

## **Carrots and Sticks: Reconciling Stakeholder Interests in Cultural Landscapes**

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Over the past two decades, the concept of “cultural landscape” has become increasingly accepted in the international conservation field as designating spaces where interaction between man and nature is the attribute or characteristic worthy of protection. It reflects a movement away from an earlier duality of man/nature which directed attention to either the built or natural environment, leaving in limbo places where the use, even reshaping, of the natural environment has been a critical element in human history. Since the 1992 decision by UNESCO to include cultural landscapes as eligible for World Heritage status, more than fifty such sites have gained recognition. It was not until 2006, with the designation of the Agave Fields and Ancient Industrial Facilities of Tequila, along the Tequila River in Jalisco, that Mexico gained its first cultural landscape designation. At a global and national level, therefore, there is far less experience managing cultural landscapes than the traditional designations for nature, or for the built environment. This lack of experience in what is arguably a more complex management arena than human or natural sites makes efforts to advance cultural landscape status as particularly worthy of attention.

In Mexico thinking about the specific array of management issues presented by cultural landscapes is still very much in its infancy. *Patrimonio y Paisajes Culturales* (Thiebaut, Sanchez, and Jimenez 2008), a product of Mexico’s first organized symposium on the subject, captures a wide-ranging debate as scholars and practitioners, particularly archeologists, duel over lines of responsibility and authority. In this respect, the very notion of a “cultural landscape” highlights a larger tension between two agencies superimposed on an institutional framework which seeks to resolve jurisdictional matters by assigning exclusivity rather than promoting collaboration. To the extent effective management requires cross-disciplinary and inter-agency practice there is little organization history to guide collaboration among the social sciences, hard sciences, and humanities.

### **The Yagul-Mitla corridor**

Approximately twenty-five miles east of the World Heritage site of Monte Alban and the city of Oaxaca de Juarez, a narrow valley paralleling the Tlacolula Valley is flanked by caves showing signs of continuing human habitation dating from 10,000 BC. In the 1960s research by archeologist Kent Flannery (1986) and others documented the extensive use early hunter-gathers made of the region’s resources, and the gradual transition from passive appropriation of what could be found there to active manipulation of the resource base to support an increasingly sedentary population. In time significant human settlements emerged at Yagul and Mitla, at opposite ends of the valley, and for this reason current research and protection projects refer to it as the Yagul-Mitla corridor to differentiate its

space from the neighboring and far larger Tlacolula Valley. While the archeological sites marked by material remains are quite small and generally in, or associated with caves, the entire corridor covers more than 10,000 acres and spreads across four municipalities. Its size and accessibility makes it important for grazing, resource extraction, and significant tourism at Yagul and Mitla. Legal ownership of the land rests with the municipalities or with ejidos, collective land-holding units created by the national government after the Mexican Revolution and important entities supporting local agriculture.

### **Jurisdictional matters**

In this setting the concept of cultural landscape provokes persistent and seemingly intractable debates because of the way in which Mexican law and historic practice assigns responsibility. The Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) has responsibility for the protection of natural resources, with the National Commission on Protected Natural Areas (CONANP) being the operational arm addressing protected areas, including potentially the Yagul-Mitla Corridor. SEMARNAT and CONANP are staffed heavily by biologists and physical scientists, and their frame of reference is defined both by disciplinary training and by critical pieces of legislation addressing protection of the natural environment. Archeological resources, defined as material remains, are under the jurisdiction of the National Commission on Culture (CONACULTA), with operational responsibility assigned to the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) under the Federal Law for Archeological, Historical, and Artistic Monuments (1972). INAH's staff is heavily archeologists, anthropologists, and architects. Thus one federal department has jurisdiction over landscapes, while a second has jurisdiction over culture, unlike the fused responsibility of the National Park Service.

While these agencies have jurisdiction and responsibility legally, lands in the corridor are owned and under the control of the municipalities and ejidos. This is common in Mexico, where national parks and archeological zones are established via presidential proclamation, but ownership continues to be local. In effect the federal agencies have the obligation to protect resources, but in practice must depend on local governments to enforce the law. Despite their status, professionalism, and theoretically superior resource base, the federal agencies commonly find themselves with few incentives (carrots) or sanctions (sticks) to achieve cooperation from local governing bodies, which are experienced in resisting pressures from outsiders seeking compliance with laws created far away, on the basis of priorities rarely reflecting community interests. In Oaxaca, municipal and ejido officials frequently cut off discussion with outsiders by shifting from Spanish to local indigenous languages, such as Zapotec or Mixtec, effectively terminating communication (Robles 1998, 72).

Although this would seem to place a premium on fostering negotiating skills, and a collaborative orientation among federal employees charged with managing the relationship with local actors, a long tradition of top-down control centered in Mexico City continues to discourage this. For example, INAH runs its own university, the National School of Anthropology and History (ENAH), located in Mexico City, and generally staffed by faculty drawn from INAH's central office. While this arrangement builds staff identification with the agency, it does not encourage empathy for community-level governance. Personnel from

SEMARNAT also find efforts to assert control over local resources foundering from lack of communication and cooperation. Federal agencies have their principal offices in the state capital, meaning local officials called for meetings may never appear, while staff who drive out to communities discover the people they seek are exceedingly difficult to find, or who argue that while they personally would be happy to help, community sentiment does not permit it.

Other governmental actors also claim space in the jurisdictional arena. At the federal level the Secretary of Communications and Transportation (SCT) has been pushing the construction of a new highway which would pass within yards of some caves, threatening to damage them with blasting, or bury them with construction debris. While sympathetic to the arguments for landscape protection, the agency's mission is to build roads on time and within budget, making detours and delay difficult arguments to sell. Political parties courting voters become advocates for communities and groups wishing to promote some policies or oppose others. A call from a representative in the Chamber of Deputies to the head of CONANP or INAH quickly prompts a follow-up to local agency heads, and these may become risk-adverse in the face of pressures to avoid possible political controversy.

### **Land use and tourism potential**

Two issue areas increasing the number of stakeholders in the corridor have to do with land use, and with the potential for tourism development. While their formal landholdings are limited, INAH and CONANP have significant legislative authority to regulate land use within the formal boundaries of areas they have been designated to protect, and these can have important consequences for local populations. They may determine whether one can cut trees for firewood or other uses, build a house, extract stone, or engage in other activities putting archeological artifacts at risk, or disturbing the environment. In turn the ability to make maximum use of every available resource becomes critical to household survival in semi-arid climates; taking goats out to graze may seem quaintly pastoral to agency managers in Mexico City, but a critical component of family economies in Villa Diaz Ordaz or in Union Zapata. Biologists may seek limits on grazing to reduce damage to endangered plants, while archaeologists may worry about site vulnerability to erosion, but their ability to control such uses will rest less on what the law says than on their capacity to explain and convince. Thus cultural landscape protection reaches beyond local governments to an array of formal and informal actors with highly-specific sets of interests.

If concerns over land use bring forth some sets of stakeholders focused on traditional matters of agriculture and resource extraction, other stakeholders appear when there is even a breath of opportunity to take advantage of potential tourist income. Over the past generation, the Oaxaca Valley has become increasingly dependent on tourist spending as a source of economic growth and employment. As one of the anchors in the Yagul-Mitla corridor, the community of Mitla has experienced a spectacular transformation over the past fifty years as an increasing flow of visitors to its well-known archeological zone promotes the expansion of services and commerce, a more urban lifestyle, and a transformation of work life. Fifty years ago, fifteen percent of the population worked in the service sector, while almost everyone else worked in agriculture; today those percentages are reversed. And the prosperity of nearby Teotitlan del Valle, where weavers with international reputations and client lists to match,

drive late-model SUVs and send their children to universities, is well known throughout the valley.

If local farmers hope tourism will generate employment as taxi drivers for their sons and store clerks for their daughters, the close alignment of the Oaxaca Secretary of Tourism Development (SEDETUR) with the hotel, restaurant, and tour industry in the city of Oaxaca boosts expectations among its client groups. Only a small fraction of the visitors to Mitla, and almost none of the visitors to Teotitlan, stay in those places. Their service center is the city of Oaxaca, and service providers there wish to see that continue. The push, therefore, is to make the Yagul-Mitla corridor as visitor accessible and friendly as possible, although doing so may overwhelm the fragile ecology of the place. Parking lots, paved roads and trails, and carefully-groomed visitor services would support a major tourist flow. From a visitor standpoint there are no pyramids, churches, or craft shops as obvious points of interest, so without investment in interpretive services and comfort, it is not clear the corridor will be a major tourist attraction. At the Monte Alban Archeological Zone, the push to increase visitor through-put means INAH must invest an increasing percentage of its zone budget in visitor services, e.g., trucking in water for the sanitary facilities, even though tourist income flows primarily to the service providers rather than INAH (Jiménez 2006, 152).

### **Management challenges**

There are several serious management planning challenges emerging from efforts to protect the cultural landscape of the Yagul-Mitla corridor. The first of these is to resolve the issue of jurisdiction. Should the corridor be managed as a protected landscape, where space and scale promote the priorities of SEMARNAT and CONANP, or is it really a place where the cultural dimensions of human agency should be given primacy, an argument favoring INAH? Is there a need for a new kind of managerial structure, and who will provide that, under what authority? While both SEMARNAT and CONACULTA have resource protection responsibilities, they may interpret them differently. INAH may see cacti growing on ancient walls as a threat to their integrity which must be removed, while CONAPO regulations see the walls as part of a physical context for a biological resource, and it is the resource which merits priority, not the physical context.

A related managerial challenge is the rather narrow preparation of most Mexican resource professionals. Archeologists receive outstanding training in archeological subject matter and techniques, but little in cultural resources management. Biologists or foresters have much the same experience. In arenas such as cultural landscape protection they have little preparation to work across disciplinary boundaries, and lack training enabling them to draw on data from a variety of sources. More training in plant cell structure does not prepare a botanist to work with tourism planners, nor does advanced training in lithics help archeologists negotiate with local community leaders. To the extent that one of the dominant characteristics of the Yagul-Mitla corridor is its institutional and organizational complexity, effective management will require breaking out of traditional “silos” which constrain action.

Still a third managerial challenge is the development of a more productive arsenal of carrots and sticks. The regulatory sticks currently available are difficult to use because in the end they depend very much on the willingness of local governments to act as enforcers for

federal agencies, something which holds little appeal for locals. And not only are there few carrots, but even these are disappearing. At the Monte Alban Archeological Zone, one carrot encouraging productive relationships with local governments was the prospect of hiring people from the communities owning the land to do maintenance, janitorial work, and offer other services (Robles and Corbett, forthcoming). But national government efforts to promote uniformity and reduce possible corruption now requires such services to be issued via competitive bidding in Mexico City. From a community standpoint, a carrot has been ripped from its hands and awarded to outsiders. More centralized management, in the end, can work against, not for, resource protection.

Finally, promoting cultural landscape protection will require more systematic attention to working with those interests and communities who see themselves as the ultimate owners and stewards of the landscape. The Pueblos Mancomunados, a group of communities in the mountains adjacent to the Yagul-Mitla corridor, manage their land base as a common unit to gain the advantage of economies of scale and otherwise capture the resource flow. They charge visitors an access fee to hike or mountain bike in their communities, have their own guide service, and offer a network of cabins where visitors can stay. The goals are to protect the resource base and to generate employment as an alternative to emigration. To date, federal agencies have resisted payments or supplemental fees to local communities where an overt federal presence is involved, but it will be difficult to deprive communities with lands in the corridor of access to the resources on them. Failure to create such a system at the Monte Alban Archeological Zone may be one reason why there are recurring skirmishes between INAH and local groups over land use and access to opportunities.

### Final thoughts

Cultural landscape protection opens some new challenges for Mexico. In the case of the Tequila region of Jalisco, the high-value product which gives the area its fame provides an incentive for collaboration among stakeholders. It is easy to see the outcome as more than the sum of its parts. That kind of outcome is far more difficult to imagine in the Yagul-Mitla corridor, reducing the motivation to overcome traditional obstacles to joint action. Yet it is difficult to imagine long-term collaboration being effective without a specific, consensus-based strategy which brings all the stakeholders to a common table, providing them with a process and an outcome acceptable across the board.

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