Participatory videos as a creative research method to reveal tensions in community forest management

The case of the Chiquitano peoples of Lomerio, Bolivia

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THE CONSERVATION, MARKETS AND JUSTICE PROJECT

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LOMERIO INDIGENOUS TERRITORY, BOLIVIA

- Location: Santa Cruz Department, Ñuflo de Chávez Province.
- Number of communities: 29
- Legal ownership since 2006
- Local organization: CICOL (Central Indígena de Lomerio)
- Population: 5445 hab.
- Extension: 259.188 has
• Dry tropical forests with great biodiversity, still considerably intact and unique.

• Forest species of high commercial value due to the endemism of this forest type in Bolivia.

• High level of autonomy in forest management.

• Increasing pressure from external stakeholders (wood pirating).

• 23 community forest management plans.

CONSERVATION + MARKET = JUSTICE
WHY PARTICIPATORY VIDEO AS A RESEARCH METHOD

• Indigenous participation and autonomy as a central part of current politics in Latin America.

• Participatory research as tool for change since the 1970s.

• CICOL as co-investigators in the whole process.

• Need for developing a research process locally relevant.

• Need for practice based research methods that allow to un-earth justice claims and tensions and make them visible outside but also to incite critical reflection at the community level to instigate change.
THREE VIDEOS

CICOL Members

HISTORY OF LOMERIO VIDEO

FOREST MANAGEMENT VIDEOS

Santo Rosario Village

Todos Santos Village
THE PV PROCESS IN A NUT SCHELL
1. GAMES: LEARNING BY DOING
2. PARTICIPATORY ANALYSIS

Time Line

Community mapping

Actor Diagram

Problem tree
3. THE STORY LINE
4. THE FILMING
5. THE SCREENING
Videos as part of the ethnography methodology:

• On screen vs. off screen stories

• Public vs. private voices

• The role of iteration and reflection in the process
TENSIONS THAT ARE REVEALED
HISTORY VIDEO

• Long history of oppression with previous land owners, patron-slave relationships.

• The long struggle for territorial demand and ownership.

• Current struggles for indigenous territorial autonomy. National political context unfavourable for the consolidation of indigenous autonomy.

• Leadership tensions: different way of telling parts of the story (e.g. process of conformation of indigenous municipally).

• Loss of identity and collective memory: younger generations are oblivious of struggles of their elders for the land. Take their current rights for granted.

• The making of the video shows the need to remember the past, in order to revitalise identity and have a clear view of a desired future.
• Perverse relations of domination of timber companies over villagers (very inequitable negotiations when selling timber, unequal access to forest markets): still “slaves in their own land”.

• Tight regulations and demand for technical procedures from the central government in forestry management, which take away local control of the activity and subjects villagers to very expensive fines when forestry procedures are not correctly followed.

• Land and forest ownership are no guarantee of local control over the resource.

• Injustices have lead to working at a loss.

• Inter-generational tension over forest use:
  – Elder ask: Is it really worth it? Forest should not to be sold.
  – Elders claim they are excluded from forest benefit distribution.
WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED (1)

About the Process:
• Crucial to have CICOL as local partners.
• Prior phase of ethnographic research was key to have a good base line understanding of issues, power dynamics and stratification differences at the community level.

About the co-production of knowledge:
• Powerful tool to cede control of research to community (a way of democratising science)
• Helps build trust and collaboration very quickly.
• Its a fun and dynamic way to co-produce knowledge
• Final product accessible to oral cultures
• Makes the co-construction of knowledge of great local relevance and significance
About a technology driven method:

• Fear of technology is lost very quickly. The method is appropriated by all sectors (men, women, youngsters, elders) very quickly.
• Editing is a tricky part, with potentially little local control.

About its value incentivising reflexivity and dialogue:

• So far it has helped to clarify internal (leadership, intergenerational and gender) tensions
• We are still to see if it will help clarify tensions with outsiders (next outreach phase)
Thank you!!!

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