciones de base tienen un largo trasfondo histórico por la presencia del movimiento zapatista y su llamado a la justicia y la democracia. (Stahler-Sholk 2007:48, 502, Harvey 2001:1047).

En el estado de Chiapas, el movimiento de base *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* se comenzó a desarrollar inmediatamente después del anuncio de la aprobación de un contrato de asociación pública-privada entre el sistema de aguas local SMAPA y un hasta ahora desconocido inversor privado, en junio de 2013. En colaboración con la pastoral social de la Iglesia católica de Tuxtla Gutiérrez se organizó un foro para informar del tema a los ciudadanos de la ciudad. Le siguieron diversos foros más y marchas de protesta. Además, se iniciaron acciones legales con el fin de combatir la privatización en el nivel político de las tomas de decisión. El movimiento elaboró una propuesta en la que se abordaban los problemas del sistema de aguas, apuntando a su falta de eficiencia, transparencia y corrupción interna. *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* enfatizan la importancia de la toma de conciencia y participación de los ciudadanos en los movimientos contestatarios contra políticas neoliberales y sus resultados negativos.

Dentro el movimiento se encuentran varias ONG's, que son vistas por Arjun Appadurai como partes de *estructuras celulares* (2006:115). Enfatizamos su profunda

implicación y su conexión con redes de movimientos como características esenciales de su funcionamiento. El que hayan extranjeros trabajando en estos espacios ejemplifica las manifestaciones de estas relaciones de *estructura celular* y la forma en la que se da la *aglomeración de recursos*. Aquí nos referimos de nuevo a las interacciones sociales a través del análisis de sus estructurales de acuerdo a lo planteado por Giddens (1984). En lo referente a esta forma de organización del trabajo tan caótica, fragmentada, interconectada y suelta, es muy importante la participación y compromiso de los individuos en la estructuración de estas nuevas formas de relacionarse, asegurando su continuidad.

Las redes de ONG's y activistas proveen la posibilidad de distribuir y acceder información. Aportan conocimiento (e influyen en la *knowledgeability*), contactos internacionales y presión política. Sus comunicaciones alcanzan a los ciudadanos de Tuxtla Gutiérrez así como a contactos internacionales, y es a través de esto que ejercen presión política.

Por otro lado, la participación de actores institucionales se da dentro de *estructuras vertebradas*, bien definidas y organizadas (Appadurai. 2006:129). Tienen su propia lógica institucional y patrones de relación social, lo que conlleva tanto restricciones como recursos. Mientras que los miembros de la Iglesia son parte de *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, a los políticos se les niega una membresía oficial debido a la profunda desconfianza y a negativas experiencias del movimiento. Sólo se forma algunas alianzas políticas, que se basan en intereses comunes respecto a la privatización de SMAPA. El poder y sus posibilidades como instituciones establecidas dentro de la sociedad radica en sus medios de comunicación, lo que les permite ensanchar la *knowledgeability* de los ciudadanos. Por parte de la Iglesia, un cierto nivel de confianza, debido a su posición en la sociedad, ayuda a la institución a alcanzar una gran parte de los ciudadanos de Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Los políticos son capaces de atraer la atención de los medios oficiales y pueden llevar el tema de la privatización a la arena política, donde se tomarán las decisiones finales.

Asimismo, los actores institucionales no son capaces de comunicar lo relacionado con el tema con la misma libertad que los activistas de las ONG's debido a normas predeterminadas que responden a su posición en la sociedad. Además, su participación es altamente ambigua debido a la historia de las instituciones y el profundamente enraizado sentimiento de desconfianza en la política que tiene la población.

En nuestro trabajo de campo, encontramos que las estructuras *celular* y *vertebrada* en los *sistemas sociales* son muy complejas. En la práctica, la distinción entre ambas no es tan clara como en la teoría. Están emergiendo nuevas formas de organización *celular*, pero se están conectando y fusionando con instituciones *vertebradas* ‘tradicionales’. Las diferencias en la organización de las comunicaciones sociales de los dos actores permiten una mayor capacidad de oposición a la privatización cuando éstos se combinan. No obstante, la colaboración se ve obstaculizada por desconfianzas políticas, ambigüedad en el historial de los actores institucionales y experiencias negativas respecto de la explotación de la participación en movimientos de base por parte de políticos. El establecimiento de relaciones de confianza entre y dentro de las estructuras *celulares* y *vertebradas* puede resultar en una gran variedad de medidas de comunicaciones en masa que incrementan la posibilidad de construir una ciudadanía informada. Con redes *celulares* por un lado, y *vertebradas* tradicionales por el otro, es la variedad dentro del movimiento ciudadano lo que contribuye a su fortaleza. A su vez, su énfasis en la ciudadanía, hace de *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* un movimiento de base fuerte, que aspira a reforzar la participación ciudadana con el fin de combatir la privatización del sistema de aguas de Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

Como tal, el movimiento ejemplifica una forma activa de ejercer la ciudadanía, imaginando una influencia ciudadana más sólida en los procesos políticos de toma de decisión. Sus miembros están formando las estructuras del *sistema social* de ciudadanía, definiendo la relación entre ciudadanos y Estado. Llaman la atención a la responsabilidad estatal de procurar el bienestar de los ciudadanos al mismo tiempo que resaltan la participación ciudadana como determinante para lograr la justicia y la equidad. Al llamarse ciudadanos, los miembros del movimiento resaltan la equidad y se unifican en un bloque contra las políticas neoliberales del estado con el fin de defender el derecho humano al agua.

Appendix B: Research summary in English

This thesis focuses on the grassroots movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* that developed in response to the announcement of the privatization of the water system SMAPA in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Mexico in June 2013. The findings are based on two and a half months of anthropological fieldwork conducted in the cities of Tuxtla Gutiérrez and San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas.

With this research we aim to get insight in bottom-up, or grassroots responses, to processes of globalization and neoliberal policies and what they can tell us about relationships of power. Furthermore we want to unravel the elements that are present within one movement, how they relate to each other and try to produce change through the organization of mass communication. Analyzing these processes we aim to answer the main question of this research: How does the organization of mass communication by official institutions and NGOs influence the abilities of the movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* to contest processes of water privatization in Tuxtla Gutiérrez?

The movement is characterized by a variety of actors. Therefore a complementary focus on different actors was chosen in order to get insight in the heterogeneity of the movement. A theoretical distinction was made between local NGOs and the official institutions of the Catholic Church and politics. However, it is important to note that such a distinction theoretical and not as clear in daily life.

On the basis of the theoretical framework we analyze the different actors' participation and organization of mass communication in their struggle against privatization. We focus on the local human elements of agency at play in the creation, maintenance and change of social systems, guided by Anthony Giddens' notion of power, and the Theory of Structuration, which underscores human action (1984). A central point of this thesis is the agents' relationship to the *social systems* that surround them and their possibilities to transform these systems in the context of globalization. On the basis of the notion of citizenship the role of the nation-state is approached from a local viewpoint, including the concept of political distrust on the part of the citizens as agents in the negotiation of power relationships. Arjun Appadurai's concepts of *cellular* and *vertebrate* structures are used as a basis to

analyze the differences in the organization of communication (2006). However, the concepts have been critically applied to our empirical findings, which in this case show that the distinction between the two forms is not always as clear as in theory. Furthermore our analysis focuses on the organization of mass communication, including online and offline mass communication in the public space.

This research needs to be understood in the context of globalization, taking into account the processes brought about by the an increase of cross-border flows of goods, services, money, people, information and culture (Guillén cited in Sanabria 2007:282). Neoliberal policing has favored a global increase in poverty, inequality, social dislocation, and ecological destruction (Juris 2008:8). Also in the context of Mexico a general shift towards neoliberal policing has taken place. The neoliberal course of the government has been met with a lot of criticism, especially in the state of Chiapas where grassroots organization has a long historical background with the presence of the Zapatista movement and their call for justice and democracy (Stahler-Sholk 2007:48, 502, Harvey 2001:1047).

In the state capital of Chiapas, the grassroots movement *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* started to develop right after the announcement of the approbation of a public-private partnership contract between the local water system SMAPA and a hitherto unknown private investor in June 2013. In collaboration with the *Pastoral Social* [social ministry] of the Catholic Church in Tuxtla a forum was organized in order to inform Tuxtlas' citizens on the issue. Several events in the form of fora and protest marches followed. Additionally, legal measures were taken in order to contest the privatization on the level of political decision-making. The movement formulated a proposal in which they address the problems of the water system, pointing at its lack of efficiency, transparency and the presence of corruption within it. *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* emphasize the importance of awareness and participation on the part of the citizens in the contestation of neoliberal policies and their negative outcomes.

Within the movement several NGOs are involved, which are seen by Arjun Appadurai as parts in *cellular* structures (2006:115). We emphasize their *deep involvement* and the connectedness within shifting networks as important characteristics of their functioning. Foreigners working within these spaces exemplify manifestations of these *cellular structured* relationships and the way in which resource-bundling takes place. Here we refer back to Giddens' understanding of social

interaction through analyzing their structures (1984). Concerning this chaotic, fragmented, interconnected and unbound way of organizing people's work the *deep involvement* of the individuals is important in the *structuration* of these new kinds of relationships, ensuring their continuation.

NGO-activists' networks provide possibilities to distribute and access information. They provide knowledge (and impact *knowledgeability*), international contacts and political pressure. Their communication reaches the citizens of Tuxtla as well as international contacts, and through this dual reach they exercise political pressure.

The participation of institutional actors on the other hand, takes place within *vertebrate*, well-defined and organized structures (Appadurai 2006:129). They have their own institutional logics and patterns of social relationships, which bring about constraints as well as resources. While the church members are part of *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua*, politicians are denied an official membership, due to deep feelings of political distrust and negative experiences on the part of the movement. Only a few alliances with politicians are formed, which are based on common interests with respect to the privatization of SMAPA. The power of their possibilities as established institutions within society lies in their means of communication, which enable them to broaden the *knowledgability* of the citizens. On the part of the church, a degree of trustworthiness, which is embedded in their position in society, helps the institution to reach a great part of Tuxtla's citizens. Politicians are able to draw the attention of the official media and they can take the issue of the privatization to the political arena, where the ultimate decisions will be made.

At the same time the institutional actors are not able to communicate on the topic as free as NGO-activists, due to predetermined sets of rules with respect to their position in society. Furthermore their participation is highly ambiguous because of the history of the institutions and people's deep-rooted feelings of political distrust.

In our field research we found the *cellular* and *vertebrate* structures in social systems to be very complex. In practice the distinction between the two is not as clear as in theory. New forms of *cellular* organization are emerging but they are connecting and merging with 'traditional' *vertebrate* institutions. The differences in the organization of mass communication between the two actors lead to an increased ability to contest water privatization when they are combined. However, the collaboration is hindered by feelings of political distrust, ambiguity in the history of

institutional actors, and negative experiences with respect to the exploitation of participation in grassroots movements by politicians. The establishment of relationships of trust between and within *vertebrate* and *cellular* structures can result in a variety of means of mass communication that increases the ability to construct an informed citizenry. With vast *cellular* networks on the one hand, and traditional *vertebrate* institutions on the other hand, it is the variety within the citizen movement that contributes to its strength. At the same time, their emphasis on citizenship makes *Chiapanec@s en Defensa del Agua* a strong grassroots movement, which aims at the strengthening of citizen participation in order to contest the privatization of the water system of Tuxtla Gutiérrez. As such the movement exemplifies an active way of exercising citizenship, envisioning stronger citizen influence on processes of political decision-making. Its members are shaping the structures of the *social system* of citizenship, defining the relation between citizens and the state. They draw attention to the state's responsibility to take care of its citizens but at the same time point out that citizen participation is a crucial determinant for justice and equality. By calling themselves *ciudadanos* [citizens], the members of the movement are emphasizing equality and unify within a block against neoliberal policing by the state, in order to defend the human right to water.