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Scalar Struggles: The Selectivity of Development Governance in Southern Mexico

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Abstract

So-called development projects in rural Mexico are heavily contested. Changes in institutional design have had little effect in mediating the exclusivity of the political decision-making processes defining such projects. Why, and how, has the Mexican state been able to maintain a developmentalist agenda, despite growing pressures to incorporate participatory development institutions and consult Indigenous peoples about development projects? This article introduces the geographic concept of scale and the concept of the state's heterogeneous selectivities into debates on participation to study the politics of development projects. It analyzes the potential and existing obstacles to political participation for Indigenous networks and activists in the corresponding planning processes across institutional scales, examining protest against wind energy development in the state of Oaxaca and the project of “rural cities” in the state of Chiapas. Rather than two separate cases for comparison, both examples represent different planning processes involving the same heterogeneous state and the same promise of progress.

Keywords: state; politics of scale; development projects; wind energy; territorial ordering

Resumen

Los llamados proyectos de desarrollo en el México rural son muy cuestionados. Los cambios en el diseño institucional han tenido poco efecto en la mediación de la exclusividad de los procesos de decisión política que definen dichos proyectos. ¿Por qué y cómo ha podido el Estado mexicano mantener una agenda desarrollista, a pesar de las crecientes presiones para incorporar instituciones de desarrollo participativo y consultar a los pueblos indígenas sobre los proyectos de desarrollo? Introducimos el concepto geográfico de escala y el concepto de selectividad heterogénea del Estado en los debates sobre participación política, para estudiar los procesos políticos alrededor de esos proyectos. Analizamos los obstáculos potenciales y existentes para la participación política de redes y activistas indígenas en los procesos de planificación correspondientes a través de diferentes escalas institucionales, basándonos en la protesta contra el desarrollo de la energía eólica en el estado de Oaxaca, y el proyecto de “ciudades rurales” en Chiapas. Más que dos casos distintos en comparación, ambos ejemplos representan diferentes procesos de planificación que involucran al mismo estado heterogéneo, y la misma promesa de progreso.

Palabras clave: estado; políticas de escala; proyectos de desarrollo; energía eólica; ordenamiento territorial

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Contested large-scale projects, participation, and the state

The idea that the integration of socially and politically marginalized groups into political decision-making is more rhetoric than reality has long been recognized by scholars of Mexico (Eckstein 1990; Holzner 2010). What is puzzling is that despite changes in institutional design, such as the introduction of mandatory consultation processes for large-scale development projects in Mexico (Zarembeg, Torres Wong, and Guarneros-Meza 2018), such changes seem to have little impact on the exclusivity of decision-making processes. Protest against large-scale infrastructure and resource extraction projects bear witness to this (Andrews et al. 2017). Even more so, participatory mechanisms have been shown to cause additional (local) frictions (Zarembeg, Torres Wong, and Guarneros-Meza 2018; Zarembeg and Torres Wong 2018).

What remains unclear are the differences in channeling social movements' claims for participation between institutional scales. Indigenous groups, in particular, had their rights recognized at a global level, for instance through norms of the International Labour Organization (ILO), and Zapatista mobilization has links with global activists and media networks (Mora 2017). Yet in local contexts of development projects, even across different cases, the reach of Indigenous groups and activists into political institutions to deliberate development projects and participate in decision-making is limited. Why, and how, has the Mexican state been able to maintain a developmentalist agenda, despite growing pressures to incorporate participatory development institutions and consult Indigenous peoples about development projects? In which ways do local actors, such as Indigenous communities, navigate the institutional obstacles to participation in development projects' governance across different scales?

Much of the valuable literature on political participation and exclusion in Mexico focuses on the nation-state (Levy and Bruhn 2006), on one institutional level such as urban institutions (Selee 2011; Dietz 1998), or on multilevel governance with a focus on institutional hierarchies (Fox and Aranda 1996). To adequately address the puzzle of participation, however, we need to look beyond both the nation-state arena and multilevel governance. We suggest focusing on power relations between different actors across a number of institutional and noninstitutional contexts, and developing the idea of "numerous changing forms and locations of domination and resistance" (Rubin 1996, 89). We introduce the geographic concept of *scale* (Smith 1992, 2008; Wissen 2007) and the concept of *heterogeneous selectivities* of the state (Jessop 2008) into debates on participation to study the politics of development projects. We analyze the potential and existing obstacles to political participation for Indigenous networks and activists in the corresponding planning processes across institutional levels.

Our conceptualization of the varying role and openness of institutions allows us to examine two designated development projects in southern Mexico: rural cities in Chiapas and wind farms in Oaxaca. These projects' governance processes illustrate the different strategic actors and social forces involved, state selectivities, and varying scalar reach of contestation. Rather than two separate cases for comparison, both examples represent different planning processes involving the same heterogeneous state and the same promise of progress.

The argument and analytical framework

Academic enquiry into the inclusive and exclusive governance of development projects has come mainly from three subfields. First, scholarship on participation suggests that an increasingly technocratic state, abandoning its care functions, produces a widening "participation gap" between prosperous and poorer Mexicans (Holzner 2010); that informal power intervenes in determining the correlation between decentralization

and local democratic governance (Selee 2011); that decentralization toward local governments does not necessarily mean a democratization of decision processes (Fox and Aranda 1996; Benton 2016); and that processes toward accountability preceded democratic elections, resulting from the scale-up of rural organizations (Fox 2007). Concerning the specific inclusion of Indigenous groups, scholars emphasize the role of law (Tomaselli 2016), the shape of citizenship regimes that (involuntarily) support local autonomy (Yashar 2005), and institutional structures, such as the redrawing of administrative boundaries, with serious implications for the political agency and mobilization of Mexican Indigenous communities (Nelson 2006). Regime-oriented work has focused on party politics (Magaloni 2006), “subnational authoritarianism” (Gibson 2004), or on the nation-state and competition (Levy and Bruhn 2006; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978). Many participation debates revolve around political or fiscal decentralization (Selee 2011; Díaz Cayeros 2006).

Second, scholarship on development governance in both Latin America and Mexico has highlighted the role of participatory instruments, such as consultations, and stressed ambiguous effects on the de facto inclusion of actors on the local scale, and, generally, contestation (Zaremborg, Torres Wong, and Guarneros-Meza 2018; Schilling-Vacaflor and Flemmer 2015; for a general analysis, see Cooke 2003). Studies on local residents’ participation in development projects have emphasized the contradictions between the global participation discourse since the 1980s that allows for the formalization of collective rights for groups perceived as Indigenous, and the persistent protest against resource and infrastructure projects (Rodríguez Garavito 2011; Zaremborg and Torres Wong 2018). Concepts such as the developmental state and development participation have resurfaced since the 2000s (Bebbington et al. 2008), in line with increasing resource extraction due to rising global commodity prices (Svampa 2013). Studies on truncated participation in development projects have focused much less on the state and institutional levels (except, for example, Brand et al. 2008).

Third, scholarship on social movements’ struggles against large-scale projects has analyzed how commodity booms and neo-developmental agendas in countries of the Global South fuel conflict (Prause and Le Billon 2021), particularly in Latin America (Bebbington et al. 2008; Echart Muñoz and Villarreal 2019). In the context of renewable energy, research has stressed that violence, repression, and criminalization rise particularly when Indigenous peoples are those resisting such projects (Del Bene, Scheidel, and Temper 2018; Leon 2016). In the case of housing and urban resettlement, studies emphasize varying forms of expulsion of social groups along race/ethnicity and class lines (Janoschka 2016). Scholars have described strategies that social movements deploy to raise awareness of violence and to fight for acknowledgement of the cultural and social rights of social groups considered as minorities on the basis of gender and race/ethnicity (Álvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998; Baker 2012; Nash 2004). Movement studies have engaged with scalar strategies related to environmental politics (McCarthy 2005), but scale-sensitive research on the contested appropriation of land and resources in Latin America is lacking.

Our analysis combines insights from these three debates and opens up the politics of development projects to the concepts of politics of scale (Smith 1992, 2008; Wissen 2007; Paz, Jara, and Wald 2019) and heterogeneous selectivities of the state (Jessop 2008). We first argue that heterogeneous state selectivities at different institutional scales influence the potential for mobilizations by Indigenous groups against large-scale development projects. We contend that protestors consciously try to broaden their scalar reach and employ strategies to simultaneously appeal to different institutional levels. A scalar perspective reframes Rubin’s (1996) understanding of the state as a complex center embedded in regional and local constellations, focusing instead on the relation between the different elements of this ensemble. It acknowledges that seemingly local conflicts around development projects have scalar impacts far beyond the local sphere, while the national state remains a decisive scale of political action.

The relationship between scale and state—the politics of scale (Wissen 2007), which different actors employ during the development project's governance process—and heterogeneous state selectivities are our two main conceptual tools. The concept of *politics of scale* helps us understand the shifting relations rather than simple hierarchies between institutional levels. Institutional scalar configurations are not fixed levels but are “the outcome of sociospatial processes that regulate and organize social power relations” (Swyngedouw 2004, 131–134). Political struggles are not contained at the local, national, or international scale; instead, the scale of action chosen is itself an arena of conflict (Trommer 2019). Since the 1990s, geographers have analyzed the shifting relations between institutions of different levels that become involved in decision processes such as decentralization and recentralization (Smith 1992, 2008; Swyngedouw 2004) or the relegation of regulatory power to supranational organizations and contracts (McCarthy 2005). These processes of reshuffling modes of political regulation are contested, and unequal actors address, intentionally or not, specific scales to reshape power geometries in their interests: these actors actively pursue “politics of scale” (Wissen 2007, 230) to rearrange power asymmetries to their advantage (Paz, Jara, and Wald 2019).

The actors involved in development project governance have highly variable scalar reach. Some actors may be privileged enough to choose their scale of political action (Smith 2008, 232) and may be able to (or need to) “jump scales” (Smith 1992, 60, 66), for instance by bypassing the local level of political negotiation or by broadening their coalitions. Organized Indigenous groups have frequently used scale-jumping mechanisms in planning processes for development projects. They pursue politics of scale to mitigate their exclusion from decision-making and to address the scalar impacts of development projects (Leon 2016; Mora 2017; Bebbington et al. 2008).

To explain variations in scalar strategies' success, we use the concept of *heterogeneous state selectivities*, which we define as the state's differentiated privileging of certain groups over others across shifting institutional levels as dynamic and dependent on conjunctural changes (Jessop 2008, 48–58). Asymmetrical power relations and claims by actors with different power resources, such as informal ties, and differential access to the state traverse all development project planning. Rather than a neutral and a priori beneficial process, the governance of development projects is the (dynamic) result of a condensation of social forces (Andreucci and Radhuber 2017; Holgersen 2013; Pichler 2015). Successful social forces can exclude others from accessing the state's decision-making circles, and certain strategies may be easier to implement as state policies than others. Yet structural restraints for some may constitute conjunctural opportunities for others (Jessop 2008, 42). Access to the state can open and close and is further refined through adopting particular discourses, selective filtering of information, systematic omissions of state agencies on some topics, and differentiated implementation of policy measures (Jessop 2008, 48–58, 129). Specific forms of access to the state, such as parliamentary lobbying, may be successful but imply certain prerequisites, while political articulations such as street protests often face disorganization and isolation by state agencies (Poulantzas 2002, 171–172; Brand et al. 2008; Jenss 2019).

In sum, the concepts of scale and heterogeneous state selectivities allow us to analyze the governance of development projects shaped by power relations between institutions, groups, and actors with varying scalar reach. In the following sections, we analyze how the Mexican state has maintained the exclusiveness of decision-making in development projects, despite growing pressure to include Indigenous peoples. We show how state selectivities at different institutional scales influence the potential for mobilizations and the strategies applied by Indigenous groups against large-scale development projects. To split our argument into digestible sections, we focus first on selectivities in discourses on development and land use, planning processes, and participation. Second, we discuss protest actors' scalar strategies against development projects. We show that state selectivities

manifest themselves in selectively closing and opening institutional access, in disorganizing and repressing Indigenous political organizations, and in reproducing social conflict. Before we substantiate our argument empirically, we describe our data collection, the methodological approach, and the case selection rationale.

The data

The article is based on empirical material originally gathered for two separate PhD projects: on state violence in Mexico (Jenss 2016) and on participation and discourses in renewable energy projects (Lehmann 2019). Methodologically, Burawoy's (1998) extended case method approach guided us. For each case analysis, we analyzed three sets of data through qualitative content analysis. We examined documents by policy makers, companies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and local assemblies, which provided us with different stakeholders' views on the two projects. The second data package consisted of national newspaper articles. A third data package—interviews with government officials, company representatives, NGO staff, and local actors contacted over several years and during various research stays—was analyzed with a focus on these actors' contrasting views and narratives. While these were expert interviews, they were based on an understanding of expertness that included local experience and day-to-day involvement in the political processes around the projects. The data was coded and triangulated. Secondary literature provided historical context and complemented the empirical analysis.

For the cross-case analysis and comparison in this article, we revisited our empirical material and identified dynamics, turning points, and events that influenced the governance process in the long run. The categories that we developed provided information on the scalar strategies of actors and on selectivities in the governance process, the turn toward international networks by protesters, the frequent occurrence of particular discourses, and the specific mention of state institutions involved in the governance process. The time frame encompasses the years between 2008 and 2016.

Case selection

Mexico is an emblematic case for studying development projects, first, because of the increase in conflicts related to infrastructure and extractive projects during the commodity super cycle of the 2000s (Andrews et al. 2017, 6). In these conflicts, state institutions were frequently accused of links to crime. The coercive power of local elites (Knight 2005) and historic conflicts over land (Escobar Ohmstede and Butler 2013) complicated power relations.

The transition from the centralized authoritarian rule of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) to formal democracy from the late 1980s onward entailed decentralization processes that intersected with struggles for Indigenous rights (Eisenstadt 2007; Jung 2017). National governments acknowledged the multicultural character of the Mexican society in constitutional changes in 1992. Indigenous groups, particularly the Zapatistas, negotiated the then singular and partial recognition of cultural and political rights of Indigenous peoples (Mora 2017) in the federal and some state constitutions (Benton 2016).

Furthermore, Mexico signed international agreements against socioeconomic and political exclusion and for cultural rights. Notably, the ILO Convention 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples assert the right of Indigenous peoples to be consulted on and consent to development projects on their territory, which provides Mexican Indigenous movements critical of such projects with a point of reference (Wilson 2014; Llanes Salazar 2020). These concurrent changes spotlighted the tensions

between local, Indigenous actors and the implementation of development projects. Although some participatory fora have recently been tested in Mexico (Zaremborg, Torres Wong, and Guarneros-Meza 2018), the claim that “participation [is] the new tyranny” (Cooke and Kothari 2002) still seems to hold on the local scale. All too often, local administrations endorse the status quo and delegitimize protest.

We examine protests surrounding two development projects: the implementation of wind farms in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, and so-called rural cities (*ciudades rurales*) in Chiapas. Rather than selecting the cases through a traditional case selection process, continued discussions about our separate work alerted us to the fact that despite the cases’ similar characteristics, differences in outcomes were notable but might be grasped through a common conceptual frame. These two similar yet different cases, both located in southern Mexican states, show similarly poor socioeconomic characteristics for groups that identify themselves as Indigenous (CONEVAL 2019). Both states have a history of Indigenous mobilization, but their histories of institutionalization differ, ranging from the frequent integration of Indigenous actors in formal arenas of policy making in Oaxaca to repeated declarations of political autonomy of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas (Anaya Muñoz 2005). Furthermore, both states look back on failed or contested development projects: the transisthmian railway (Oaxaca), large-scale hydropower dams (Chiapas), and the Pan-American highway. Similar development projects exist in other Mexican states, yet in Oaxaca and Chiapas, the political base for such projects is particularly narrow, in contrast to their heavy contestations outside formal political arenas.

With its favorable wind conditions, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca, which covers almost twenty thousand square kilometers, has a high density of on-shore wind turbines. Over two dozen wind farms produce more than half of Mexico’s installed wind power capacity (around 2.756 MW) (AHK Mexico 2018; SENER 2016). Transnational companies like Acciona Energía, Électricité de France, and Iberdrola generate electricity for industrial end consumers in other parts of the country (e.g., Femsá-Coca Cola or the Mexican mining company Peñoles) via bilateral contracts, or sell it to the Federal Mexican Electricity Commission (CFE) (Huesca Pérez, Sheinbaum-Pardo, and Köppel 2016). From the mid-1990s onward, rumors spread about a project linked to transregional infrastructure plans, notably the Plan-Puebla-Panamá (PPP, now Proyecto Mesoamérica) (Lehmann 2018, 17–19). Private corporations and real estate agents began to lease land subject to multiple and contested property titles, including collective Indigenous land. Private companies, state officials, and landowners started promoting concessions for wind farms in the isthmus (Howe and Boyer 2015). Residents, with support from national and foreign NGOs, questioned the economic benefits for themselves, many of whom live by subsistence farming, fishing, cash-crop agriculture, or precarious and informal jobs in the construction and service sectors and the Salina Cruz oil refinery, or receive state transfers and remittances (Nahmad, Nahón, and Langlé 2014).

Residents challenged the top-down implementation of wind turbine construction, which ignored Indigenous and peasant communities’ participation rights (Baker 2012; Diego Quintana 2018; Zárate Toledo, Patiño, and Fraga 2019). Police forces, allegedly connected to organized crime, started to use intimidating practices against critics in and outside the area (Codigo DH 2014; Dunlap 2019). The conflict intensified around 2012–2013, when the opposition movement was able to stop the planned mega-windfarm “San Dionisio,” supported by a federal judge’s decision that the projects violated agrarian and Indigenous rights. In 2014–2015, a consultation process, apparently based on the principles of ILO 169, took place for the same project, with ambiguous results. It was the first-ever consultation process of local residents in a development project, a direct result of the protest. Local initiatives and human rights organizations from the state capital and from Mexico City, however, criticized the consultation process as fraudulent and refused to participate in its final event, where it was decided to build the project nonetheless.

The San Dionisio wind farm was subsequently constructed under another name, even though the opposition filed an appeal. Finally, the Mexican Supreme Court, which was entrusted with the case in the last instance, ruled that the consultation and the resulting decision were lawful. At the time of writing, movements continue to contest further planned wind farms.

The Rural Sustainable Cities program (RSC) in Chiapas, a large-scale urbanization and housing infrastructure project, was initiated in 2009. Governor Juan Sabines made it the core of the initiative to anchor the UN Millennium Development Goals in the Chiapan constitution. It consisted of planned settlements for a maximum of 1,500 inhabitants each, allegedly to mitigate poverty and environmental risk. The first “city” was built in 2010. Corporate and state actors jointly devised the RSC program. Transnational and Mexico-based firms (telecommunications giant Telmex of the Carso Group, and Banamex of Citigroup) were involved in RSC planning through their philanthropic foundations and contracts with the Chiapas state. Unefon and Iusacell brands, a joint venture between the Salinas and Televisa conglomerates between 2011 and 2014, received the exclusive contract to provide mobile phone services. Grupo Salinas’s chairman described the first RSC, Nuevo Juan de Grijalva, as “a concrete bet against the dispersion that generates so much marginalization” (Fundación Azteca and MR School of Business 2010, 2). The RSC program is based on the assertion by authorities, across institutional scales and political conjunctures, that tiny villages scattered around the hills are problematic and that the “dispersed” settlements of (Indigenous) peasants is a fundamental cause of poverty. This concern goes back to the 1994 Zapatista uprising, which was incubated in similar villages entirely unnoticed by the state. In 1994, the Army for National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) occupied several towns for twelve days, demanding autonomy, an event that still defines imaginaries of Chiapas more than twenty years later. The Zapatista uprising’s relevance for local social relations has raised concerns that RSCs are ultimately a disciplinary strategy (Wilson 2014; Zuñino et al. 2011). Both at the project’s height and at its demise after 2011, when increasing nonacceptance of RSCs let the state level’s support temporarily subside and four planned RSCs disappeared from the website of the Population and Rural Cities Institute (Instituto de Población y Ciudades Rurales, IPCR), the federal executive continued to support the RSC project.

Residents defied this spatial planning and often left the planned cities. Local administrations found half-empty settlements. Struggles between different institutional scales contributed to the failure. For instance, the community council in Santiago del Pinar mainly administers the municipal debt of the abandoned RSC. Inhabitants abandoned the planned city only months after moving in in 2012 because the CFE cut the electric supply (Mandujano 2012; CMDRS and IDESMAC 2013). The RSC of Copainalá never went far beyond its foundation ceremony, as intermittent inhabitants (Ruiz López 2017, 135) established their own patterns of temporary living in the RSC, constantly going back and forth between their old hamlets and the new settlement. Open protest against the RSCs seemed to be less successful than these actions in undermining the project. The state administration of Manuel Velasco Coello (2012–2018) attempted to revive the RSC project by bringing in federal institutions such as the urban planning department, but only a fraction of the planned cities have been completed or inhabited. In Chiapas, the IPCR discussed economic prospects with inhabitants of Nuevo Juan de Grijalva in 2017, suggesting a strategic shift at the regional level (IPCR 2017). Already in 2014, the United Nations had removed its global-level support (UN Global Compact 2018).

Both cases offer empirical evidence for our argument that scalar reorganization and the shifting heterogeneous selectivities of the state at various institutional scales influence the possibilities of successfully mobilizing against development projects. When we speak of mobilizing actors or protest movements, we refer to a wide range of actor groups such as neighbors to wind farms, RSC residents, grassroots organizations, and foreign and

international NGOs. They represent protest movements in a broader sense (Della Porta and Diani 2006).

Heterogeneous selectivities of the state at different institutional scales

Discursive selectivities

Discourses are one dimension of the scalar governance process of development projects, which is characterized by discursive selectivities, for instance a certain state bias toward the very different narratives around development uttered by different actors. For instance, dominant imaginaries of development may be reflected in newly established state agencies, while other ideas are discarded. Existing critiques of discursive state selectivities around the notion of development echo debates on the violent “conquest of territories and populations” and the potentially negative effects of development as a “spatio-cultural project” (Escobar 2008, 65). Although development—understood as increasing state services and integration into monetary circuits and labor regimes—is assumed to be universally beneficial, states and international institutions frequently discursively prioritize and privilege particular knowledge on development that contrasts, for instance, with Indigenous visions of sustainability.

For the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the US-based National Renewable Energy Laboratory’s Wind Atlas (NREL 2004) is one of the main reference documents in the planning process. It sets the frame for discussions on the necessity of exploiting the wind resources of the isthmus region. This discourse intertwines and contrasts with historical narratives on the intense winds as an obstacle to agriculture. Echoing promises of the green economy and ecological modernization (Fisher and Freudenburg 2001), wind technologies are promoted as a medium for local development, insofar as residents secure employment, landholders receive rent, and communities benefit from new income sources and corporate social responsibility projects (Ávila 2018). This green development narrative belongs to the rhetoric of state officials, companies, and international financial institutions; it excludes ideas on land use compatible with the strong winds, as well as criticism on the failure of past agrarian policies (de Ita 2019) as an important reason for poor soils. Actors on the local level were able to politicize content to some extent, but the green narrative on climate protection and development complicated the visibility of their claims (Backhouse and Lehmann 2019).

Along with this notion of development, discursive selectivities are concerned with the role and status of collective and private property, a historically contested issue in Mexico (Escobar Ohmstede and Butler 2013). In the isthmus, forms and ideas of land use have been recurrent points of conflict at least since the 1950s, when state agencies with competing and contradictory practices issued *de facto* land titles for plots with multiple claims by different actors (Binford 1993). The concomitant land conflicts were objects of political contestation in different isthmus regions (Zárate Toledo 2010; Cruz Rueda 2011). The arrival of transnational wind companies and corresponding political decisions changing the land use of allegedly private property aggravated the conflicts. Not only do different claims exist on whether an area should be used collectively or privately, for example in the area around Juchitán and Unión Hidalgo, but also land users claim they should decide collectively on land use change, in this case from agrarian to industrial use. Companies have concluded contracts with individuals and/or municipal authorities, despite competing visions and practices on the status of collective property and decision-making. This has privileged private over collective land use.

Government institutions at the different scales of the municipality, the state of Oaxaca, and the federal state accepted or did not prevent these corporate practices (Nahmad, Nahón, and Langlé 2014). In some cases, the state indirectly supported private land

use. For instance, the state government of Oaxaca openly favored a pro-wind candidate for the ejido La Venta's agrarian commission, who then spoke in favor of individual contracts, although Mexican agricultural law prohibits such interference (Oceransky 2009). Academic studies and NGO reports show that this selective practice has reproduced tensions and historical community conflicts on land use and decision-making around existing and planned wind farms (Codigo DH 2014; Diego Quintana 2018). The tensions around land use decisions are linked to disputes concerning the electoral system, that is, to disagreements whether communities should elect their political authorities by customary law or political parties (Hernández-Díaz and Zárate Toledo 2007).

After the demise of the first RSCs in Chiapas, the political conjuncture from 2015 onward brought renewed state interest in territorial ordering and so-called population management. The Coello government (2012–2018) produced elaborate maps on land use recommendations for Chiapas in its Territorial Planning Plan (Programa de Ordenamiento Ecológico y Territorial del Estado de Chiapas, POETCH) (Gobierno de Chiapas 2012). In alliance with the national Secretary for Agricultural, Territorial, and Urban Development's redensification program, Coello renewed the discourse to cluster rural populations in Chiapas (SEDATU 2014).

The renewed discourse still drew from World Bank documents (World Bank 2009) such as the "reshaping of economic geography," arguing for density as an indicator of progress. As part of the renewal, the state government partially decentralized population management from the federal level toward institutions such as the State Council for Population (Consejo Nacional de Población, COESPO). This aimed at reviving the RSCs through scalar reorganization and promoting agro-industrial "modernization" and a "population distribution adequate for the development needs of state regions" (IPCR 2015, 3).

The state government highlighted positive social effects of urbanization. In 2015, the World Health Organization's Mexico program Healthy Homes, Strong Families awarded the RSC Jaltenango de la Paz a "healthy community" certificate, which was contingent on civil registration processes. The state handed out 625 occupancy certificates (*constancias de posesión*) to recognize the community, although occupancy is less binding than property ownership (Pérez 2016).

State officials at different scales routinely linked the concentration of a formerly dispersed rural society to promises of development and citizenship in their recurring appearances at RSC opening ceremonies, hinting at the inhabitants' integration into the political community. However, state selectivities continued to be unfavorable to the villagers turned urbanites, at various scales. Their struggles have hardly effected any change in regional state policy, laws, or administration.

The rationale behind the rhetoric on relocating dispersed villagers is land use change. For instance, state documents on RSCs selectively condensed an interest in efficient land use, satisfying the need for large-scale property for agro-industrial investments, rather than an interest in urbanization (Gobierno de Chiapas 2006; Presidencia de la República 2013). Eliminating dispersed living meant being able to scale up land use change through centralized state policy, usually a laborious affair involving parcel-by-parcel buyouts and convincing owners to give up one by one. For instance, the RSC program refers to the Mesoamerican Project's regional planning guidelines, a transnational North and Central American infrastructure plan. RSCs belong to the same bundle of strategies that aim to "define priority regions . . . and regional compensation projects" (Comisión Ejecutiva del Proyecto Mesoamérica 2009).

Grassroots organizations defied official discourses by criticizing malfunctioning services like the lack of electricity or water provision for the local health center, reappropriating space and turning unused playgrounds into grazing grounds for goats, and simultaneously stating that they prefer to work their old plots of land a few hours' journey away and to reside in the RSC only part-time (CIEPAC 2010). Local social organizations

voiced their distress about the state administration's adverse institutional selectivities, for example, the lack of access to decision-making bodies. Their counter-discourse makes the failure of both the participation and the density discourses of RSCs blatantly apparent.

Selectivities concerning planning and participation

The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the planning processes show that structural selectivities in prior political processes and integration into the world market (Brand 2010, 107) condition access to state institutions. Often, selective filtering or even omission of information in the planning process structures this selective governance process, which depends on very specific actors but not their opponents. Additionally, the selective shifting of governance can result in increased "weight" of some institutions versus others (Jessop 2008, 129). For instance, processes of scalar reorganization toward supranational bodies reduce the possibility of contesting projects, for example in parliament, even though the external conditioning of policies is not new in Latin America.

In the Mexican isthmus, the wind energy planning process shows selective omissions, especially concerning the provision of information. From the late 1990s onward, landholders, inhabitants, and local administrative staff reported that rumors about a new and "mysterious project" (Girón and Beas Torres 2010, our translation) grew stronger in the isthmus and were related to other transregional infrastructure plans like the PPP (Lehmann 2018, 17–19). They received no information from state or federal agencies on the renting of land, planning of wind farms, technology, or on possible impacts, nor any support in negotiations with wind energy developers and investors (Nahmad, Nahón, and Langlé 2014, 147–152; Oceransky 2009). Meanwhile, private companies, often with links to politicians from the PRI and the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional), state officials, and landowners had been discussing wind quality and the "allocation of land prior to the tender process" (PODER 2011, 33; Howe and Boyer 2015). This led to uncertainties on the local scale, although according to Mexican law, environmental impact assessments for any project had to be discussed with residents (Huesca-Pérez, Sheinbaum-Pardo, and Köppel 2016). Such documents were provided but contained no comprehensive details of prospective projects and did not account for levels of illiteracy or bilingualism of (older) residents, especially women, for the digital gap between younger and older population, or for different forms of knowledge on land use and fishing. Moreover, the environmental impact assessments ignore historical land conflicts and the possible duplication of negative impacts of wind farms built next to existing turbines (Lehmann 2018, 17–23).

These selectivities in the larger planning process are linked to selective local-scale participation. Specifically, in a consultation process held in Juchitán in 2014–2015 in line with ILO 169, the prior selectivities of the planning process turned out to influence the trajectory and outcome of the consultation. Notably, before 2014, no such consultation had been conducted. In 2012, Indigenous inhabitants of coastal villages stopped the construction of a large 132-turbine wind farm through militant protests and legal action, disputing the lack of consultation that includes access to information. Subsequently, the operating consortium Eólica del Sur (formerly Mareña Renovables) sought to build the wind farm in nearby Juchitán de Zaragoza, for which state institutions of all three government levels organized a consultation. The central document, the Protocolo de Consulta issued by the Federal Energy Department (Secretaría de Energía, SENER) and other state institutions, set the frame for the process, inviting the entire Zapotec community and addressing different social groups in Juchitán (SENER et al. 2014).

The rhetoric surrounding the consultation process reflects the critique that isthmian *asambleas* voiced vis-à-vis foreign and national human rights organizations on exclusive decision-making processes in wind energy development. The critique is further reflected in SENER's contested energy reform of 2014, which includes communities' right to

consultation. The isthmus was seen as a “laboratory” (interview with two employees of the Secretaría de Energía, Ciudad de México, February 22, 2015) for this new form of participation, tested in the context of disputes over the previous lack of regulation for wind energy development, as well as severe political struggles dating back to the authoritarian rule of the PRI (on the history of these political disputes see Campbell 1993). Despite the inclusive character of the Secretaría de Energía consultation document, the decision-making corridor was predefined and selective: lease contracts had been negotiated years before, concessions and bank loans had been issued, and the turbines waited in a nearby warehouse. Company staff or state officials almost never satisfactorily answered residents’ requests for information on the socioeconomic impact (Gerber 2015). The organizing state institutions announced sessions primarily via internet in a region with a wide digital gap. Because of these shortcomings, critics scaled legal action up to the federal level, but meanwhile, Eólica del Sur constructed the wind farm with the municipality’s approval, creating facts on the ground (ProDESC 2018).

In Chiapas, the network of actors that converged in the RSC project’s governance process, although led by federal and Chiapas state governments, transcended a single institutional scale, and its setup was highly selective. The mix of public and private actors not only enjoyed a privileged role in evaluating and assessing a public settlement and land use program but in fact acquired tasks of governance. These entities, much more than the semi-voluntary settlers themselves, constituted the project’s advisory board, the Consejo Consultivo Ciudadano, which functioned between 2008 and 2013. Its list of members reads like a who’s who of the Mexican top ten private-sector philanthropic foundations, including Azteca, Telmex, and BBVA-Bancomer. Their involvement is reflected in the private donations that amount to more than 50 percent of total investments (561 vs. 505 million pesos from Chiapas’s public budget) (Ruiz López 2017, 126; *Crónica* 2011).

Local participation was seemingly made difficult on purpose. Instead of building on the villages’ *asambleas comunitarias* as an existing democratic vehicle, RSC project staff created three supposedly participatory institutions—the housing committee, the public services committee, and the neighborhood assembly (IPCR 2010). These institutions never became corridors of access to the local state but remained informational events. They even reinforced existing power relations, conditioning the provision of services and infrastructures on the acceptance of homogenized housing and consent to relocation (Ruiz López 2017, 126).

Despite adverse selectivities at several institutional scales in Chiapas, local protests did influence the RSC governance process, and inhabitants heavily criticized the programs for lacking participatory planning (CIEPAC 2010). The self-organized Abeja communities, with considerable scalar reach to global Zapatista support communities, said that “if they really want our benefit, they first have to respect us . . . Well, he [governor Juan Sabines] didn’t even officially inform us. He hasn’t asked if we want to leave our houses and land for them to give us others which they decided on” (Abejas 2010).

Lingering behind the RSC urbanization project was a promise of citizenship (although villagers of course already held formal citizenship), and thus, of participation, although this threatened autonomy, as Yashar (2005) would argue. Indeed, a mayor was elected in Nuevo Juan de Grijalva. Yet the project of urbanization via RSCs not only failed to provide local participatory state access through favorable institutional selectivities but closed down possibilities of more autonomous political organization because it dissolved preexisting, potentially Zapatista-friendly communities.

Dispersed communities were certainly not necessarily democratic, in an ideal sense, before and did not enjoy access to any state scale. Yet, despite the promise of development and citizen participation, the scalar reorganization of the RSC regional policy works against political participation.

Mobilizing scalar strategies

Protesters in both Chiapas and Oaxaca actively navigated shifting scalar setups. In their opposition to decision-making processes taking place mainly on the national scale, activists who opposed the isthmian wind farms put politics of scale center-stage. They not only built barricades and blocked infrastructure and roads, notably in the years around 2000 and between 2010 and 2014, but clearly pursued a scale-jumping strategy. They invoked international agreements, in particular ILO 169, and addressed the isthmian district court. Activists traveled to Mexico City to explain their concerns to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which had financed the contested Mareña wind project. The reference to ILO 169 enabled coalitions with national human rights organizations and similar social movements in Mexico. One further effect was the presence of the then United Nations special rapporteur on human rights, James Anaya, in one of the allegedly ILO-based consultation events in Juchitán, a case of scale jumping similar to the one in Chiapas (see below).

Along with bringing first the lack of consultation and then the deficiencies of the actual consultation process to the attention of the courts at different levels (Diego Quintana 2018), some wind farm opponents addressed the IDB's Independent Consultation and Investigation Mechanism (ICIM). The mechanism confirmed that the bank had violated its own standards of respecting Indigenous rights by funding the Mareña project (ICIM 2016). Despite these scalar strategies, there have been no direct financial consequences for the IDB funding of wind energy projects. Moreover, the Supreme Court ultimately rejected objections to the project. Nonetheless, the Secretaría de Energía stopped a new consultation process on a new wind farm of *Électricité de France* subsidiary *Eólica de Oaxaca* in Unión Hidalgo in 2018. Residents and the National Commission on Human Rights, a federal agency, had criticized any consultation process taking place in the aftermath of the devastating earthquakes of September 2017 (Mateo 2018). Whereas the local scale was important for organizing protest and manifest interruption of the implementation process, the regional, national, and global scales, and particularly discourses on Indigenous rights, were essential for making their claims heard.

In the isthmus, some local-scale institutions have contested the expected benefits of wind farm development. To back up their criticisms, particularly on the lack of information and regulation provided by Oaxacan state and federal state institutions, isthmian mayors announced a protest march to Oaxaca de Juárez, the state capital, in February 2015, which ultimately did not occur. It is important to note that the isthmus region, especially Juchitán, has historically been a place of resistance against colonial rule, the centralizing nation-state, and one-party rule (Campbell 1993). This spatio-historical legacy continues to back protests against central administrative decisions or involvement from "outside" the isthmus, and remains part of political narratives.

Struggles against RSCs in Chiapas focused primarily on the Chiapas state government. Companies and state actors addressed each other at the national scale but widely neglected the local scale as an arena of political negotiation. Local actors contesting RSCs, however, referred to the global scale of action that Zapatista mobilizations had established a decade earlier to protest against neoliberal projects which reinforced Indigenous communities' marginalization (Mora 2017). Zapatista sympathizer communities had introduced democratic alternatives in Chiapas, with global scalar reach. Villages neighboring RSCs are known as Zapatista support bases. Previous state selectivities were particularly unfavorable toward them. The scalar reach and success of autonomous movements partly explains the repeated attempts by state actors to cluster inhabitants in housing projects without an economic and social program. Urbanization has, if anything, contributed to the disorganization of these communities' more

autonomous processes, while RSC inhabitants face institutional selectivities related to intertwined aspects of counterinsurgency and racism (Pueblo Creyente 2010).

Yet local critics of the RSC program did employ scale jumping toward the global when, in 2011, the UN special rapporteur on the right to food Olivier De Schutter informed the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva that despite good investments, the Mexican state had not provided inhabitants with sustainable livelihoods, and the first two RSCs needed a thorough evaluation before scaling the project up to more localities (Mandujano 2012).

Nonetheless, marches and open criticism had less impact on the project's implementation through the state-level IPCR than did strategies to subvert the development project. The regionally influential Pueblo Creyente movement (2010), motivated by liberation theology, during a march in San Cristóbal de las Casas that received global attention, highlighted how the RSC program had transformed livelihoods. RSC inhabitants subverted and evaded official regulations and criticized dominant development imaginaries. They show how selective state strategies set the corridors for action but do not fully control the political outcomes or the scales at which these are contested.

State selectivities and the relationships among and within the municipal, state, and federal levels shape the character of protestors' scalar struggles. In the case of the wind farms in Oaxaca, decisions regarding energy production (where and how) are taken in Mexico City—as energy policy is the responsibility of the federal government and thus centralized—leaving state and municipalities to deal with conflicts perceived as local. Nonetheless, the state administration of Gabino Cué Monteagudo (2010–2016), particularly the Tourism and Economic Development Ministry, sought to attract investment for infrastructural development. This aspect is relevant for struggles between the municipal and the federal/state level and the alliances of critics across scales, and actor groups (state and nonstate actors). One case in point is the fact that, as mentioned earlier, from 2013 onward, the local isthmian administration began challenging unfavorable tax distribution as part of the lack of economic benefits of wind projects at the local level (Manzo 2016). Another example is the role the municipality of Juchitán played during the consultation process. While negotiating benefits for the municipality with company representatives behind closed doors, then mayor Vicente Vázquez (2013–2015), a member of the UN Permanent Forum of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, fended off political pressure from landholders and PRI affiliates who sought to speed up the consultation process to the detriment of those demanding a more inclusive process (Friede and Lehmann 2016; Gerber 2015); he thus maneuvered state selectivities strategically by allying with different actors in varying instances of the process.

However, the Juchitán consultation has opened up space for debate and influenced initiatives for Indigenous consultation in Mexico (Zarembeg, Torres Wong, and Guarneros-Meza 2018). We observe that state actors, particularly from the Oaxacan state and national levels, did not participate as visible actors but set the framework for the supposedly free, prior, and informed consultation, thus strengthening the procedural dimension of consultation but not addressing the underlying conflicts and structural contradictions (for a comprehensive debate, see Rodríguez Garavito 2011). Similar issues concern recent calls for a national law on Indigenous consultation. Thus, planning corridors seem fixed and not subject to changing state selectivities. The terrain of debate the state provides revolves around “how-to” questions rather than a general questioning of large-scale projects. This resonates with critical studies on consultation processes.

For protest actors, this means they must carefully analyze state selectivities and strategies of scale jumping to make a claim heard. For instance, official discourses prioritize private property land use and specific imaginaries of development, illustrating state selectivities but offering a frame for criticism. Protestors in our cases consciously and frequently broadened their scalar reach and employed strategies to simultaneously appeal

to a range of institutional levels. They pursued politics of scale to mitigate their exclusion from decision-making. Particularly in the Oaxacan case, local conflicts around development projects had scalar impact beyond the local. However, the Chiapan RSCs have been slowly abandoned. This points to the power of renewable energy discourses, which push activists' claims for Indigenous rights to the margins.

Conclusion

This article has examined the discrepancy between discourses of participation and their realization in planning processes of development projects in two cases, namely wind energy projects and rural cities located in the southern Mexican states of Oaxaca and Chiapas. The governance of development projects discussed here contradicts the discourse on participation. The governance process—more than its effects—exposes the limited spaces for democratic participation in a context where structural, far-reaching questions seem to be relegated to arenas out of reach of political contestation. Participation itself becomes an exclusionary process. The violent effects of development projects (cf. Andreucci and Radhuber 2017) manifest themselves in the two cases as the reproduction of social conflict, the demobilization of autonomous organizations, and intimidation against critics. In consequence, the governance processes surrounding the implementation of wind farms in Oaxaca and rural cities in Chiapas expose very particular state-society relations based on the highly asymmetrical integration of claims by strategic actors and social forces into state policies and projects. These heterogeneous state selectivities at different institutional scales influence (potential) mobilizations against large-scale development projects.

In line with the asymmetrical integration of claims, and despite selective democratization processes in Mexico, local consultation processes in large-scale development projects have largely served to legitimize corridors of action previously approved by converging interests at various institutional scales. Differentiated state selectivities allow for greater weight and protagonism at some scales but limit access to decision-making at other scales, for instance at the local state level. By bringing together politics of scale and heterogeneous state selectivities, we can understand participation in development project planning as both local and transcending a single scale, beyond the existing focus in participation literature on the nation-state or the city. Instead, both the projects and the mobilizations against them are organized across multiple institutional levels. Knowing which scale is relevant to make their criticism heard requires careful analysis from activists and depends on context and the object of contention.

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