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# Gender and the development of handicraft production in rural Yucatán/Mexico

Eva Youkhana

Abstract	ii
Introduction	1
Conceptual and Methodological Approach	1
Tourism and handicraft production	2
Women's role in handicraft production	2
Participatory development and gender	3
Methodological approach	3
History of Handicraft Production in México and Yucatán	4
Changing values	4
Changing livelihoods	5
The Village Yaxuná and Transformations through Tourism	5
The village Yaxuná	5
History and social structure	5
Economic Activities and division of labor	6
Transformation through tourism	6
Proyecto Productivo Artesanal for Women in Yaxuná	7
Impacts of PPA	8
Capacity building and Alphabetization	8
Limits of Participatory Approaches	8
Workplace at home and family involvement	9
Market access, commercialization and dependency patterns	10
Decreasing agricultural productivity and health issues	10
Impact on gender roles	10
Conclusion	11
References	13

## Abstract

Using the example of a development project to increase tourism and improve artisan production in a Maya community, the study explores traditional gender roles and transformation processes in a village where handicraft production became the most dynamic rural economy. The study focuses on the relationship between project executors and peasant artisan women and describes processes of inclusion and exclusion that arose during project implementation. By describing the interface between the care and commodity economies, it is shown how the gendered division of labor was partly overcome, and how new dependencies arose simultaneously. Furthermore, it is documented in which way development projects are accompanied by resources appropriation of powerful interest groups.

This paper also addresses the origins of the division of labor and development of handicraft production in Yucatán and describes in how the national tourism industry is taking advantage of segments of the population to construct Mexican identity. The paper argues that the 'artinsation' of the rural indigenous population is a poor substitute for their integration into the national economy, within which women's perspective turns out to be exploited in many ways.

Keywords:

Mexico, gender, tourism, peasant artisans, participatory development

## Introduction

In Mexico, like in many developing countries and countries in transition, tourism is one of the most dynamic economic sector and is therefore an important identifier of economic and social change. Because of the rich and diverse folk culture of Mexico the production of handicrafts forms one of the most energetic activities of the tourism industry. Bringing the cultural expressions of the indigenous population to the market is an integrative part of privately or governmentally initiated rural development projects in tourism, also called ethno-tourism, cultural tourism (van den Berghe, 1995) or other forms of tourism that are supposed to be sustainable. Every region of the country, indeed almost every state, produces its own forms of commercialized popular art. Such widespread production is, however, a somewhat recent phenomenon. Literally thousands of Mexicans now derive all, or part of their livelihoods from a business they can practice at home. Not surprisingly, women's role in this newly pursued economic sector is becoming increasingly important as the traditional division of labour of rural Mexican women assigns their workplaces in the home.

The so called cultural or creative industry (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947) and the transformation of meanings by mass-produced popular art such as handicrafts have been subject to theoretical debates on the utilisation and commodification of cultural expressions within the capitalistic production processes. In the Latin American context the artisanation (Albornoz, 1996) of the rural indigenous populations to bring the indigenous cultural production to the market has been subject to a fundamental critique on the political economy of tourism (ibid, Williams, 2002), which is being understood as a substitute for poor integration of the rural indigenous population into national economies. Likewise, gendered perspectives on the continuously changing rural economy, for example of Mexico, provide interesting insights into the gender asset gap (Deere and Leon, 2003, Katz, 2001) and the societal origins of unequal gender relations.

The research, that is the basis for this paper, is derived from fieldwork of the author's doctoral thesis (1998 – 2005). Within the study questions concerning gender equity in rural Mexico, tourism and participatory approaches arose in a village, where a tourism project, led by a regional non-governmental organisation (NGO), tried to address all these development approaches in order to support an indigenous peasant community with economic alternatives. The main aim of the paper is to evaluate the impact of the development project on the village by looking at the approaches and underlying concepts in a combined way. The paper starts with some theoretical and methodological implications on tourism and handicraft production, women's role in handicraft production, participatory development and gender in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 continues with an emphasis on the development of the tourism industry in the Yucatán Peninsula, and the emergence of so called "peasant-artisans" (Cook, 1990) since colonial times in order to stress women's subordinated pathways within the cultural industry of handicraft production. Thereafter, a short description of the region, its history, economy and the historically derived gender roles will be described. By using the example of the Maya village Yaxuná this paper points to the capitalization of indigenous forms of cultural expressions. By describing the social dynamics and impacts of a tourism project the limits of participatory approaches in development are addressed. The paper concludes with an analysis of the impact of the tourism project on social life and gender relations in the village.

## Conceptual and Methodological Approach

Since Mexico's rural economy is continuously changing agriculture as the most important livelihood strategy is being partly replaced by off-farm employments also in the growing tourism industry. By that means the overwhelmingly indigenous population in rural Mexico has gained a new value for the Mexican society. The cultural expressions that have often been devaluated and disregarded in the past, are now becoming an attractive commodity for the national and international tourism market, not least because they are repacked as souvenirs and/or handicraft items. In Mexico, a new traveler category was

attracted by these exotic demonstrations of Mexicanity and soft forms of tourism, being labeled as eco-, ethno- or cultural tourism, evolved during the last two decades.

As such, tourism is utilized as a rural development strategy that is not just conveyed by an international donor community, but also reflected in national policies and programs of the Mexican government to promote regional development (Sectur, 2008). Likewise, these so called soft forms of tourism are promoted by many private initiatives and non-governmental organizations in Mexico (Youkhana, 2007). In many cases, those initiatives intend to put participatory techniques and approaches in place in order to empower marginalized groups, to include them into decision making, give them a voice and a choice. Not surprisingly, ecotourism projects and the related promotion of handicraft production for the tourism market have influenced the historically derived and traditionally deep-seated gender roles of rural Mexicans to a huge extent.

In order to combine the theoretical conceptions on tourism, handicraft production, participatory development and gender, it will be necessary to approach them separately in order to set the frame for the analysis.

## Tourism and handicraft production

According to van den Berghe (1995), Mexico is a uniquely interesting example for a country that is using ethno- or cultural tourism for the marketing of its indigenous population – forming almost 10% of the overall Mexican population. Besides criticism on the ecological impacts of alternative tourism forms and the “false labeling” (Ellenberg, 1998), being used to meet the newly defined requirements of different traveler categories, it is criticized that the contact between tourists and the indigenous populations, living in the areas of destination, can lead to the devaluation and commercialization of their cultural expressions and a loss of socio-cultural control and identity (May, 1984, Erdheim, 1993). Ethno-tourism, which is targeting the ethnic minorities of a country, may also lead to an idealization of poverty if it appears as pictorial, beautiful and close to nature (Craik, 1997).

Due to historical patterns of oppression, the ethnic minorities are currently culturally and ecologically marginalized and socially and politically discriminated. Paradoxically, this extreme marginalization constitutes the main attraction for travelers in searching for the “authentic other” (van den Berghe, 1995). Being of economic value to the Mexican society, the promotion of ethno-tourism has even led to changing attitudes towards parts of the indigenous population that has been formerly rejected by the Mexican majority of Mestizos. As van den Berghe (1995) states the indigenous population is now an asset for the Mexican economy as they attract tourists by producing shows and souvenirs. Others, such as García Canclini et al. (1995 after Albornoz, 1996) even see in the “handicraftization” of the rural and urban indigenous communities a chance for integrating them into the modern economic sectors. By virtue of handicraft production low cost jobs can be generated and practiced by a huge part of the rural indigenous population. By that means, families can re-concentrate around the activity in order to establish a complementary source of income. Likewise, the extraction and processing of raw materials can be advanced simultaneously.

## Women’s role in handicraft production

Handicraft is known as a practice that can be engaged in at home, and handicraft production most often appears as a small-scale enterprise within the households of the rural poor. Women’s role in such enterprises is increasingly important, as the traditional division of labor in rural Mexico places women’s workplaces in the home. Especially at the case in Yucatán, where more than 50 percent of the population is indigenous and lives in rural areas, women experience a strict division of labor. They are responsible for food production, child care, and families’ reproduction. Men, on the contrary, maintain the agricultural field, take care of the livestock and go hunting (Villa Rojas, 1992).

The gendered division of labor within the peasant household of Yucatán has a long tradition and is rooted in inheritance practices, land rights and land acquisition partly passed on through pre-colonial practices and colonial impositions (Deere and Leon 2003).

Being kept away from the access to land, rural women have limited opportunities to generate income. Women may leave the village in order to work in the urban service sector or manufacturing industries or they get engaged in the production of handicrafts in case they prefer to stay in their villages. The projects and programs promoted by diverse governmental and non-governmental organizations in Mexico are therefore a way to include women into the national economy without withdrawing the traditional division of labor and their role as care taker in the family. While it is obvious that liberalization and global economic forces lead to a new understanding of gender roles in rural Latin America, the question, if women are experiencing new social and economic assets by forming a major part of the tourism industry, remains unanswered. Thus, questions of power and control, inclusion and exclusion, access to markets, marginalization and participation are important aspects to be looked at. The application of participatory principles in development projects was investigated in the course of the research and will therefore gain special attention.

## Participatory development and gender

Participatory principles and the involvement of communities into development projects are currently the main strategy to development and a panacea to sustainability. The importance to include the target group and the local knowledge into development projects in general and tourism projects in particular is often stressed (Chambers, 1983, Jamal and Getz, 1995, Reed, 1997, Wichterich, 2002). The main reason why is to put the people into the centre, include them into decision making of planning and implementation processes and transfer the responsibility of tourism management into the hands of the communities. By putting the people first is expected that the empowerment of target groups lead to more sustainability and social acceptance of implemented innovations.

Notwithstanding, the theoretical debate on participatory approaches and practices in development (not just in tourism projects) has also opened up interesting aspects about the limits and drawbacks of this widespread paradigm. One line of argument points to participatory approaches linked to institutional reforms which do not acknowledge the fact that many decisions are negotiated and made outside formal organizations (Cleaver, 2001: 42) during daily interactions. These informal relationships and interactions dominate social dynamics and political decisions. Likewise, they influence the development processes and the course of the development projects. Practitioners often homogenize the target group by assuming that conditions are the same everywhere. Consequently, the same development strategies are imposed on all project communities. Participation can be understood as a political strategy to empower underprivileged groups. However, power issues, the redistribution of property rights, the transfer of authority as well as the reallocation of natural and social resources may also lead to a reassertion of powerful interest groups and to resource capture by old or new elites as Kothari (2001) points out.

As Cornwall (2003) states in her reflections on gender and participatory development that women's participation in development projects, especially those in peasant communities, are often restricted. Indigenous women are often not allowed to participate in village assemblies and have therefore limited ways to express their needs and wishes. Instead, much of their participation in public spaces depends on their husbands and/or fathers. Here, the naive assumption of many development practitioners, namely that the community is a homogenous entity, may also support the status quo that is unfavourable for women. Furthermore women do often not support project interventions that support their empowerment but "reinforce the exclusionary effects of other dimensions of difference" (Cornwall 2003). The author concludes that the focus on gender is not implicit in participatory approaches and PRA methodologies. Consequently, these differences must instead be addressed by other tools and concepts that were addressed by the methodology of the study.

## Methodological approach

In order to understand issues of gender and power within communities and processes triggered by the implementation of development projects in rural areas, the activities of a regional NGO in Yaxuná, a small Mayan village in Yucatán, was studied. Research was conducted at the planning and the installation phase of an ecotourism-project in 1998, and when funding of the project ended in 2002. A



combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in a long-term study and an actor-oriented approach (Long, 2001) turned out to be the appropriate tools to measure the social and cultural effects of such development interventions at different stages. The acceptance of different subprojects by the local population and their legitimacy articulated in knowledge about the project, continuous participation in the project and relationship with project members, were studied. Besides the importance of development brokers (Bierschenk and de Sardan, 2002), kinship and religious affiliations for the development process, the changing role of women and their new role in the production of handicrafts were investigated at the social interface (Long, 2001) of the project and the rural population.

## History of Handicraft Production in México and Yucatán

In order to better understand the function of the Mexican indigenous population in handicraft production and the role women play, it is important to review the history of handicrafts and the changing meaning of handicraft production for the Yucatec economy. In doing so, it becomes possible to understand how the tourism industry makes use of handicraft producers to socially construct Mexican identity.

### Changing values

In pre-Hispanic times, handicraft had a social function, symbolic meaning and were valued in the framework of daily consumption patterns or/and for ritual uses and ceremonial purposes (Abornoz, 1996).

Even though the Conquista and centuries of colonial rule destroyed most of the Mesoamerican cultures and art, elements of Indian and European civilization amalgamated and formed new cultural expressions. Elites of new artisans arose from migrated Spanish craftsmen, who excluded the indigenous population largely from their associations (Gormsen, 1985). Instead considerable pressure was placed on women in the peasant household to produce tributary craft commodities (Villanueva 1985, after Cook, 1990). The composition of the complex tributary economies allows us to say that peasant artisan women in Mesoamerica "has long been subject to the stresses and strains of the double burden of production for use and exchange" (Cook, 1990).

After independence in 1821 handicraft was forced back gradually by industrialisation and competition with export products and after the Revolution (1910 – 1917) it was replaced by synthetic textiles imported from Europe (Eastmond and Robert, 2000). In that period, the artisan production was continuously limited to rural indigenous regions, where daily consumption articles were still produced from pottery and weaving. Other handicraft branches were reduced to the production of commodities, to which new cultural meanings were associated by the post-revolutionary regime and its search for an integrated national identity.

The indigenous population became objects of state driven programmes and initiatives to support handicraft producers and strengthen the importance of the amplitude of the materialized cultural heritage (Gormsen, 1985). The first institute was the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), founded in 1948, where a whole department was in charge of handicraft promotion. Capacity building, organization of exhibitions and awards as well as the provision of micro-credits and other types of financial support led to a reactivation of Mexican handicraft production. INI was criticised because of its selective choice of certain communities and groups for support and because the institute provoked rivalries for the resources. Furthermore, INI became part of a bunch of middlemen and intensified therefore the structure of exploitation (Medina and Quezada, 1975, after Gormsen, 1985).

With the foundation of the Fondo Nacional de las Artesanías (FONART) in 1961 artisans were supported with credits and marketing strategies in order to open export markets for handicraft productions. In many cases FONART immediately bought products from the producers in order to keep middlemen unemployed. This practice led also to more dependence of the small scale producers on the requirements and price quote of FONART.

The most notable transformation indeed took place after the systematic introduction of tourism and the discovery of Yucatán as an international and cultural tourism destination in the 1970s because many small scale and large scale private enterprises evolved to feed the expanding tourism markets. The developments in Yucatán are described in more detail below.

## Changing livelihoods

In Yucatán, handicraft production underwent a special boom after the construction of the bathing resort Cancun on the Caribbean coast by the Mexican government in the 1970s. With the political and administrative separation of the state of Quintana Roo from the rest of the Yucatan Island, the region was systematically prepared for the desired tourism expected from the United States and Europe. Cancun and Pisté, for example, two former Maya villages, became the most important tourist attractions while multiplying their inhabitants (Gormsen, 1995, Momsen, 2002, Castaneda, 2004).

While the social impacts of tourism, economic change, and environmental degradation in tourist centres like Cancun or Pisté as well as gender inequalities in urban labor markets have been well documented, there is little data available on the development in rural areas around these centres and the coping strategies of subsistence farming villagers (Gormsen, 1995).

The peasant communities were mainly affected by unemployment with the end of the construction phase in Cancun (Cook, 1990, Castaneda, 2004). At the same time, the government began to intervene into the tourist sector and into the development of new infrastructures for better accessibility of tourist attractions. With programs like "La Ruta Maya" in the beginning of the 1990s tourism boom was extended to the rural villages in order to encourage the private sector to invest in rural areas, to strengthen the handicraft production and create a new rural economy as a substitute for the loss of jobs and perspectives in the construction and agricultural sector. Accordingly, the amount of men and women being involved in handicraft production increased significantly. By the 2000 Census of the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Geografía (INEGI) from a total of 618.000 registered workmen and -women 106.000 were artisans or worked in related jobs. 21.870 of the counted artisans were women (84.655 men). These numbers point at both, the economic importance of handicraft production for the overwhelmingly rural Yucatecans and the increasingly significant role of women in the informal sector for income generation.

## The Village Yaxuná and Transformations through Tourism

Having described the history and changing function of handicraft production in Mexico and Yucatán the attention will now be shifted to the developments in the village Yaxuná. By giving a brief overview of the history, the economic activities and the socio-cultural structure, main patterns of recent socio-economic developments will be approached. Using the example of the tourism project, established by the regional NGO Fundación Cultural Yucatán (FCY), and the role of women in handicraft production, the impact of the project on the social life and on the gender relations will be analyzed.

### The village Yaxuná

#### History and social structure

Yaxuná, a small village 30km close to the Mayan site Chichen Itza and Pisté was significantly affected by the developments described above. The Mayan village, with about 600 inhabitants in the year 2002, was until the mid 1990s rather isolated from the expanding tourism industry in the region. The main rural livelihood strategy was based on subsistence farming and milpa cultivation in the ejido system, as well as livestock breeding in the courtyard.

The village is inhabited by Maya families, who occupied the area during the War of the Castes in the mid 19th century. The timely sequences, within which families populated the village, gave way to political

power and control over land and other resources. Due to customary principles, first settlers had more political influence and power than late settlers. Patterns of in-migration combined with the pagan-Christian belief system led to social stratification in the village. The social systems survival was ensured by the controlled redistribution of wealth and a prescribed set of responsibilities or burden tied to it, also known as cargo system. Being carrier of a burden endows power and authority over generations because a burden is inheritable and can be transmitted within one family over generations. Even though the cargo system was put forward to prevent the individual accumulation of wealth it has often led to the opposite. Besides a general withdrawal of the Catholic Church within which the pagan Christian belief system could survive for Centuries, it was the massive evangelization by protestant fundamentalists and Adventists of North American origin that undermined the influence of religious authorities and cargo holders. Notwithstanding, the cargo system is until today a starting point to better understand power relations and social stratification in the village of Yaxuná.

## Economic Activities and division of labor

Agricultural productivity of the population in Yaxuná is traditionally based on a clear cut division of labor characterized by gender and age (Villa Rojas, 1978). While men are responsible for milpa cultivation and works related to agricultural production, women are taking care of the household and the children and are carrying out any reproductive work in the home, like cooking, washing and making tortillas. Craft production is part of the material reproduction and is, as such, in many cultures under the area of responsibility of women, also in Yucatán (Espinosa, 2002, Cook, 1990) and Yaxuná. The production of clothes and embroidery, for example, has always been female's duties, whereas men use to cut and process leather, make candles, hats and other products of hemp. The family based economy includes men and women of all ages into the production process. Children start in the age of 7 or 8 to either follow the father into the milpa or, as a girl, help the mother within the household or taking care of younger children. Older family members are always engaged in assisting their children and nieces as long as they can. In return, children are taking care of their parents if required. The inclusion of the entire family into the production process is also a precondition for the productivity of peasant-artisans, as will be described later on.

In Yaxuná many agricultural households have had access to governmental subsidies and credits for agricultural production through the state driven aid program PROCAMPO. Almost all households in Yaxuná stated to be receiver of the poverty reduction program. Few men migrated to Cancun or Pisté for seasonal employments in the construction industry, when these communities were developed for the growing tourism market.

## Transformation through tourism

Even though famous anthropologists like Morley, and Redfield as well as the well known Mexican ethnographer Villa Rojas already classified the area as an important ancient Mayan heritage in the 1920s (Ortegón Zapata, 1993), the importance of the site increased when a Mayan ruin and an ancient paved road, connecting Cóba and Yaxuná in Mesoamerican times, was found next to the village and exarvated by a group of north American archeologists. During excavation works financed by the north American SELZ-Foundation and backed by the state of Yucatán and the National Institute for Anthropology and History (INAH) in the years 1986, 1988, 1989 and 1990-1996 the majority of the male villagers (up to 90%) were involved in the archeological works. By that means, men learned how to treat archeological troves and how to measure their value.

Women, in contrary, were employed as household maids for the scientists. This reproductive labor was, with respect to the capacity building activities of the men, a subordinated exercise. Looking at the traditional division of labor in the village these services were assigned to women because it was socially expected that they carry out the major share of domestic tasks (Youkhana, 2007). However, both, male and female employees were paid according to the then defined national minimum salary of 35 Mexican pesos daily. According to the compared declarations of the villagers in the years 1998 and 2002 the employments helped to overcome climatically caused harvest losses and extreme poverty (ibid). Ideas to

implement a sustainable tourism project came up and were discussed between the authorities of the community and the North American scientists in order to attract alternative income sources.

In the year 1996, when INAH detached the American archeologists from the excavation works, the regional NGO Fundación Cultural Yucatán (FCY) was introduced to Yaxuná by the archeologists in order to follow the sustainable tourism initiative. By that time, already one third of the interviewed households were involved in the production of carved Mayan idols, an economic engagement spilled over from nearby developments in the tourist Center of Pisté. With the production of embroidering articles, especially huipiles, known as the traditional and contemporary dress of Mayan women, another income generating activity was pursued by more than 80% of the households. One explanation for this increase in handicraft production is related to the tourism projects and programs in the framework of the Ruta Maya initiative, and the development of new markets for handicraft articles. Another reason for the expansion of artisan peasant households is also the decline of the agricultural productivity after economic and climatic threats (Castaneda, 2004, Youkhana, 2007) and the need to search for new income generating activities.

With the financial support of the federal Programa de Apoyo a las Comunidades Municipales y Culturales (PACMYC) women received raw materials for handicraft production in the late 1990s. Most of the artisan products were commercialized in Mérida, Cancún or Pisté by either middlemen or by male household heads. Those were already used to the wholesaling in urban centers. During the study in the years from 1998 to 2002 female artisans achieved 100 to 120 Mexican Pesos for one perfectly composed huipil. Assuming five working hours a day, it took two weeks to complete one dress with a salary far below the fixed minimum salary in Mexico of 35 Pesos a day.

The described off-farm employments, being provided by the north American Archaeologists, helped all families in Yaxuná to better maintain their livelihoods in times when the agricultural yield was insufficient for subsistence (Youkhana, 2007). Strict participatory principles guided the works at the ruins. An operational rotation ensured that every men and household was equally integrated in the works. The same procedure was applied to the women being employed as maids. The labor work allowed most of the women to generate their own income, a exceptional experience. But, the experiences made with off-farm employments also showed negative effects on the lives of the villagers. It was observed that a huge part of the population partly shifted their economic orientation and simply replaced agricultural activities with the provided labor work. Furthermore, the regularly paid salaries became habit-forming in a way that most of the households could not make up their living without these additional income.

## Proyecto Productivo Artesanal for Women in Yaxuná

At the beginning of the tourism project women were the main target group for the overall development objectives. The NGO, mainly financed by private donations of Yucatan's Coca Cola branch and its representatives, aimed at encouraging women to enter into commercial embroidery. Thus, technical capacities, raw materials and other necessary resources for the production process were provided. The NGO also offered support for active marketing and selling of the commodities at local markets. In the medium-term, economic cooperatives with a legal basis were to be created. In the framework of the so called Proyecto Productivo Artesanal (PPA), the FCY established workplaces in the center of the colonial village by creating three working groups, one group for machine embroidering, one group for hand embroidering and another group for wood carving. Support of the working groups was also provided by political activists and was connected to activities during municipal elections. The ruling municipal party, for example, donated sewing machines in search for voters.

The activities around the PPA showed a significant impact. In 1998, 106 female adults in Yaxuná were registered in one of these working groups, which was close to a 100% involvement. Thereupon, the NGO hired professionals to build capacities and develop new handicraft designs and styles, not least in order to strengthen the women for the commercialization of their handicraft products. It was targeted that the handicraft articles reflect the authentic natural surrounding of the region in order to give a picture of

the handicraft tradition of the Maya. Additionally, the products were supposed to reflect the natural and social world of the Maya by describing regional animals and symbols of the pagan-Christian belief system. This staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1976) was supposed to conquer solvent tourism markets on the long run.

In addition, an alphabetization campaign was initiated to reduce the number of illiterates within the mainly Maya speaking females in Yaxuná. The FCY employed a Maya speaking instructor and his wife who were employed and partly lived for the next three years in the village. The couple also provided hygiene education, established courses for a better agricultural use of the courtyard and initiated a young women's project for poultry breeding. Due to the FCY this last mentioned initiative was meant to cover all, mainly younger, females who were, by virtue of their age, excluded from the PPA.

Over a period of five years the female artisans of Yaxuná produced far more than 60.000 handicraft articles, which were collected by the FCY at a quality dependent price. In the average, each artisan women produced about 20 articles a month, for which they earned between 140 and 200 Pesos at large. To avoid overproduction the amount of articles taken was limited. After a three years period of practice and capacity building first cooperatives were established and got registered at the regional finance office. The cooperatives were administered by a president, a secretary and a treasurer. The owners of these administrative functions represented the group to the public and also maintained liaison to the members of the FCY. These associations were the basis for the upcoming patron-client relationships between the project practitioners and the village elites which is described in the next chapter.

## Impacts of PPA

So far, the project could be interpreted as an example for a successfully implied development initiative to reduce poverty. In fact, 5 years after the tourism project was implemented most of the interviewed villagers expressed their disappointment in many ways. Thus, the PPA turned out to be an economic trap for a huge part of the Yaxuná women who became handicraft producers under the direction of the FCY. In addition, conflicts increased as a result of failed participatory approaches (Youkhana, 2007). The analysis points at different weaknesses of the approach that was applied by the FCY. In the following, the failings are discussed in detail.

## Capacity building and Alphabetization

Even though almost all women joined alphabetization courses between 1998 and 2002 most of the interviewed females declared to be still illiterate in 2002. Instead of learning how to write and read, women were trained to control their signature. Because of the high illiteracy rate and widespread ignorance of Spanish among women over 30 the language lessons turned out to be a difficult undertaking, and not as unproblematic, as expected. The lectures were given once a week for an evening hour which turned out to be insufficient to train, what was missed during the last decades. Furthermore, most of the targeted women could not join the classes because of household tasks and child care. In that respect women faced the double or even triple burden that is often typical for rural women in developing countries (see also Williams, 2002). By carrying out most of the domestic tasks, taking care of children and at the same time, working as artisans, there was neither space nor energy to get alphabetized in a foreign language. As a matter of fact, most of the interviewed women failed to join the lectures regularly and simply lost track.

## Limits of Participatory Approaches

The members of the FCY followed a participatory approach by making the effort to involve all women into the artisan project. While in 1998 almost every household was represented by one female in one of the artisan groups, in 2002 more than half of the counted 106 organized artisan women had abandoned

their groups or were forced to leave. These developments are based upon two main reasons that are both connected with the social structure in the village.

Immediately after their implementation the working groups were led by a clique of women, who were powerful in terms of kinship, religious affiliations and their favorable relationship to members of the NGO. These women hold official functions and, at the same time, were acting as brokers between the NGO and other group members. Slowly, they gained more and more influence on the production and commercialization processes of the handicrafts. The president of the group controlled the quality and quantity of the products. Those women whose works were considered as poorly wrought or sparse in multitude were kicked out of the group. By this practice all groups lost quickly their high memberships. At the same time, the remaining members could improve their competing interests with regard to the handicraft sales to the FCY.

Unfortunately, the FCY missed the fact that certain interest groups gained high influence on the production process by systematically excluding women who belonged to the wrong families and networks. The NGO did not respond to polarization of women in participants and non-participants and did not adopt their information and communication structures and by that means their networking. As a result, any new project or information did not address those, who were previously excluded from the share. Members of the FCY in charge of the PPA paid no attention to the conflicts that arose. Instead, they made use of the powerful interest groups who could facilitate the access to the village and helped the project executors to carry through their development agenda. By the emergence of congenial bonds (*compadrazgo*) the cooperation between powerful brokers and NGO members got institutionalized through which certain facets of patron-client relationships could be established after some years of cooperation.

## Workplace at home and family involvement

In 1998, the FCY constructed a central workplace for women in the centre of the village. The female artisans used the place for meetings and workshops, as a storage room and for advanced trainings. In addition, a library was established in order to give children the opportunity to make their homework and be close to their mothers during the production of handicrafts. At the very beginning, women used this infrastructure to leave home for a while, meet others and escape from isolation. Many interviewed women indicated that this infrastructure was welcome and fairly used and that it gave them the opportunity to follow personal interests far away from male control and paternalism.

In 2002 the library was most of the time abandoned. This unintended development track can be explained by the emergence of conflicts between different interest groups, caused by either personal disparities, or, as mentioned before, the aim to reduce membership and exclude certain individuals from the project. Unless an event was to be attended, women avoided the meeting point. Instead, they worked at home, where, besides all the benefits, also specific production costs were involved. For example, chances to upgrade skills or exchange experiences with other practitioners were cut off. Likewise, the opportunity to get organized in cooperatives and to market the products decreased. Another disadvantage was related to the productivity as the amount of space and time to work efficiently was limited.

While the workplaces were shifted towards the home, also children started to produce handicrafts under conditions that can neither be considered as safe nor suitable for children. Like their parents, children used sharp knives and toxic substances to accomplish the work. However, parents did not know or inform about the risks connected with the handicraft production process. The integration of the family had also a negative influence on the quality of the products. Just a minor part of the producers joined the courses where basic skills about tools and their treatment were shared. In addition, the focus was put on quantity rather than on quality. The fact that the handicrafts were low in quality resulted in bad commercialization, as stated by one member of the FCY, who was responsible for marketing activities.

## Market access, commercialization and dependency patterns

Even though attempts were made to improve market access, marketing was one of the most challenging parts of the commercialization process. According to members of the FCY in the year 2002 more than 60.000 handicrafts were stored in the nearby provincial capital Mérida. As the FCY undertook the role of a non-profit middleman who bought and stored the products, the women got used to a regular delivery area. Because of artificial but preferable conditions the families could improve their livelihoods on the one hand. On the other hand, women became dependent on the willingness and the ability of the FCY to buy the products.

This holds also true for the women's capability to arrange with a cooperative at a legal basis, with lots of liabilities involved. The implicated responsibilities, like bookkeeping and the need to pay fees, turned out to be a difficult exercise. The registered groups accumulated outstanding debts and, by the end of the project, dropped behind the magisterial demands. Because of the difficulties for women to deal with the legal and financial requirements and because of the lack of market access the PPA failed to become self-sustaining.

## Decreasing agricultural productivity and health issues

Due to the job opportunities offered by the FCY and the US-American archeologists, the villagers gained a new source of continuous income, which seemed to become indispensable for their every day life. In 1998, most households appreciated the various initiatives because life could be improved.

Notwithstanding, the acceptance and legitimacy of the artisan project PPA decreased at the end of the support of the FCY in 2002. By that time the support turned out to be an economic trap, as just a precarious few women were incorporated into the projects and benefits were shared by particular families. As a matter of fact, most of the interview partners expressed their disappointment about the course of the PPA. Most interviewees stated the increase of conflicts between women, which also reflected deep-rooted power struggles between certain families and individuals in the village. The artisan project became a most welcome ground to continue with practices of social in- and exclusion. Whereas the artisan production increased constantly, agricultural activities decreased concomitantly. In 1998, for example, the households in Yaxuná cultivated 4 hectare of land in the average to maintain their subsistence. In 2002, it was in the average one hectare less. According to the interviews many agricultural fields remained uncultivated, because the production of handicrafts was experienced by many villagers as a more easy way to make the living.

According to the doctor at the medical centre of the village children's well being suffered most from the new situation. More cokes and cafés were consumed, which could be afforded by the new income sources. In contrary, less breast feeding, seen as an antagonistic alimentation was practiced. In 2002 more children suffered from malnutrition than during the 1990s, when less monetary funds were available and peoples' alimentation was mainly based on subsistence farming.

## Impact on gender roles

The impact of the PPA and the new income generating facilities for women on families and gender relations in the village are difficult to measure. In Yaxuná, the developments observed that can be regarded as intended and latent implications.

Not remarkably, for those women, who remained involved in the project, stated that the new income opportunities showed a positive effect on their economic situation. Because the monetary situation improved, families could improve their living standard in a considerable way. These families reconstructed their houses, built new ones, bought luxury goods, like HiFi Systems or televisions. The basis for foodstuffs also shifted from self made agricultural products to modern industrial products, a fact that built the fundament for more efficiently operating shops in the village. These improvements did not just follow the initiated artisan project PPA but also private initiatives which were launched thereupon. In comparison to the so called marketing procedures at the PPA, the private enterprises, with

some exceptions controlled by men, had to compete on the free market. Thus, the production process was adjusted to the demand for the products and was therefore economically more stable and far sighted.

Nevertheless, the new income sources generated with handicrafts encouraged the women in the village and strengthened their role within the family. At the beginning of the project in 1998, when women left home to join workshops and lectures, men got used to also take care of the children, to wash the clothes, to cook the meals. According to one interviewee, just tortilla baking remained merely women's obligation. Women and their duties seemed to be more respected and, men, at least some of them, more willing to take over unpaid domestic tasks.

Still, in some cases men also reacted contrariwise to the developments and became jealous and domineering. Violations emerged in families, where women's function as breadwinner improved and displaced men's importance for income generation. One of the interviewed women, endorsed by her parents, managed to break up with her violent husband. Looking at this case, the historical derived gender roles could partly be overcome in favour of the woman.

## Conclusion

Looking at the historical background and political economy of handicraft production in Mexico, we can identify some continuity by looking at the role of women in the handicraft business of Yaxuná. While lots of pressure was placed on women to produce handicraft commodities in the past, the women of Yaxuná experienced comparable strains in present day. Like the Spanish officials, who provided raw materials to peasant women of highland Maya, the FCY took over a similar position by equipping and schooling the Maya women in Yaxuná to meet the increasing requirements in handicraft production. When the beneficial aspects of the protected and subsidized handicraft projects such as input of raw material and regular income disappeared, the women again became subject to the stresses of the double burden of household tasks and off-farm production processes.

The study also documents a complex network of patron-client relationships (Foster, 1977, Gonzales, 1972), which influenced the strategies, methods and direction of the participatory development project for artisan women. Strategic relations between powerful interest groups and project leaders determined the development of the project and the allocation of project resources. While powerful and privileged actors were able to influence project policies and participated in decision - making processes, village members of less political influence and economic means were widely excluded. Local as well as expert knowledge was exchanged selectively, largely to the disadvantage of those, who were politically and economically less endowed. The findings of this study clearly show that communities can not be conceived as homogeneous entities, but that especially pro-poor projects, for their successful implementation, need to gather deeper insight into socio-cultural structures and village dynamics and the interests and rationalities of different local actors, in order to be able to effectively promote disadvantaged members of the community.

The analysis of the artisan production groups for women highlights the perspectives and chances for systematically implemented handicraft production as well as the associated risks. It seems that the creation of cooperatives with legal backup and cost-effective rules was not the right way for the mainly inexperienced women to get better organized. Since the NGO was not aware of the context specific and socio-cultural conditions within the village and the heterogeneity of the social groups this western conception and rather bureaucratic course of regimentation had to fail on the long run. The study also points at the difficulties for ethnic minorities in general and indigenous women in particular, to face the challenges of the newly established tourism market. As paternalism and dependency still describes the relationship between the indigenous rural population and the majority of the Mexican society, no self-sufficient private enterprises, as promoted by the FCY, could be established. New dependencies, as described at the example of the PPA, are likely to happen when management capacities are not developed properly. As most of the older and mid aged women in Yaxuná had not enjoyed appropriate schooling, they could not advance with the requirements of a legally based cooperative.



Because the FCY created a virtual market without substantiate market access the women's businesses were prone to failures. The intention to develop marketing strategies without having explored the market led to short-sighted behaviour of the producers and their intermediary. As such, the FCY emphasized its paternalistic conduct and the historical derived way of dealing with subordinated ethnic minorities in Mexico. Here, a comparison with the historical patterns of disciplining indigenous women for handicraft production, as introduced by the Spanish officials in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Villanueva, 1985, after Cook, 1990) and by FONART in the early 1960s, indicates that the driving forces behind handicraft production for commercial purposes has not been changed. The case shows that cultural and human resources are utilized and commercialized, without increasing participatory and decision - making capacities accordingly. Against this background, the example of Yaxuná shows in how dependencies within the Mexican society are still established. The developments in Yaxuná also hint at the double and triple burden of peasant artisan women by being piled in to act between the care and the commodity economies in tourism.

By introducing new handicraft designs the FCY also 'folklorized' the cultural expressions of the Mayan villagers. By that means a reevaluation of the symbolic meanings, being materialized in handicrafts, was conveyed. Previously understood as a religious form of expression within the pagan-Christian belief system, handicraft was now transformed to a market oriented activity - the production of commodities for the tourism market. The capitalization of the everyday life in Yaxuná led to a marketable illusion of authenticity and an 'artificialization' of local cultural expressions. In that respect the projects, introduced by the FCY destroyed some of the cultural manifestations as well as their social and ritual meanings. By incorporating the marginalized indigenous population into the rural tourism industry they became subject to the social construction of Mexican identity. By simulating a nonexistent market and by creating new dependencies through the benevolent purchasing of the handicraft products the FCY also concealed the current agricultural problems in rural Mexico in general and the village in particular. The 'artinisation' and inclusion of the rural indigenous population into the tourism industry can be interpreted as an attempt to absorb the consequences of their economic disintegration. In fact, the shift from subsistence farmers to handicraft producers is a poor substitute for their little integration into the national economy, as reported for Yaxuná.

As I could show in the study, paternalism, the lack of education and capacities to maintain a business, as well as the double burden as caretaker and breadwinner constrained the women's participation in a certain way. Even though the women seem to be amenable to the transformations carried on by the FCY at the beginning, most of them were disabused at the end. Women, who belonged to the wrong kin or belief system, decreased their prospects for participation because powerful interest groups kicked them from the promising developments. The hope for economic independence, which was expressed in 1998, was dashed and gave way to resignation and frustration.

Still, the artisan projects also contributed to a positive change in both, the enhancement of self assurance of women and the ability to reflect their imposed roles and functions within the family structure. The new source of income and the women's contribution to the household income gave women more autonomy to decision making and therefore a better standing within the family structure. It is all the more distressing that production facilities were provided and new designs developed, without exploring the market for these new articles. No thriving marketing and the lack of access to national and international markets did not just limit the success of the project but carried the endeavors of both, the NGO and the women, add absurdum. Looking at these dynamics it remains questionable if development projects which solely focus on tourism markets can effectively substitute subsistence farming and objectively meet the expectations of peasants, be it men or women, to improve their livelihoods.

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