# Dimensions of Development

## Culture, Neoliberalism and Conflict in Chiapas, Mexico

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## Summary

This study demonstrates the benefits of introducing culture into development policy analysis. In order to do so, it begins by exploring the concepts of culture and development in order to reach working definitions. Next, the study constructs a conceptual framework for policy analysis that relates culture and development. The framework consists of four dimensions of development (production, distribution, governance and culture) and a cultural base that can be affected by policies adopted in any dimension. It is argued that the cultural elements of the framework are in charge of ensuring the fulfilment of identity of the population, and that failure to do so implies a failure of development which, in addition, can provoke a cultural shock that can lead to popular reactions that make the achievement of development even more difficult. To illustrate the argument, the case of the adoption of neoliberal development policy in Mexico in the 1980s and early 1990s is subsequently analysed through the lens of this framework. The neoliberal development policy provoked a cultural shock in Chiapas because it required that the indigenous peasants who live there and who have an attachment to land as their main cultural feature, were forced to abandon their lands to seek work in towns. This cultural shock was the cause of a violent reaction in the form of armed struggle, which led to the appearance of conflict.

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# List of Abbreviations

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| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| EZLN | *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) |
| INMECAFE | *Instituto Nacional Mexicano del Café* (Mexican National Coffee Institute) |
| ISI | Industrialisation through Substitution of Imports |
| NAFTA | North American Free Trade Area |
| PRI | *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institucional Revolutionary Party) |
| PROCAMPO | *Programa Nacional de Apoyos Directos al Campo* (National Programme of Direct Support to the Countryside) |
| PRONASOL | *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* (National Solidarity Programme) |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |

# List of Tables and Figures

# Preface

This paper explores the positive effects that the introduction of the notion of culture can bring to development policy analysis. It goes beyond the abstract and theoretical nature of the main conceptualisations of the relationship between development and culture in order to build a framework which is useful for the analysis of concrete cases of development policy.

The ideas presented in this study were triggered by a two and a half months research trip to Chiapas, Mexico, in which I had the opportunity to interact with many dwellers of the region and to realise that, even taking into account their precarious standard of living, their problems and demands could not only be thought of in terms of material well-being. In the highlands and Lacandon jungle regions of Chiapas especially, the indigenous factor seemed a key element in shaping the situation of conflict which has engulfed the state since the upraising of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or EZLN) in 1994. However, my aim while thinking about this case was to avoid falling into the same culturalist and materialist simplifications to which many analyses of the conflict recur. Therefore, I began a process of reflection about how culture and development could be integrated into a model of analysis of development policy which, more than a year later, resulted in the present work.

The framework described in the first part of this dissertation, although original, is based on an extensive review of the literature on development, culture, and on the relationship between both terms. Equally, the case study of Chiapas is based on the examination of several works dealing with the development experience of Mexico and with the conflict of Chiapas, as well as on my own understanding of the situation based on my experience in the region and on conversations that I have had with many of its inhabitants.

I would like to express my gratitude to Aaron Schneider, my supervisor, and Rosemary McGee for their helpful and insightful comments throughout the process of writing this dissertation, and to Jude for her support and stimulating engagement with my work.

# 1. Introduction: Thinking about Culture and Development

*'Like any virtue, … parsimony in theory construction can be overdone and something is sometimes to be gained by making things* more complicated*.'*

*Albert O. Hirschman*

The attempt to deal with the notions of culture and development, as the title of this study promises, appears in the beginning as an overwhelming task. Indeed, an in-depth study which tried to fully characterise both concepts and identify all the levels of their relationship would entail a major endeavour which lies beyond the reach of this dissertation. The intention here is less ambitious, but nonetheless challenging and, more importantly, relevant. The main objective of this work is to explore how the analysis of development policy can benefit from the incorporation of the concept of culture.

Although it is possible to think about development policy being undertaken at different levels and by different types of actors, in this work I will focus on the development policy made by states at the national level. This obeys the realisation of the immense impact of state development policy on the lives of millions of people all over the world, as many countries, especially developing ones, frame their whole government strategies in terms of development. Based on this far-reaching impact on all aspects of social life, the basic assumption underlying this paper is that state development policy requires a high degree of complexity in its analysis. Simplifications and general toolkits can be of use in some occasions, but often, as Hirschman argues in the quotation above, proper understanding of the processes affected or set in place by development policy can only come from the increased complication of the tools of analysis. It is precisely in this juncture that this study intends to explore the concept of culture.

Behind the term 'culture' lie many intangible elements and processes of social life which, because they are not readily apprehensible and quantifiable and because they do not seem to have a direct effect on the economic factors usually considered to be at the core of development, are frequently ignored in development policy. My contention here is that these elements are not only relevant but in many occasions crucial in order

to understand social change, and that therefore their consideration could help to improve development policy.

My proposal to incorporate culture into development policy does not mean to say that the linkages between both concepts have not been examined before. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), for example, has been arguing for the need to make such a connection for more than thirty years, and a number of scholars have also tried to establish the points of contact between both concepts. Moreover, it is also true that many current analyses of development incorporate elements of what I refer to here as culture, although this is seldom made explicit.

However, most understandings of the relationship between culture and development have frequently suffered from several weaknesses which have led them to remain on a theoretical and abstract level. In this respect, the main contribution of this paper is that it tries (again following Hirschman) to go *against parsimony* and complicate the conceptualisation of the relationship between culture and development in order to construct a framework which is operative for the practical analysis of development policy.

Having taken all this into account, the focal question that this work tries to respond to is: how can a re-conceptualisation of the relationship between culture and development help to inform and improve the analysis of development policy?

In order to answer this question, the remainder of this dissertation is divided into three parts. Part I undertakes an exploration of the two main concepts used in this work: culture and development. Chapter 2 delves into the notion of culture, analyses some of its most prominent conceptualisations and adopts a working definition to be used in this study. Chapter 3 then deals with development, exploring its different understandings through an examination of several development models.

Building on the findings of Part I, Part II constructs a conceptual framework for the analysis of development policy. Chapter 4 introduces the notion of dimensions of development which, grounded on the observations of development models in Chapter 3 and expanded with the introduction of culture as defined in Chapter 2, is the basis of the framework.

Part III of this work then takes on the examination of a case study of development policy using the framework constructed in Part II as an analytical lens. The case study is that of the state of Chiapas, in Southern Mexico, which is of particular interest because it is the site of a violent conflict often framed in cultural terms. Chapter 5 introduces the situation and the development policy initiatives in Mexico and Chiapas before the 1980s. Chapter 6 analyses the radical change in development policy that the adoption of neoliberalism supposed for Mexico in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Then, Chapter 7 presents the results of neoliberalism in Chiapas, which include the emergence of violent conflict as a result of a cultural shock as predicted by the framework from Part II.

Finally, Chapter 8 extracts conclusions and sketches directions for further research.

# PART I CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS: CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

The next two chapters undertake an in-depth exploration of the concepts of culture and development in order to provide a clear understanding of the terms for the subsequent elaboration of the conceptual framework.

## 2. Culture

Culture is a very convoluted notion that is often used unrigorously and with different understandings. In order to deal with such complexity, this chapter begins with an historical exploration of the concept that attempts to portray its range of meanings, before moving to adopt an appropriate working definition for the purpose of this study.

### 2.1. Meanings of culture

Historical accounts of the use of 'culture' in the English language point to the original usage of the term to refer to the cultivation of land, crops and animals (Mennell 1985, p.100). This use was extended in the 16th century to convey the cultivation of minds, arts and civilisation, with which the term started to be related 'to the process of human intellectual and aesthetic development' (Mennell 1985, pp.100-101). Culture then became, in the 18th century, a value-charged term, denoting the best of the creations of humankind in the form of literature, music, art and philosophy. This meaning, also referred to as 'high culture', gave place later on to another use of culture referring to the popular manifestations of human creativity, or 'popular culture', such as folklore, popular music, and also 'the activities of leisure-time and entertainment' (Hall 1997, p.2).

In the 19th century, culture was adopted by the social sciences, especially anthropology, to describe the way of life of a people, with cultural sociology using a similar formulation but focused on the shared values of a community (Hall 1997, p.2). This marked a radical change from previous conceptualisations, as it meant that culture stopped being a value-charged notion and became a relativistic term: all peoples have a culture and none can be considered superior to the others (Sutton

2000). There are many formulations from this perspective about the specific definition of culture, each of them giving a different account of the set of features which it comprises. Claxton (1994, p.11), for instance, refers to culture as the 'lifestyles, value systems, traditions, beliefs, knowledge and skills of the community', while UNESCO (1982, p.41) considers culture to include almost everything, defining it as 'the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.' In any case, and besides much debate between different theoretical currents within the social sciences, the crucial point to consider here is that this perspective sees cultures as discrete, bounded and cohesive entities identified by a series of objective characteristics. The possibility of objectively identifying a culture and its members, however, has the drawback of ignoring the existence of cultural flows and dynamic change, making this understanding of culture quite inflexible (Worsley 1999a, p.15).

In the 1970s and 1980s, a new academic discipline known as 'cultural studies' appeared as a synthesis of literary studies and social science and introduced an alternative notion of culture which overcomes the rigidities of the classical conception used in the social sciences (Schech and Haggis 2000, p.26). According to this view, culture is less a set of things or features associated with a certain group of people than a process, a set of practices which confer meaning (Hall 1997, p.2). The corollary of this definition is that every practice undertaken by human beings which is not genetically programmed into them involves some sort of meaning and therefore is part of culture. Hence, culture permeates all of society (ibid, p.3).

Although this understanding of culture avoids falling into the rigidities of the notion of culture as a set of features, its abstract nature and its reference to all of society seems to make it less useful for social investigation as it cannot be directly related to specific groups of people. However, a link between culture as practice and social groups can be identified through the introduction of the notion of identity into the analysis.

## 2.2. Culture and identity

Identity is a crucial element of the social life of human beings. It refers to the meanings that individuals and groups attribute to themselves in order to situate themselves in the

world, and therefore it is what allows them to relate with the rest of society (Woodward 1997, p.1; Snow 2001, pp.2212-2213). This acquisition of meaning is a process which occurs both at the individual level – 'I am John Smith' – and at the collective level – 'we are British' –, giving place to individual and collective identities respectively. Collective identities can be associated to the formation of social groups, and therefore they are the focus of interest from here onwards.

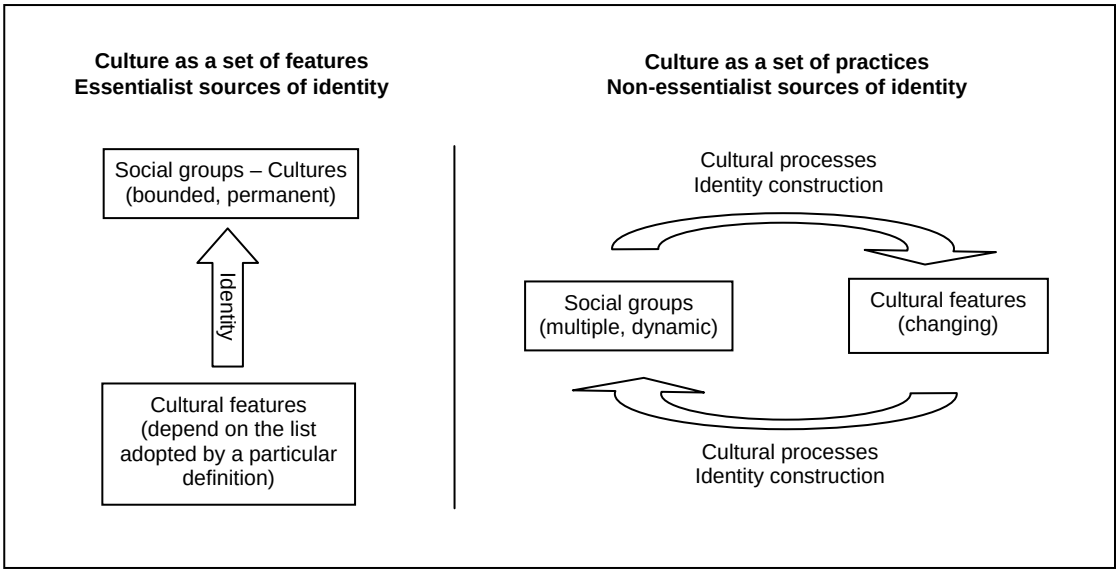
There are different ways of understanding identity depending on how the sources of identity are conceived. Snow (2001, p.2215) identifies three different types of sources of collective identities: primordialist, social structuralist and social constructionist.

The primordialist and social structuralist types share an *essentialist* perspective which conceives collective identities as naturally flowing from certain characteristics of their members. In the case of the primordialist type, these features are ascriptive attributes such as gender, race, or even underlying psychological dispositions; whereas for the social structuralist position they are some 'kind of master social category implying structural commonality, such as social class, ethnicity, or nationality; a set of relational ties or networks suggesting structural connectedness; or a mixture of both.' (Snow 2001, p.2215).

When culture is understood as a set of features, the identity of social groups is based on these types of essentialist perspectives. These groups are closed and permanent, and are defined by certain objective characteristics which make up their identities. This also implies that the only social groups which can be considered 'cultural' are those whose features are also defined as 'cultural'. Therefore there can be social groups based on non-cultural characteristics (i.e. class) and others based on cultural features (i.e. language). In any case, this demonstrates the limitations of this conception of culture, as it depends on what particular set of 'cultural features' is adopted, and disregards certain social groups as not cultural (see Figure 1).

The third approach to the sources of identity – social constructionist – postulates, in opposition to essentialism, that collective identities are 'invented, created, reconstituted, or cobbled together rather than being biologically preordained or structurally or culturally determined.' (Snow 2001, p.2215).

**Figure 1: Culture as features and culture as practices**




This point of view reproduces the premises of culture as a process. If culture is understood as practices which confer meaning, it can also be seen as the process of formation of identities, and therefore of social groups. Hence, if identity is understood in non-essentialist terms the conceptualisation of culture as practices is also related to social groups. However, this construction of social groups is different from the one occurring when culture was understood purely in terms of features. Now the groups are not based on a limited set of objective characteristics, but they coalesce around non-essentialist identities which are created through interactive, dynamic processes (see Figure 1). This means that there can be several simultaneous identities and that these can change or disappear as others are created (Woodward 1997, p.1; Schech and Haggis 2000, pp.26-27).

It is important to realise that these created or invented identities can be defined by the same features which were the base of essentialist identities. The difference lies in that now these features *become* characteristics of social groups instead of acting as their foundation. This means that groups, and the features which define their identities, are in constant change. Old groups can disappear and new ones can emerge, and what is even more important, people can belong to different groups and have different identities at the same time (Snow 2001, p.2215). In contrast to the case of culture as a set of features, now all groups, no matter how they are defined (in terms of class, race, language, etc.), can be considered to be related to culture, because cultural is the

process through which they emerge and obtain an identity, and not only some of the features that define them.

One example can help to clarify the distinction between both conceptualisations of culture and identity. When culture is understood as a closed set of features, it could be said that there is one group of people who are British and have a British identity because they share certain characteristics associated with ‘Britishness’. In contrast, when culture is understood as a process that confers meaning, it should be said that there are some people who have come to see themselves as British as a consequence of their social interactions, and that even if they associate some features with ‘Britishness’ in order to define themselves, these are not immutable and can vary for different people. For instance, some decades ago Britishness could be associated with being white, whereas this is no longer a defining feature of this particular identity. Moreover, Britishness is not an exclusive category, as some British people can also define themselves as English and European (or women, black, etc), and they can also abandon or change their ascriptions.

## 2.3. A working definition of culture

The previous two sections have set the ground upon which it is now possible to present a definition of culture to be used in this work.

As it must have become evident from the preceding sections, the definition of culture as a process that confers meaning is attractive because it helps to overcome the essentialism of the notion of culture as features. Moreover, it avoids having to specify a particular set of characteristics which can be considered ‘cultural’. However, its focus on processes makes it more abstract and difficult to incorporate in policy analysis. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that people recur to specific characteristics when defining their culture and their identity. In order to overcome these problems, I will adopt a definition of culture which perceives culture at the same time as features and as processes.

Culture will be understood here as both the set of features and the processes of meaning acquisition through which this set of features comes to define people’s identity. This in fact establishes culture as a dynamic cycle, as the processes which make certain features become cultural are in turn affected by the cultural features in

place. This conceptualisation allows one to consider certain features as cultural, but there is no need – in fact it is impossible – to establish an *a priori* list. These features will only become cultural when a group of people, through their interactive practices, come to adopt them as a defining part of the identity that makes them regard themselves as a group. Hence, a particular characteristic such as race is a cultural feature of a group of people who define themselves as blacks, for instance, but it does not have to be for others (even for other black people) who use other traits to define themselves. Thus cultural features are not just any traits which *describe* a group of people, but those through which people in that group *define* themselves. This means that their entire social relations and lives are built around and affected by these features, and therefore any social happening which affects them can have a potentially distressing or harmful effect which must be carefully taken into account. With this understanding of culture it is possible to retain all the advantages of culture as practices, while being able to look for the cultural features of a people, which now are conceived as dynamic and fragmentary.

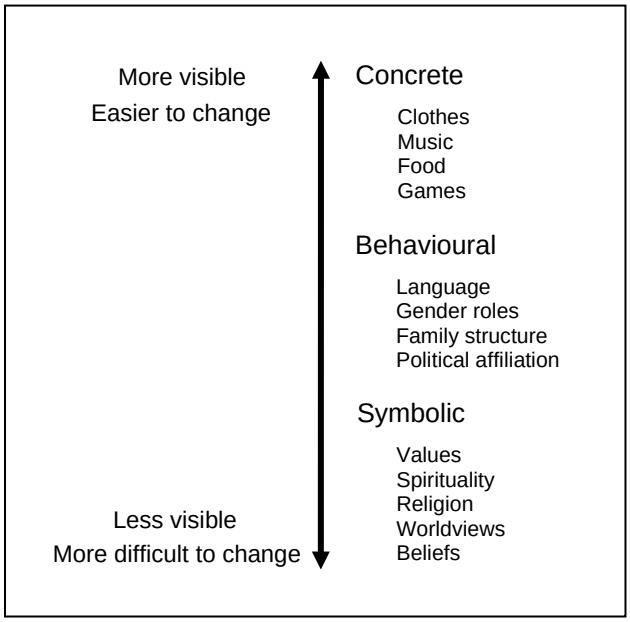
This conceptualisation of culture implies that its study becomes more complicated than when it was associated only with a closed set of features. As a result, each particular context must now be analysed in order to ascertain what cultural processes are in place, what identities and groups are being formed through these processes, and what characteristics – or cultural features – these identities come to adopt at a given point. This additional complexity, however, is to be embraced as it allows one to understand social processes and differences between groups without *a priori* assumptions.

A further difficulty of the study of culture as conceived here is that the list of features through which a given social group can define itself is potentially very large. In fact, any social element could become part of a given identity. Now there is no need to draw up a closed list, but in order to facilitate the observation of reality it is necessary to understand the nature and range of possible features which can come to define people's collective identities. In order to do so, I now present a typology of (possible) cultural features based on the classification proposed by Hidalgo (1993).

She distinguishes between three categories or levels of cultural characteristics, the concrete, the behavioural, and the symbolic. These are situated on an axis indicating the visibility and proneness to change of the features (see Figure 2). The concrete level groups the most visible manifestations of social life, such as folklore, music, food or games. They are the most easily identifiable as part of a culture and therefore

usually become the symbols of collective identities, especially when they are under threat. However, they are also the less intrinsic and important in people's everyday lives, and hence the easiest to change or disappear. The behavioural level refers to common practices and behaviours, often defining social roles, such as family structure or productive activities. They usually reflect deeper values, are less visible and identifiable than the elements at the concrete level, and are also more difficult to change. Finally, the symbolic level denotes values, beliefs, worldviews and other invisible features which are hard to apprehend and modify.

**Figure 2: Layers of Culture**




Source: Elaborated by the author based on Hidalgo 1993

# 3. Development

If in the previous chapter the exploration of culture has portrayed a term with a high degree of variation in its meaning, then development appears as an even more convoluted term. The aim here is to draw a general picture of development going from its most basic traits to an analysis of different understandings of the term.

## 3.1. Development models

A preliminary exploration of the way in which the term ‘development’ is used in academia and policymaking exposes the presence of many, often conflicting, understandings of the concept. However, the persistence in its use also points to some core of shared meaning about what development entails. Schech and Haggis (2000, pp.2-3) identify this core as consisting of two basic features of development: social progress and intentionality.

Social progress refers to the idea that human societies are not static and that they are immersed in a continuous process of progression to the better (Leys 1996, p.4). Intentionality evokes the realisation that social progress is not uniform and that it is possible to affect it and accelerate it through the adoption of specific policies (Schech and Haggis 2000, p.2).

Besides constituting the basic ideas underpinning the notion of development, these two characteristics are also the cause of the appearance of different understandings of the term, as they open the door for discussion about what exactly constitutes progress and how it should be pursued. Hence, the basic traits of development are the foundation of its contested nature, and this implies that it is impossible to characterise development unequivocally. If an exploration of development intends to go beyond its two key features, it must focus on its particular expressions.

A particular expression of development can be said to be any practical application of the concept of development in policymaking or analysis. It can refer to the sets of development policies adopted by countries all over the world, or to academic works such as comprehensive theories of development or analyses of particular development cases. I refer to any of these expressions of development as ‘development models’.

Each development model adopts a specific stance about the questions open by the intentional character of development, effectively giving it a concrete form.

In order to properly understand the variations of the different understandings of development, it is therefore necessary to study some development models. The next section undertakes a selective exploration of several of these models in an attempt to identify their stance regarding the two basic traits of development; that is how they conceive progress and how they propose to pursue it. Given the fact that the main goal of this paper is to construct a framework for policy analysis which incorporates the notion of culture, I also pay attention to whether the development models examined incorporate the notion of culture and, if so, how they conceptualise it.

## 3.2. Analysis of selected development models

The first development model to be analysed is the one presented by modernisation theory, which was prominent in the years following World War II (Rapley 1996; Leys 1996; Larrain 1989). The famous Point Four speech of US President Truman in 1949 is usually cited as marking the birth of the development project (Escobar 1995; Rist 1997). It also indicates the beginning of an understanding of development as a process to be applied to whole countries which are in a situation of what was then called underdevelopment. According to Leys (1996, pp.5-7), the conditions of the world at that time, with mass destruction caused by World War II, the beginning of the Cold War, and the establishment of the Bretton Woods financial regime all led to modernisation theory conceiving development very much synonymous to economic growth. Hence, material well-being was central in the conception of progress of this development model. It assumed that all countries in the world would follow the path of developed nations, but this transition could be accelerated and facilitated by undertaking a series of measures, mainly of an economic nature, among which capital accumulation was central (Rapley 1996, p.17). However, these measures also had a cultural component in the diffusion of ‘modern values’ (Rapley 1996, p.17). Following the thesis advanced by Weber some decades before (Kamal Pasha and Mittelman 1995, p.357), these modern values, associated with an ethic of hard work and an orientation toward achievement, were seen as the key factor in allowing the emergence of capitalism in the West. Therefore, they had to be adopted everywhere else if development was to take place. This cultural change would then be associated with a type of growth characterised by industrialisation and urbanisation. Hence, it can

be seen that although modernisation theory incorporated cultural elements in its analysis, these were only seen as a necessary condition in order to achieve real development, which was associated with Western capitalism and its material affluence.

The criticisms raised against this development model, both because of its ideological role in the Cold War and because of its failure to attain its goals in much of the developing world, led to the abandonment of any contemplation of culture in many posterior models (Schech and Haggis 2000, p.38). Thus, although the critiques to modernisation theory influenced by Marxism, such as dependency theory and structuralism, introduced the dimension of power and defended the idea that developing countries should follow their own strategy of development, they maintained their stance on the latter as mainly a matter of economic growth (Leys 1996, p.7, Larrain 1989; Rist 1997). Their basic contribution was that they framed development as a site of political contestation whose achievement was not anymore about a change in values to become like the West, but to cut the ties used by the 'centre' to exploit poor countries on the periphery. However, the development goals defended by dependency theory and structuralism do not seem to differ from the capitalist development advocated by modernisation theory.

Another model of development, popular in the 1970s, is the basic needs approach (Rapley 1996; Leys 1996; Rist 1997). This model established as the goal of development the provision of 'the minimum standard of living which a society should set for the poorest of its people' (International Labor Organization 1976, cited in Schech and Haggis 2000, p.12). Such a goal implies a departure from the exclusivity of the macro objective of economic growth in a capitalist system sought by modernisation theory. It recognises that within countries not all the population benefits from such macro processes equally, and argues that, whatever the macro system, the aim must be to ensure the standard of the poorest people. Although this standard consists mainly of material elements such as food, shelter and clothing, this micro approach also opened the door for the consideration of other less 'material' components such as health and education or democracy (Larrain 1989). However, what system should be in place to ensure the provision of basic needs was not made clear by the approach. It certainly seems as if social policy should play a key role, at least as a last resort for those who cannot cover their needs through their productive activities, but the system through which the resources for such policies should be obtained was not specified. Moreover, the role that culture or other dimensions could have in development were not dealt with either.

Leaving aside the models based on theories of development for a moment, a very influential approach that deserves attention is that of the developmental state, which appeared in the 1980s as an explanation for the development success of the states of East Asia (Leftwich 1995; Kamal Pasha and Mittelman 1995; White and Wade 1988). This success is usually understood in terms of rapid economic growth through industrialisation and integration in the world economy, which implies that the notion of development defended by this model is not very different from previous ones. Its key contribution is its emphasis on the crucial role played by the state in the promotion of development in East Asia, and on the identification of the main sets of policies adopted (Leftwich 1995, p.401). As acknowledged above, many of these policies pertain to the field of economics, but there are others of a different nature. For instance, a feature of developmental states often cited is their repressive character, helpful to control the social unrest which appears in the difficult first steps of economic transformation, and which if unrepressed could reverse the incipient achievements (Leftwich 1995, pp.418-419; Kamal Pasha and Mittelman 1995, p.359). A second related policy has to do with the construction of strong national projects, which can also be seen as instruments of social control (White and Wade 1988, p.24). This dimension of social control, however, seems to be more a facilitator of the main economic goal of the developmental state than a goal in itself. In this respect, it resembles other features of the East Asian states which are usually seen as factors contributing to the success of their development model, and which often adopt the form of cultural elements. For example, White and Wade (1988, p.24) identify ‘a common Confucian heritage’ and of ‘cultural homogeneity’ as some of these factors, which also seem to contribute to social control. However, the cultural element is also cited in reference to the developmental state to argue that the East Asian countries have been able to construct a kind of capitalism which is adapted to their cultural specificities, and that part of their success lies in the achievement of this compatibility (Claxton 1994, p.19). The paradigmatic example is that of Japan, whose system of industrial relations is characterised by particularities such as life-time employment, seniority promotion and company unionism (the ‘three jewels’), which are said to mirror Japanese cultural features (Goodman 1999, p.127).

The model of the developmental state appeared in opposition to a common view that the key of the East Asian success was to be found in openness to trade and the withdrawal of the state to let free markets work. These elements can be found at the core of neoliberalism, a development model which became dominant at the end of the

1970s and in the 1980s (Rapley 1996; Martinez and García 2000; Brohman 1995). The main focus of this model is clearly economic, associating development with economic growth, and it argues that the role of the state has to be limited to the protection of private property and to the maintenance of macroeconomic stability (Martinez and García 2000). Markets then take care of allocating resources efficiently, and even if the poor do not benefit immediately from growth this eventually 'trickles-down' to reach all portions of society (Brohman 1995, p.299). Later formulations of the neoliberal model, in light of increasing problems of poverty, incorporate mechanisms such as safety nets and other social policies, but these are seen as short-term solutions which do not preclude the centrality of growth (Rapley 1996, p.79). Finally, neoliberalism also presents itself as a universal model, applicable everywhere irrespective of socio-political or cultural differences, and therefore it largely ignores other dimensions in its analysis and policies (Brohman 1995).

Disappointment with the results of neoliberalism triggered the appearance in the 1990s of a series of approaches to which Kothari and Minogue (2000) refer as 'alternative development'. These approaches cannot be said to constitute a coherent development model. In fact, the same authors argue that alternative development shares the same goals of 'mainstream development', which is equated to the neoliberal model pursued by the major multilateral aid donors (ibid, p.10). However, they do so through different means which usually present themselves as people-centred and participatory (ibid, p.9). I would argue that the importance given to participation, if genuine, is an indicator of a qualitative change in the approach to development, as the process through which development is pursued is also part of development. However, impact of participation in development is always dependent on the authenticity of the incorporation of participation into development policy, which unfortunately is often described as tokenistic and unsatisfactory.

The few examples of development models presented above show a wide array of understandings of development and of how it can be pursued. However, some general lessons can be extracted from their analysis:

1) In most cases, development is associated with material progress, which is achieved through economic growth. This growth is the result of a process of economic transformation usually linked with industrialisation and urbanisation. The unequal allocation of the benefits of growth is often recognised, leading to the adoption of redistributive measures.

2) A few models, especially more recent ones, go beyond material progress and place emphasis on aspects of democracy and participation, although these priorities are frequently subordinated to that of economic growth.

3) Culture appears as a factor in several models, but it is usually considered a facilitator of main material advancement, rather than important in itself. The maintenance of social order also seems to play a prominent role as a facilitator of material progress in some models.

4) Most models also present themselves as solutions of a universal nature that can be easily applied to any context. Moreover, within these contexts they are applied without discriminating and taking into account the characteristics of different sectors of the population within them.

# PART II CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A MODEL FOR THE ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT POLICY

This part of the paper draws on the findings of the previous two chapters in order to build a framework for the analysis of development policy. In doing so, the relationship between culture and development is re-conceptualised in a way that improves the explanatory power of development analysis.

## 4. Dimensions of Development

This chapter begins by analysing the drawbacks of current conceptualisations of the relationship between culture and development. It then presents a framework for the analysis of development policy grounded on what I call 'dimensions of development', which are based on the observations prompted by the exploration of development models undertaken in Chapter 3. Next, it expands the framework by introducing the concept of culture as defined in Chapter 2. Finally, it presents a hypothesis of why this is beneficial for development policy analysis.

### 4.1. Conceptualisations of culture and development

As I mentioned above, the links between development and culture have not been completely neglected in the past. The exploration of development models above has shown, for instance, that some notion of culture has been used to try to understand and explain development processes. Moreover, there are a number of scholars and institutions who have argued for the need of greater integration between both terms (see UNESCO 1982; Worsley 1999b; Carranza Valdés 2002; Claxton 1994; Verhelst 1987; László 1985; Escobar 1995; Sachs 1992). However, most attempts to do so present a series of weaknesses which I would claim fall into one of the following four problems.

First, a common feature of many of these works (see Worsley 1999b; Carranza Valdés 2002; Claxton 1994; Verhelst 1987; László 1985) is a rhetorical and abstract call to incorporate culture into development thinking and practice. The problem is that these philosophical justifications are not followed by specific frameworks of analysis and

guidelines for the implementation of development policy, making them of little practical utility. This is the case, for instance, of Claxton, who in a study for UNESCO affirms that ‘Development is a seamless web, whose fabric contains a multitude of interwoven strands. It is culture, however, which provides the colour, the texture, the weave, the resilience, the strength of that fabric.’ (Claxton 1994, p.56). Although poetic, neither this statement nor the rest of his theoretical analysis of culture and development provides a plan for action. When other authors do present specific proposals, these often lack any account of how they should be implemented. This is, for example, the case in Verhelst’s call for a ‘recourse to sources’ (1987, p.62) and for the search of a development rooted in culture. László (1985, p.23) provides a further example when he asks for a re-examination of the culture of each society in order to find new development paths and models. It is obvious that incorporating culture into development means finding a new way of pursuing development which takes cultural elements into account, but the real challenge resides in going beyond this statement and showing how this can be done.

The second problem that can be found in the literature about culture and development appears when culture is conceived in such a narrow way that it only leads toward its tokenistic incorporation into development (see UNESCO 1982). This can be seen, for instance, in some of UNESCO’s work on the subject, which, after rhetorically making culture the milestone of development and adopting a very broad definition of culture, proposes policies which have to do with a conception of culture restricted to the arts and other elements of its most concrete and visible layer, bringing no fundamental change to the way development models are conceived. This was also the case in some of the examples of development models examined above, when culture was conceived only as a facilitator of development processes.

Third, there is a tendency toward a simplistic use of culture in the pursuit of an easy explanation for political and social phenomena (Kamal Pasha and Mittelman 1995, Goodman 1999). Under this perspective, the achievement of development is attributed only to cultural factors. This is caused by the ubiquitous character of culture and the fact that the features shared by a group of people can often be traced back to their history and the geography of their land. As Goodman (1999, p.135) argues, this is dangerous because the appeal to history and geography makes it difficult to challenge their explanatory power, with the resulting dismissal of other contributing factors. This is the case of some culturalist explanations about the East Asian success which are

based solely on the presence of Confucianism and a supposed hierarchy-orientation of the population in the region (Kamal Pasha and Mittelman 1995, pp.356-357).

Finally, culture has been related to development in order to attack the rigidities and weaknesses of mainstream development policy (see Escobar 1995 and Sachs 1992). Although many of the insights that can be extracted from this perspective are worthwhile and point to the absence of culture in the dominant notions of development, its call for the abandonment of the development project establishes an *a priori* opposition which does not allow for the constructive exploration of the connections between culture and development. This point of view is in part grounded in the emergence, from the 1970s and 1980s, of a current of popular mobilisation known as 'identity politics' which, instead of framing itself in terms of class struggle, presents itself in cultural terms (Hale 1997, p.568). Interpretations of this phenomenon as opposed to or overcoming material struggles have led to the reaction of Marxist writers, such as Brass (2003) and Petras and Veltmeyer (2003). These thinkers claim that the focus on cultural mobilisation deviates attention from material exploitation and presents all kinds of resistance as progressive, when in fact part of these movements are reactionary. The bottom line is that this controversy is detrimental for the exploration of the relationship between culture and development, because it presents both terms as – at least partially – opposed.

## 4.2. Dimensions of development

In order to overcome the weaknesses of previous formulations of the relationship between development and culture, in this section I use both terms to outline a framework for the analysis of development policy based on the concept of 'dimensions of development'.

I propose to use the term 'dimensions of development' to refer to the different areas of intervention of development policy. As such, it is not an absolute concept which identifies a series of universal dimensions. Different sets of dimensions are possible depending on what the understanding of development is and on the policies available. The notion of dimensions of development is valuable because it allows to think of an integrated concept such as development in terms of different fields on which intervention is necessary in order to achieve them. Moreover, it is useful for action

because the dimensions are not the product of theoretical abstractions but are based on policy options.

I now present a proposal of dimensions of development which will serve as the basis for the conceptual framework and which, I hope, will also help to clarify their definition. In order to make it as adequate as possible for the analysis of development policy, my proposal of dimensions of development is based on the exploration of development models undertaken in Chapter 3.

Most development models analysed above seemed to endorse a notion of development in which material advancement, pursued at the macro level through policies aimed at economic growth, is the key element. This indicates the first dimension of development, which I label *production*, and which refers to the area of intervention in charge of the productive activities of society.

However, the basic needs approach and the later developments of neoliberalism (which incorporate safety nets and social policy) show that a distinction must be made between aggregate processes of growth and the distribution of their outcomes among the population. The dimension of production and its search for economic growth, even when it succeeds, does not ensure the fulfilment of the of the goal of material advancement for all the population due to problems in the distribution of its benefits. Therefore, there is a second dimension stemming from the development models analysed which can be labelled *distribution* and which encompasses all the policies in charge of the redistribution of the outcomes of growth, including social policy.

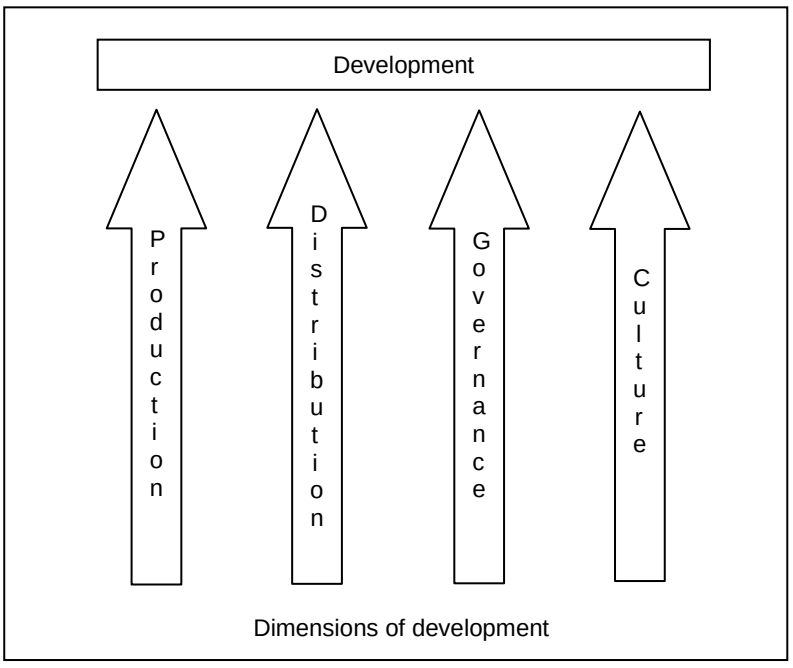
A further exploration of the development models outlined in Chapter 2 brings attention to two seemingly unrelated factors. First, in several of these models there is a recurrent attention to ‘social order’ as a key element in their strategies. Second, other models, such as the basic needs approach and the group of initiatives known as alternative development, emphasise democracy and participation as basic factors in their understandings of development. I would argue that both social control and democracy/participation belong to a *governance* dimension of development. This dimension has to do with how the relationship between the state and the population is to be conceived, and specifically how the decisions regarding development policy are to be made and implemented. When framed in terms of social control, it implies that the relationship between government and citizens is top-down and relatively

authoritarian. In contrast, when framed in terms of democracy/participation, it involves a certain degree of openness from the government to input from its citizens.

Finally, the fourth dimension of development that can be extracted from the exploration of development models in Chapter 3 is that of *culture*. Taking into account how culture was conceptualised in the models analysed, this dimension comprises the sets of activities that governments undertake in order to facilitate the adoption of the rest of their development policies. It would include, for instance, the implementation of measures to adapt people's culture to the Western features which are necessary for the success of industrialisation, as the case of the modernisation theory model above suggested.

This would leave the framework with four distinct dimensions of development (production, distribution, governance and culture), as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Dimensions of development - 1**




## 4.3. Culture and the dimensions of development

The previous proposal of dimensions of development, however, was based on the analysis of existing development models, and therefore its conceptualisation of the role of culture in development falls into the weaknesses reviewed in Section 4.1. I attempt

now to amend my proposal of dimensions of development with the introduction of culture as described in Chapter 2, therefore re-conceptualising the relationship between culture and development so that culture adopts a much more critical role.

Culture was defined in Chapter 2 as the set of features and processes involved in the creation of people's identities. Taking into account that identities are a crucial element of people's lives, as they are what allows them to situate themselves in the world in order to be able to relate to the others, this implies a fundamental change for the cultural dimension, for now it must be in charge of ensuring that *people are able to fulfil their identities*. Hence in my proposal of dimensions of development culture is not a second-tier dimension, important only insomuch it enables or facilitates the work of other dimensions. Conceiving culture as it has been defined in this work implies acknowledging the importance of identity and making the cultural dimension a crucial element of development.

In order to characterise and fully understand the cultural dimension it is necessary to go beyond its definition and reflect about what kind of 'cultural' policies should be used in order to pursue the fulfilment of identity. Considering what is usually understood as cultural policy, it emerges that the most obvious types of measures are those positive policies which affect the most visible and recognisable elements of culture. In the classification presented above, these elements would be situated in the concrete and, in some cases, in the behavioural levels of culture, comprising elements such as folklore, language, and artistic and literary production among others.

However, Chapter 2 argued that there are other less visible, deeper and less easily alterable elements of culture – the behavioural and symbolic levels. What policies could affect them? The elusive nature of these elements makes it difficult for them to be directly reached by specifically aimed policy. However, this points to the realisation that many cultural features, because of their embedded character in people's minds and practices, underpin all human actions and therefore are affected by policies directed toward other areas of life. This means that policies undertaken in the non-cultural dimensions of development can potentially affect some of the cultural elements which are the cornerstone of people's identity, therefore having an impact on the fulfilment of such identity.

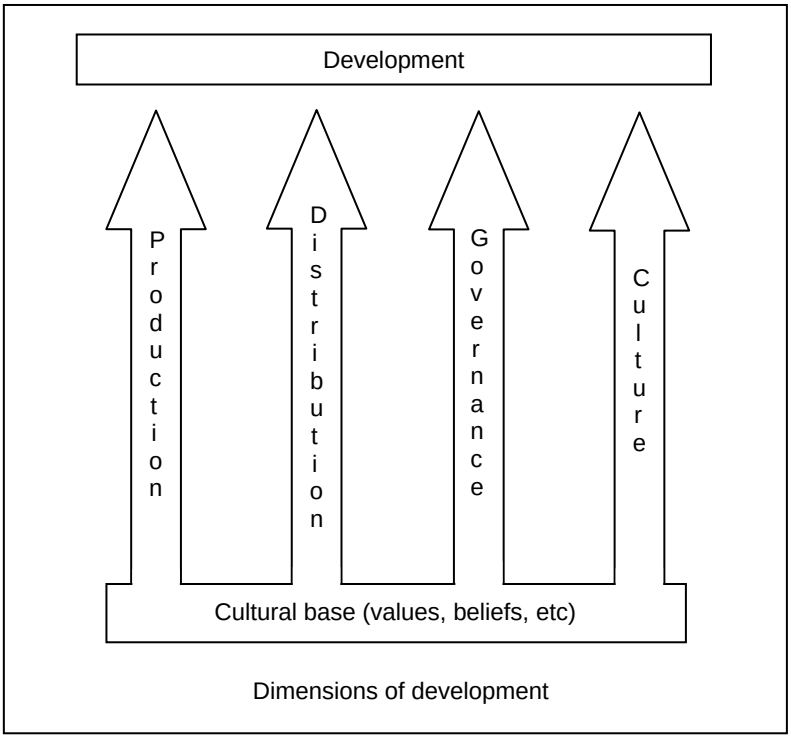
An example might be illustrative at this point. One of the key elements in the construction of the identity of a certain group of people could be, for instance, the

value of family unity. This would make it a cultural element on which the lives of the members of the group are based, and one which is not easily affected by direct policies. Although originally with another aim, however, an economic policy which forced some members of the family to migrate in search of a job would be indirectly attacking this cultural value, effectively creating a problem for the fulfilment of their identity as they would no longer be able to live according to their values.

In terms of the dimensions of development, this means that culture cannot be conceived purely as another dimension. Besides its status as a dimension, granted by the possibility of undertaking measures specifically directed to the cultural elements of a given population, culture must be also understood as a base level consisting of those elements which are part of people's identity and which can be affected by policies in any of the other dimensions. Essentially, this base level is constituted by values and beliefs, those elements of culture which are more difficult to target through specific policies and which reside deep within people's minds and practices – the symbolic level. The implication of conceptualising culture in this way is that the fulfilment of identity does not only depend on specifically directed cultural policies, but on the effects (positive and negative) that all the other development policies have on it, exponentially complicating the analysis and practice of development. The final form of the dimensions of development incorporating culture as defined in this paper should then be as displayed in Figure 4.

The introduction of culture as proposed above has further implications for the overall understanding of development. Once culture is considered, development cannot be conceived without taking into account the values and beliefs of the population. This implies, on the one hand, that the dimension of governance cannot simply set a top-down relationship between state and citizens based on social control and must seek people's inputs and participation. On the other hand, this also means that the analysis of development policy must take into account different populations and their specific cultural characteristics, and cannot rely on universal sets of policies.

**Figure 4: Dimensions of development - 2**




To sum up, it can be said that the proposal of dimensions of development to be used in this paper posits four dimensions, meaning four fields of intervention in order to achieve development: *production*, in charge of increasing the material products available in society; *distribution*, which has to ensure equity and the coverage of minimum levels in the allocation of the products of growth; *governance*, which has to do with the search of a more participatory and democratic relationship between the government and the larger population; and *culture*, which is in charge of the fulfilment of people's identities through positive policies affecting the cultural elements that make up such identities. Moreover, the framework also posits the existence of a *cultural base*, made up by all those cultural elements – mainly values and beliefs – that are not directly reached by cultural policies but that can be indirectly affected by policies in any of the dimensions.

With this framework it is now possible to analyse any development policy examining what measures are taken in each of the dimensions, which dimensions are prioritised and which (if any) are ignored.

## 4.4. Importance of culture for development policy

In the previous section I have shown how the dimensions of development would be affected by the introduction of culture as defined in this paper, but I have still not argued why this is valuable for the analysis of development policy. In this final section I present a hypothesis about what benefits are to be gained from this incorporation, and it is this hypothesis which will later on be tested on the case study.

**Figure 5: Development with culture as a facilitator**

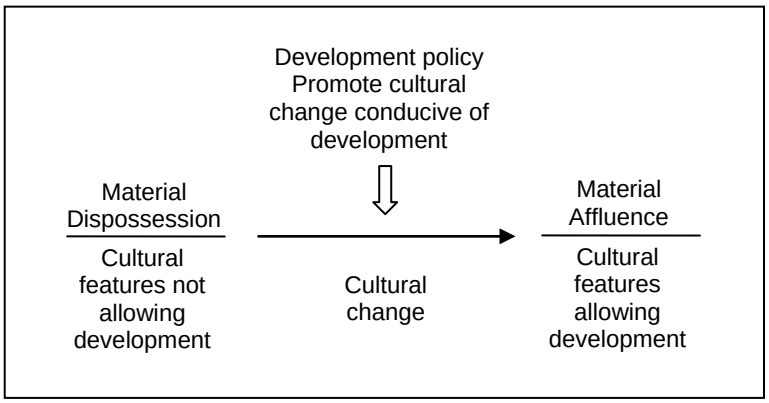
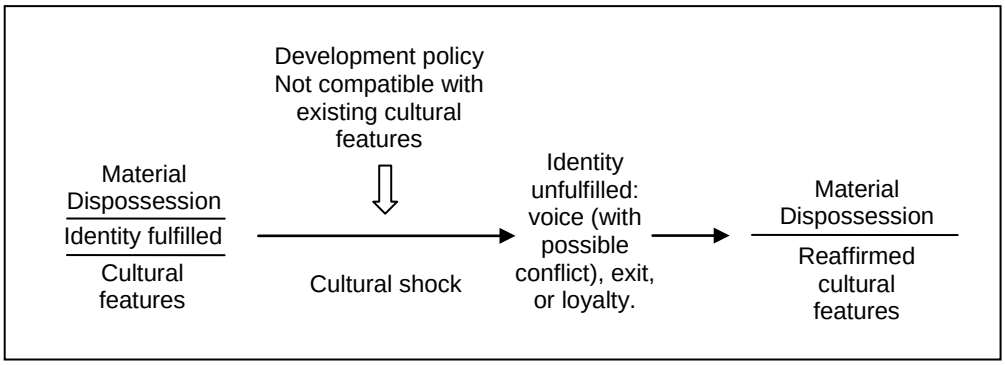



Figure 5 shows how development is supposed to work in its simplest conceptualisation, when culture is understood only as a facilitator of development and the dimension of governance is framed in terms of social control (the notion of the dimensions of development would be as the one portrayed in Figure 3). In this case, development is understood basically as material advancement (I include here the dimensions of production and distribution), and therefore development policy is basically aimed to go from material dispossession to material affluence. The economic policies proposed are seen as dependent on a set of cultural features that are lacking in the population, and therefore the measures of the cultural dimension are destined toward the promotion of a supposedly unproblematic cultural change. If the economic policies are adequate, it is therefore assumed that material affluence in a society like those of Western Europe will be reached.

However, if the dimensions of development as proposed above (and displayed in Figure 4) are used for the analysis, I would contend that the use of culture only as a facilitator of economic processes would lead to a situation like the one described in Figure 6.

The starting situation assumes that, although there is relative material dispossession, the people concerned are able to live according to their cultural features and therefore their identity is fulfilled. When development policies in the different dimensions are undertaken irrespective of the cultural features of the population it is likely that they will provoke a cultural shock. This happens when the consequences of the measures imposed directly clash with the cultural elements (at the base of the dimensions of development) on which the identity of the population rests. The outcome is that people's identity becomes unfulfilled (or rather de-fulfilled), which constitutes in itself a failure of development because one of its goals is not reached.

**Figure 6: Diagnostic of development without culture**




However, the situation can become even worse because the lack of fulfilment of their identities triggers a reaction by the people (precisely because, as it has been argued above, identity is important for them). There are numerous forms of possible reactions, but in general they can be grouped in three different categories: loyalty, exit and voice (Hirschman 1970).

*Loyalty* occurs when people are submissive and, even if their identity is being denied, they opt to adapt to the changes imposed from above. This leads to the creation of new identities compatible with the policies forced upon them. This is the reaction that is always assumed to happen by the model behind Figure 5, which sees cultural change as unproblematic.

The second type of reaction, *exit*, implies disaffection and flight from the contested issue. This option might be difficult to adopt when we are talking about issues that affect all aspects of life, as is the case of development. However, it is still worth

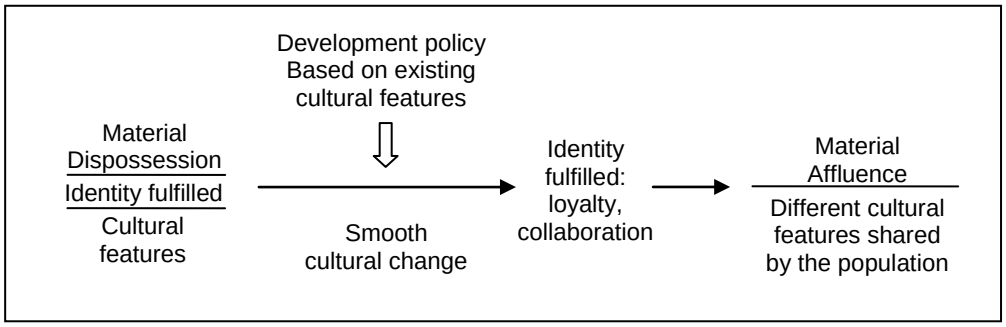
considering because it could be argued that alcoholism, which Gledhill (1998, p.99) identifies as a common problem of indigenous people in Mexico, is a form of exit.

Finally, there is the option of *voice*, which involves active contestation. This can take the form of pacific protest, but it can also be expressed with violence and lead to a situation of overt conflict – although this does not necessarily have to be the case.

The argument here is that, once any reaction different from loyalty occurs, not only is identity not fulfilled, but most probably exit and voice (especially if it leads to conflict) will cause problems for the achievement of material advancement. It is evident that it is very difficult to promote economic growth in a zone where there is violent conflict, as all productive activities will be threatened and distorted. But even when conflict does not arise, if the population 'exit' from development or are engaged in non-violent opposition to the productive measures adopted by the government, it is very unlikely that these will accommodate the benefits pursued.

From this point of view, a development policy which wishes to avoid the reactions of exit and voice requires the introduction of culture and a conceptualisation of the dimensions of development as presented in Figure 4. Then, it is to be expected that the process of development works as shown in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: Development incorporating culture**




Development policy, based in all its dimensions on the existing cultural features of the population, does not provoke a cultural shock. If there is any cultural change (which is not unlikely in the case of development), it happens smoothly so that people's identity remains fulfilled. Therefore, people will collaborate in the working of the policies and, if these are adequate, material affluence will also be achieved. In this process, increased participation from the population will also play a positive role.

A precautionary note is needed here. The framework just presented must be understood as a lens for the analysis of development policy, and it does not imply that the processes examined are not influenced by external factors or that they always happen smoothly in successive and easily definable stages. The schematisation shown in Figures 5 to 7 intends to illustrate *a way of exploring* development policy in order to make sense of it and understand its effects. It must not be seen as a *description* of development processes which, as it has been argued above, are extremely complex and not reducible to a simple diagram.

To sum up, it can be said that the hypothesis presented above has two basic implications:

1. If development policy takes into account culture as defined here, it will be able to take actions to avoid the appearance of a cultural shock, which would increase the likelihood of reaching whatever conception of development is being pursued.
2. If development policy does not take into account culture as defined here, it risks creating a cultural shock, which would preclude the fulfilment of identity of the population and set up reactions which would make the achievement of the development goals being pursued more difficult.

# PART III CASE STUDY: DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE IN CHIAPAS, MEXICO

Just as in Part I of this dissertation dealing with the concepts of development and culture seemed to be an overwhelming task, the exercise of describing the rich complexity of the history and realities of Mexico and Chiapas in a few pages appears as a tremendous challenge. Rather than attempting a complete description of the Chiapas experience, an endeavour that would be impossible in so short a space, the following discussion highlights those aspects that are important to understand the development policies adopted in the region and the role of culture in the popular response. The focus of the case study is put on the neoliberal development policies adopted by the Mexican state in the 1980s and early 1990s and on their particular effects on the indigenous peasants of the highlands and Lacandon jungle regions of Chiapas.

The methodology employed for the case study follows the form of the hypothesis described in the previous chapter. Figures 5 to 7 showed an idealised account of the workings of development policy, presenting a situation before the implementation of such policy, the implementation of the policies themselves, and a situation after the implementation has taken place. The next three chapters are conceived precisely with this structure in mind. Chapter 5 deals with the situation in Mexico and Chiapas and the development policies adopted until the 1980s, Chapter 6 analyses the neoliberal policies of the 1980s and early 1990s, and Chapter 7 explores the impact of the adoption of such measures in Chiapas, which is marked by the appearance of cultural shock and the emergence of conflict. At each moment of the investigation, the framework of the dimensions of development as presented in the previous chapter is applied.

# 5. Culture and development policy in Mexico before the 1980s

This chapter analyses the situation and the development policies in place in Mexico until the 1980s through the lens of the framework of the dimensions of development. The main goal is to show how the policies adopted during this period, as opposed to the case of neoliberalism examined in the next chapter, did not lead to cultural shock and conflict. In order to do this, however, it is necessary to confront the policies in each dimension with the cultural elements that make up the identity of the indigenous peasants of Chiapas. Yet, as I argued in Chapter 2, such cultural features are the result of a dynamic process of identity construction, and therefore cannot be determined beforehand. Thus the first two sections of this chapter undertake an historical examination of the period leading to the 1980s to describe the policies adopted and the processes in place in Mexico and Chiapas. Then this information is used in section 4.3 to define the identity of the indigenous peasants of Chiapas. Finally, the last section of the chapter revisits the policies adopted by the Mexican state in this period in order to explain why they did not provoke a cultural shock.

## 5.1. Development policy in Mexico until the 1980s

In order to understand the development policies adopted in Mexico and the process of construction of indigenous peasant identity in Chiapas, it is necessary to take into account two factors that have marked Mexican society throughout the 20th century. The first one is the Revolution of 1910, the key ideological reference in Mexico, which led to the adoption of the progressive Constitution of 1917 and to the institutionalisation of land reform, as demanded by the revolutionary peasants Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata (Needler 1995, pp.7-8). The second factor is the creation of the 'official' party in 1927 – later known as *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI) – in order to institutionalise the conquests of the Revolution and ensure the unity of the different factions of the 'revolutionary family'. The status of the PRI as the party of the Revolution, along with its corporativist practices, allowed it to dominate political life in the country during the 20th century in such a way that, until the appearance of effective opposition in the 1980s and 1990s, it was able to act as if Mexico had a single-party system (ibid, pp.9-11).

With these elements in mind, I now move on to explore the situation and development policies in Mexico before the adoption of neoliberalism through each of the four dimensions of development.

### 5.1.1. Production

From the 1930s onwards, the PRI assumed the task of modernising the country under the ideals of the Revolution. In the dimension of production, Cypher (1990, pp.10) distinguishes two periods between 1934 and 1982. The first one is marked by the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). This period was characterised by the presence of a 'nationalist-populist state' which undertook a dynamic role in the establishment of a mixed economy through the creation of parastate firms and state banks, and through the nationalisation of foreign capital. The state was able to carry out a function of accumulation and was also legitimised in front of the popular sectors thanks to its adoption of land reform and social policies (more on this below) (ibid, pp.10-11).

The second period, comprising the years from 1940 to 1982, saw a continued and enhanced expansion of the economy under a strategy of industrialisation through substitution of imports (ISI), with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growing between 1951 and 1980 at an average annual rate of 6.4% (GDP per capita growth averaged only 3.3% because of high population growth) (Urquidi 2003, p.562). However, Cypher (1990, pp.11-13) argues that this period presented a fundamental contradiction because of the existence of a 'capitalist-rentier state'. Alongside the development of the forces of production and the expansion of the economy, there was still in place the old '"rentier" ethos of the hacendado/merchant capitalist … seeking its own expansion by way of economic rents and/or unequal exchange.' (ibid, p.11). This implied that instead of innovating in order to improve their products (which would have been what the ISI strategy argued for and expected), producers opted to benefit from the post-World War II situation by increasing their prices. When these fell in the 1950s, the only solution was to recur to loans. This unsustainable situation was prolonged during the 1970s thanks to the returns brought in by the discovery of large reserves of oil in Southern Mexico and by the predisposition of international banks to lend given the large availability of petro-dollars (Cypher 1995, p.13). However, the reversing of the situation in the early 1980s forced Mexico to face reality in the form of a deep economic crisis.

### 5.1.2. Distribution

One of the main outcomes of the Mexican Revolution was the incorporation in the Constitution of 1917 of Article 27, which established the supremacy of the state – representing the public interest – over private property and thus legitimised the expropriation and redistribution of land. The latter was to take place through the creation of *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias*, collective agricultural communities whose lands could not be sold, rented or remain idle. Despite the provisions of the Constitution, it was not until president Cárdenas took office in 1934 that mass redistribution was undertaken with the allocation of 20 million hectares to about 810,000 people (Thiesenhusen 1996). After Cárdenas, all Mexican presidents adopted the rhetoric of land reform and took up some redistribution, but they did that in a much lower degree and usually implying the extended use of national idle, low quality lands, thus avoiding political clashes with large landowners. The result is that nowadays the distribution of land, the main asset for the survival of the rural population, is still very unequal (see Table 1). However, up to the 1980s the process of land reform was embedded in the Constitution and thousands of landless peasants still hoped they would be able to obtain land legally.

**Table 1: Agricultural, Livestock, and Forestry Production Units in Mexico by Size of Holdings, 1991**

| Size of Landholding | Production Units (number) | Total Area (hectares) | Average Area (hectares) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Up to 2 hectares | 1,305,345 | 1,494,003 | 1.1 |
| 2-5 hectares | 958,338 | 3,459,008 | 3.6 |
| 5-20 hectares | 1,193,865 | 12,606,815 | 10.6 |
| 20-50 hectares | 208,594 | 6,559,552 | 31.4 |
| 50-100 hectares | 72,068 | 5,243,247 | 72.8 |
| 100-1000 hectares | 74,414 | 20,363,223 | 273.6 |
| 1000-2500 hectares | 5,709 | 9,060,803 | 1,587.1 |
| More than 2500 hectares | 4,730 | 32,626,741 | 6,897.8 |
| National total | 3,823,063 | 91,413,395 | 23.9 |

Source: C. de Grammont 2003, p.355

Besides the allotment of land tenure, the benefits of the expansion of the Mexican economy from 1950 to 1980 were not equally distributed. As Thiesenhusen (1996, p.39) argues, the attention of all the governments in that period was put on commercial agriculture and import-substituting industrialisation. The result was that, against the mandates of the Constitution, little investment in irrigation, roads, and the provision of

credit and services was directed to the areas where *ejidos* concentrated. Thus while the incomes of the middle and upper classes rose, those of the poor either stagnated or fell. However, the state did intervene in the countryside in two ways. First, the government established price controls for key crops and set parastate firms to provide services to peasants, albeit often very inefficiently (Harvey 1995). Second, the state would also reach the countryside by means of social policy. This was allocated in a clientelistic way through the 'official' party in exchange of political support. Although this system was initially able to reach a considerable proportion of the population, in the 1960s it was evident that large numbers were being excluded, giving place to increasing popular discontent (Craske 1994).

### 5.1.3. Governance

The relationship between the Mexican state and its citizens until the 1980s obeyed a corporatist model in which the clientelistic provision of social policy was a key element (Craske 1994, p.1). This system must be understood as a mechanism of social control developed in the years after the Revolution through the creation of the PRI. The original idea was to incorporate all elements of society into the party in order to avoid the confrontations of the past. This led to the establishment of three main sectors – workers, peasants, and popular, the latter incorporating public servants and the middle classes –, each of them coordinated by an organisation through which control and provision of benefits took place (Needler 1995, p.14). Whenever there was any element of dissent, these organisations would be the channels through which the cooptation of the rebellious elements would be attempted. If that strategy failed, they would also be in charge of silencing the dissidents through repression (Craske 1994, p.8).

Corporatism was then at the core of the undemocratic nature of the Mexican state and explains the longevity of PRI rule in the country. It is also an indicator that the governance dimension of development was not structured in the pursuit of democracy and participation, but framed in terms of social control, which was reinforced because the PRI was, until the end of the 20$^{th}$ century, the only party with any chance of winning elections.

### 5.1.4. Culture

The analysis of how the Mexican state handled culture until the 1980s shows that the fulfilment of identity was not part of its understanding of the concept. On the contrary, it conceived culture as a set of malleable features that should be changed to facilitate modernisation. Using the Revolution as a cornerstone, the successive PRI governments tried to build from scratch a unitary idea of Mexicanness (up to that point still absent among the population) associated with 'modern values' and the Spanish language although grounded on idealised historical features (Verduzco Igartua 1996). Thus, even though most of the population was *mestiza* (mix of European and indigenous), and therefore from European descent, the Spanish conquerors were depicted in pejorative terms while the pre-Conquest indigenous leaders were seen as heroes[1] (Needler 1995, p.47). This was, according to Carbó (1997, p.91), part of the *indigenista* strategy, which denied any distinction between European and indigenous elements in Mexican society so indigenous people would feel part of the single Mexican project and abandon their languages and traditions. This process was also linked to corporatism, as the PRI co-opted many young indigenous leaders who thus became *caciques* (local bosses) in charge of the distribution of benefits in exchange of political support (Gledhill 1998, p.93).

Despite all these efforts the category 'indigenous' was not eradicated in Mexico, and nowadays about 10% of the population are considered indigenous. However, the predominantly rural indigenous population kept being a marginal element of Mexican society excluded from growth processes (Needler 1995, p.46).

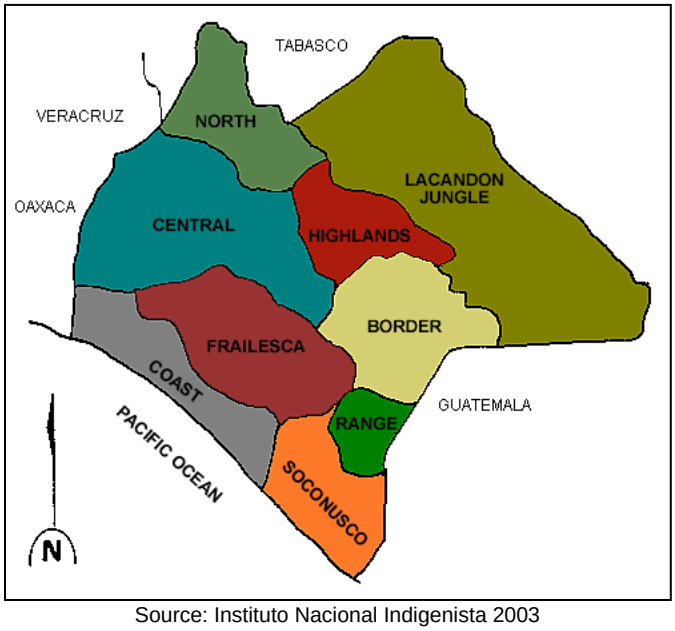
## 5.2. The situation in Chiapas

The description of Mexico presented in the previous section outlines the general situation for the whole country in terms of dimensions of development. In order to understand the process of construction of indigenous identity in Chiapas and the outcome of neoliberal policies in the state, it is necessary to pay attention to some of its particularities.

[1] Needler (1995, p.48) recounts how 'former President Emilio Portes Gil used to tell the story how, as ambassador to France, he was accosted by an elegant Frenchman who told him, "I am related to your last emperor" (meaning Maximilian [emperor in the short period of French rule in Mexico in the 19th century]), to which Portes Gil replied, "Really? Which one – Moctezuma or Cuauhtémoc [Indigenous rulers]?".'

Chiapas, situated in the South East of Mexico and bordering with Guatemala, is one of the poorest states in the country. Although in economic terms the most important sector in the state is energy, basically because of the presence of oil, most of its population, about 73% in 1976 (before the adoption of neoliberalism), works in the primary sector, being coffee and maize the most important crops (Fernández and Tarrío 1983, p.18). However, the polarisation that could be found in Mexico in general is even more acute in Chiapas. There is a small class of wealthy large landholders, mainly situated in the Southern coast of the state, who grow crops for exportation and are also engaged in cattle raising. In contrast, the majority of the population are grouped in *ejidos* where they farm very small parcels. For instance, Harvey (1995, p.7) reports that in 1990 '44.6 percent of ejidatarios possessed between 0.1 and 4.0 hectares and 42.0 percent had plots between 4.1 and 10.0 hectares'.

**Map 1: Regions of Chiapas**




Source: Instituto Nacional Indigenista 2003

Chiapas is also the state with the second highest percentage of indigenous people, estimated by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (2003) to be around 30%. However, the indigenous concentration is much higher in the central highlands and the Lacandon jungle regions, where most indigenous people live (see Map 1). They are mostly engaged in agricultural activities in very small plots of land and they have to sell their workforce on a temporal basis in order to ensure their subsistence (Fernández and Tarrío 1983, p.18).

Until the 1950s, the Lacandon jungle, a large area of tropical rainforest, was almost unpopulated. It was then that a very high rate of population growth (see Table 2) started putting pressure on the limited availability of land in the highlands region.

**Table 2: Population in Chiapas and the Lacandon jungle region**

| Year | Lacandon jungle region | Chiapas |
|---|---|---|
| 1920 | 20,089 | 421,744 |
| 1930 | 31,848 | 529,983 |
| 1940 | 34,224 | 679,885 |
| 1950 | 43,191 | 907,026 |
| 1960 | 62,684 | 1,210,870 |
| 1970 | 98,439 | 1,569,053 |
| 1980 | 159,729 | 2,084,771 |
| 1990 | 287,815 | 3,210,496 |
| 2000 | 376,515 | 3,920,515 |

Source: adapted from De Vos 2002, p.36

This triggered a process of mass migration to the Lacandon jungle region, in particular because the government encouraged migration as a way to avoid effective land redistribution (De Vos 2002, p.31).

Ouweneel (1996, pp.89-90) argues that in the highlands of Chiapas, the clientelist pact between the PRI and local indigenous *caciques* was strong and ensured the exchange of political support for social benefits. However, it also provided a certain degree of autonomy to the indigenous communities, which were free to manage themselves in their own particular way as far as they stuck to their clientelistic obligations. This especially contributed to the maintenance of typical indigenous traits in the population, such as language, customs and religious practices. However, in the 1970s the strength of the *caciques* began to diminish and factionalism and internal fighting appeared in the indigenous communities.

In the Lacandon jungle, the indigenous autonomy was reinforced by the geographical isolation of the region and the absence of a system of *caciquismo*. The abandonment of the region by the state compounded with the extremely hard conditions for agricultural activities in the jungle, and led to the arrival of different actors and the beginning of a process of local organisation. These actors were the Catholic Church and groups of Maoist revolutionaries who had been repressed by the government in the large cities. Both took as a task the mobilisation of the indigenous peasants of the highlands and jungle regions of Chiapas (De Vos 2002, pp.38-41).

To sum up, it can be said that the situation in the beginning of the 1980s was one in which the poor indigenous peasants of Chiapas were facing very hard living conditions, but this did not imply a huge change from the past as they had not benefited from the growth that the country had experienced since the 1950s. However, they had been able to maintain their indigenous traits and their way of life through migration to the jungle in search for new lands. Yet the decrease of strength of *caciquismo* in the highlands and its absence in the newly colonised jungle meant that their loyalty to and identification with the Mexican state declined. This, in turn, facilitated the emergence of processes of local organisation instigated by external actors.

## 5.3. Culture in Chiapas

The information presented in the previous two sections contains the necessary elements to describe the cultural elements that make up the identity of indigenous peasants in Chiapas.

As suggested above, the notion of culture does not refer to a predefined set of features, but to those elements that people use to define themselves and therefore be able to relate with other individuals and groups. It is the confluence of the definitions of many people around certain characteristics that makes them see themselves as a group sharing a collective identity.

Accordingly, I contend that throughout the 20$^{th}$ century the indigenous peasants of Chiapas came to construct themselves as a group with a common identity, and that the key cultural feature behind this identity was *the attachment to land*. This must be understood as a fundamental value situated at the cultural base of the four dimensions of development, where the symbolic elements of culture can be found (as shown in Figure 4). This value is reflected in the dimension of production via the productive activity of agriculture. However, what for other people is just a productive activity which can be changed at different points of life, for the indigenous peasants of Chiapas this is connected to a fundamental characteristic which makes them as they are. The importance of land for this group of people is evident from the many accounts of the situation in Chiapas (see Harvey 1995; De Vos 2002; Barabas 1996; Leyva Solano 1998). However, in many of these accounts the attachment to land is interpreted, often implicitly, as important because of its productive value. Agriculture is seen as an

occupation, and consequently its loss is as detrimental as the loss of the fundamental source of income would be for anybody, and especially for poor people. Yet I argue that it is necessary to interpret this attachment to land as something deeper, entrenched in values. The lives of the people of the highlands and the Lacandon jungle of Chiapas revolve around this value of attachment to land, which is a central element in their worldview. Bosman (2003), for instance, argues that the Mayas (a category that describes all the different indigenous peoples of Southern Mexico and Guatemala) see the earth as their mother, and that they only hurt her when there is need to do so, when they sow the land or when they build a house. And, before doing so, they have to ask permission to the earth, which they do through different kinds of celebrations and rituals.

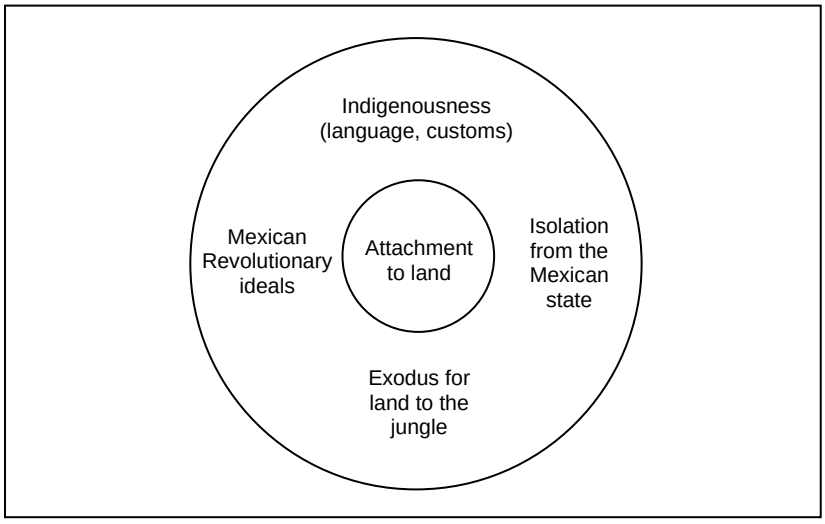
However, this could be used to argue that this attachment to land is shared by other indigenous people and peasants all around Mexico (if not the entire world), and therefore cannot be the defining characteristic of the indigenous peasants of Chiapas. Here it is necessary to go back to the definition of culture as the *process of construction of an identity*. The features on which an identity is based do not lead to the shape of that identity in a deterministic way, but are part of a complex social process through which identities are constantly created and recreated. Hence the presence of the same cultural feature in different populations can lead to different forms of identity in which this feature plays different roles. It is possible, for instance, that in other parts of Mexico the attachment to land has been diluted – or even disappeared from people's identities in the cases where they have migrated into towns – because of the close links of the population with the Mexican state which have made them prone to internalise the ideas of Mexicanness and modernity promoted by the government.

In the particular case of the indigenous peasants of Chiapas, I would argue that it is their specific process of identity construction that made attachment to land a central and defining value. Four key elements can be identified in this process. First, the nature of the search for land in the region is a crucial factor. This search was defined by the availability of land in the jungle, which involved a tremendous personal investment both in the process of migration and in the efforts to establish agricultural activities in such a hard environment, thus reinforcing the significance of land for the migrants. Second, the relative isolation of the indigenous peasants of Chiapas from the state meant that their reliance on the land for survival was almost absolute. This isolation was strengthened through the organisational activities promoted by the

Catholic Church and Maoist groups, which gave local populations a sense of unity and of opposition to the state. Third, the indigenous element played a crucial role in surrounding the attachment to land with a mystique. Therefore, I do not endorse the view of some commentators (see Gossen 1996 and Esteva 1999) who regard indigenousness as instilled with almost essentialist features based on pre-Colombian history, such as their communitarianism and communalism. Quite the opposite, I see indigenousness as part of a constructed identity that strengthens, and in turn is strengthened by, the attachment to land. Finally, this identity also incorporates elements of the traditional fight for land of the Mexican peasant, manifested in an exaltation of the Revolution and its peasant leaders, such as Zapata, who is the key figure of reference for the indigenous movement in Chiapas.

The result of the process characterised by the four elements just described is a specific and complex identity which has attachment to land at its core (see Figure 11).

**Figure 8: Cultural features of indigenous peasant identity in Chiapas**




## 5.4. Culture and development policy in Chiapas before neoliberalism

Having defined the key elements of indigenous peasant identity in Chiapas, the key question that emerges at this point is: if the policies adopted in the cultural dimension by the Mexican state before the 1980s, as mentioned above, were not aimed at the fulfilment of identity, why was there no cultural shock in Chiapas?

The answer, as predicted by the conceptual framework of Chapter 4, is that no cultural shock was provoked because the policies pursued in each of the four dimensions of development, even if unintentionally, did not deny the key element of indigenous peasant identity, namely attachment to land.

The indigenous people of Chiapas were marginalised within Mexico and the government was running a campaign of assimilation and negation of the indigenous part of their identities. Moreover, they were not benefiting from the country's economic growth and they had to live in an undemocratic and corporatist political system. However, they could still live according to their own self-definition or at least, aspire to do so. The system of parastate companies and price controls in place ensured that most peasants could maintain their productive activities, even if precarious. The institutionalisation of land reform in the Constitution, even if the process of redistribution was applied unevenly and slowly, held a promise of land ownership for every Mexican peasant. The recourse to go to the jungle to obtain a piece of land, no matter how much hardship it implied, was also a solution that many indigenous peasants were willing to accept. Therefore, the situation, although difficult, did not imply the negation of themselves and their way of life as they could still live according to the value of attachment to land, and thus there was no cultural shock leading to extreme reactions. However, all this would change with the advent of neoliberalism in the 1980s.

# 6. The neoliberal turn

In this chapter, the new neoliberal development policy adopted in Mexico in the 1980s is presented, again with particular attention to the four dimensions of development. The next chapter outlines its consequences and analyses its impact on the fulfilment of identity.

## 6.1. Production

With the general situation as presented in the previous chapter, Mexico had to confront its economic contradictions by defaulting on its foreign debt in 1982 and entering a profound economic crisis. The dependence of the country from the International Monetary Fund and the global ascendancy of neoliberal economic policies were the causes of a turn in Mexican development policy toward neoliberalism. The change took place during the second half of the government of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), and it was intensified during the mandate of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994).

The policies adopted followed the neoliberal canon, which is seen as universally applicable and concentrated on the productive dimension. The model intends to achieve economic growth through increased efficiency based on a higher reliance on the workings of markets and the withdrawal of the state from the economic sphere. This implies the adoption of macroeconomic stabilisation and the opening of the country to trade and foreign investment (Rapley 1996). The de la Madrid government undertook all these measures to some degree and also started a large privatisation programme of state companies (Cypher 1990, p.14). However, at the end of de la Madrid's term in office, GDP per capita in the country had dropped to its level of twenty years before and inflation reached an annual rate of 180% (Needler 1995, p.28). Nonetheless, some changes began to be evident. As Needler (1995, p.28) argues:

> Mexican manufacturing revived, now that little foreign exchange was available to import consumer goods, and exports started to climb as Mexican prices became very attractive with the decline of the peso. Foreign investment grew as Mexican wages dropped in dollar terms, concentrating especially in the *maquiladoras* [in-bond processing factories].

The new emphasis of economic policy toward macroeconomic stability, mainly through the reduction of inflation and of the public account deficit, implied that the government lost interest in fostering national agricultural production, which stopped to be seen as 'the main lever for urban-industrial development' (C. de Grammont 2003, p.351). Price guarantees were dropped in favour of market prices, making imported agricultural products cheaper than domestic ones, and other services like the provision of credit or marketing to small producers were also discontinued (Harvey 1995, p13). In this new situation, the goal was instead to make commercial agriculture as efficient as possible so it would be able to compete in global markets. To that purpose, several measures were taken, the most relevant one being the reform of the Constitution in order to end the process of land distribution and allow for the privatisation of *ejido* land (ibid, p.352).

All of this process led to the birth of the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) in 1994, which would join Canada, the United States and Mexico in a permanent free trade area. This was expected to provide long-term stability in economic policy and increase the attractiveness of the country for international investment (Needler 1995, p.30).

It seems clear that the productive policies adopted by the government did not take into account the particularities and needs of the indigenous peasants of Chiapas (or of the rest of the country), as most measures were of a macroeconomic kind and with the primary goal of bolstering efficiency.

## 6.2. Distribution

However, the Salinas administration had learnt from the negative social consequences of previous similar experiences with the adoption of neoliberal policies, and therefore it engaged in the delivery of temporary social policy to mitigate the impact of the reforms on poor people. This took place through the implementation of a gigantic social program called *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* (National Solidarity Programme, or PRONASOL), which was financed with the earnings of the privatisation of state companies (and therefore did not affect the current account budget) (Needler 1995, p.30). PRONASOL was supposed to provide targeted benefits to poor communities which, organised in specifically created committees, would decide in a participatory fashion which projects they wanted to be financed (Needler 1995, p.31). The programme also incorporated the notion of 'corresponsibility', requiring the

beneficiaries to contribute between 25% and 50% of the cost of a project (Craske 1994, p.27). It is also worth noting that, being the poorest state in the country, Chiapas was the first recipient of PRONASOL funds under Salinas (Harvey 1995, p.17).

In 1993, another initiative called *Programa Nacional de Apoyos Directos al Campo* (National Programme of Direct Support to the Countryside, or PROCAMPO) was adopted by the Salinas government. This programme made 3.3 million small producers of seven crops eligible for direct payments to be made on a per hectare basis, and was created to complement PRONASOL in the countryside given the negative effects that the policies adopted were having on the peasantry (Harvey 1995, p.14).

Despite these measures and as the previous section has shown, land reform; the most important distributive policy in the period before the 1980s and the most relevant for the indigenous people of Chiapas was discontinued, making this population group worse-off.

## 6.3. Governance

In the governance dimension, president Salinas' policies seem to have followed a double goal. On the one hand, he belonged to a new generation of technocrats who wanted to modernise the PRI and to overcome the corporatist system which, in their view, was precluding the emergence of a liberal regime which would bring progress to Mexico (Craske 1994, p.10). In this respect, the new development policy seemed to set, at least rhetorically, democracy and participation as a goal. Proof of this can be seen, for example, in the way PRONASOL was drawn up as a participatory programme.

On the other hand, it is also possible to see a tendency in the Salinas government to adopt measures aimed at the maintenance of the hegemony of the PRI. Thus, Bruhn (1996) affirms that the distribution of the funds of PRONASOL followed political priorities, which is confirmed by Craske's (1994, p.28) observation that the PRI certainly benefited from its implementation in the 1991 parliamentary elections.

However, the channelling of resources through PRONASOL bypassed the traditional clientelistic conduits monopolised by the PRI, further weakening the already shaking

corporatist system (Craske 1994, p.10). It is to be expected that this effect was felt the strongest in those places where the clientelistic links were already weak, as was the case of Chiapas.

The simultaneity of these opposed tendencies in the Salinas government leads to the conclusion that, although the policies pursued implied a step forward in the direction of democratisation, they did not fundamentally seek a change in the nature of the relationship between the state and the citizens, which could still be categorised as based on the exercise of social control. This implies that the cultural characteristics of the indigenous people of Chiapas were less likely to be acknowledged and to underpin further development policies.

## 6.4. Culture

The fact that neoliberalism is understood as a set of generic policies which can be applied everywhere without distinction clearly indicates that it does not incorporate a notion of culture like the one endorsed in this paper. In fact, although it does not propose any specific cultural measures, neoliberalism could be said to endorse a notion of culture that refers to a set of characteristics that need to and can be changed unproblematically in order to achieve economic growth (see Figure 5). This time, however, it is not the state which is in charge of changing the cultural features of the population, but free markets. Their reward of certain economic activities and their punishment of others would imply that people have to adapt their whole lives in order to do some activity that markets indicate as efficient, thus changing their culture as they have to adapt if they want to survive. This is precisely the kind of argument that the following statement by one of the principal architects of the neoliberal reforms in Mexico seems to support:

> As long as peasants cling to a marginal plot of land, without resources and with low productivity, they will remain impoverished, a dead weight on society. The solution is for this population to find work in better-paid activities and for agricultural production to be left to those who have what it takes to make it profitable and dynamic (Téllez Kunzler 1993, p.153, cited in C. de Grammont 2003, p.352).

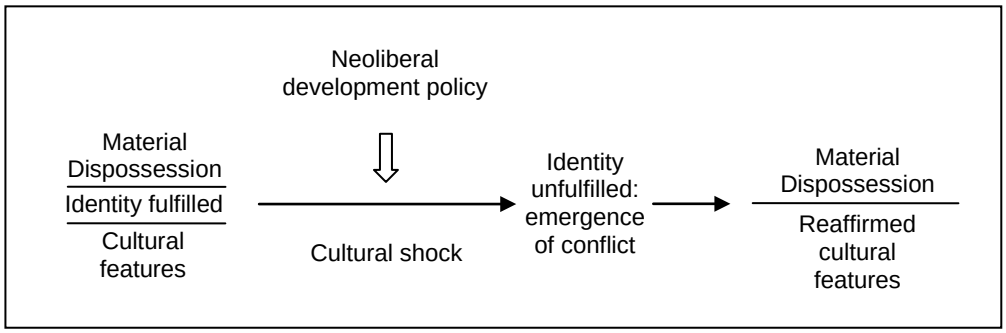
This line of reasoning, however, completely ignores the importance of the fulfilment of identity and, in the concrete case of the indigenous peasants of Chiapas, the central

role of attachment to land. Thus, as the next chapter shows, neoliberalism led to cultural shock and to the emergence of conflict in Chiapas.

# 7. Cultural shock and conflict in Chiapas

The adoption of neoliberal development policies in the 1980s had significant repercussions for the indigenous peasants of Chiapas. According to the framework presented in Part II of this project, I would argue that the situation just described follows the conceptualisation shown in Figure 9, which reproduces the hypothesis presented in Figure 6 but applied to the case of Chiapas. Figure 9 posits that the neoliberal development policy adopted in Mexico did not take into account the key cultural elements of the indigenous peasants of Chiapas, therefore provoking cultural shock, tearing apart identities and leading to conflict.

**Figure 9: Effect of neoliberal development policy in Chiapas**




In order to prove the validity of this hypothesis, the next two chapters analyse the consequences of the neoliberal policies described in the previous chapter in two steps. First, the impact of neoliberal policies and the appearance of cultural shock are presented. Second, the reactions of the population to cultural shock and the emergence of conflict are portrayed.

## 7.1. Neoliberalism and cultural shock in Chiapas

### 7.1.1. Consequences of neoliberalism

The neoliberal policies made by the Mexican state in the late 1980s and early 1990s had far-reaching consequences on poor peasants in Chiapas. On the productive front, these were triggered by two related sets of causes. First, the progressive withdrawal of state support to peasants; and second, the liberalisation of trade which culminated with the signing of the NAFTA agreement in 1993.

The dismantling of several parastate companies which provided services to the countryside was initially welcomed by peasant organisations who were happy to see the disappearance of some very inefficient, bureaucratised and corrupt institutions (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello 1994). However, it soon became clear that this move would not be followed 'by the type of financial and marketing support required to reactivate the rural economy' (Harvey, p.13). Although the level of government support to the countryside had traditionally been below the country average in Chiapas (and even lower in the highlands and jungle regions), the abandonment of small scale producers brought serious problems to a sector that did not have alternative sources of credit, marketing and inputs. This compounded with the disappearance of price guarantees and the incoming competition from the United States, which made marketing products even more difficult for small producers.

**Table 3: Principal crops cultivated in *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias* in Chiapas, 1991**

| Principal crop cultivated | Number of *ejidos* and *CAs* | % of *ejidos* and *CAs* |
|---|---|---|
| Maize | 1,264 | 75.8% |
| Coffee | 349 | 20.9% |
| Sugar cane | 19 | 1.1% |
| Soy beans | 16 | 1.0% |
| Beans | 8 | 0.5% |
| Green vegetables | 8 | 0.5% |
| Rice | 3 | 0.2% |

Source: Harvey 1995, p.8

For instance, maize, which is the most important crop in Chiapas (see Table 3), saw the real value of its guaranteed prices fall behind the increase in input costs, resulting in a rise of the proportion of maize producers operating at a loss from 43% in 1987 to 65% in 1988. At the same time, the lack of government support for production in the difficult environment of the jungle region meant that from 1982 to 1987, even though the land area dedicated to maize increased by 20.6%, its output fell by 19.6% (Harvey 1995, p.12). The entrance in NAFTA only made things worse. Maize yields in Chiapas average 1.7 tons per hectare, whereas in the United States the figure stands at 6.9 tons per hectare. This means that the inclusion of maize in the NAFTA and the progressive phasing out of tariffs and import quotas will, in the medium term, force the small producers of Chiapas out of the market (ibid, p.14).

**Table 4: Inputs in *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias*) in Chiapas, 1991**

| Inputs | Number of *ejidos* and *CAs* | % of sector |
|---|---|---|
| Farm installations | 495 | 28.9% |
| Tractors | 318 | 18.6% |
| Agroindustry equipment | 206 | 12.0% |
| Credit | 951 | 55.5% |
| Public services | 1,390 | 81.1% |

Source: Harvey 1995, p.8

The second largest sector in the state, coffee, constitutes an even clearer example of the effects of the new policies. Affected by the collapse of international prices and the disappearance of the parastatal *Instituto Nacional Mexicano del Café* (Mexican National Coffee Institute, or INMECAFE), the coffee sector saw its productivity and total output fall by 35% between 1989 and 1993. According to Harvey (1995, p.11), small coffee producers suffered a 70% drop in income in this period, were unable to pay loans and thousands of them had to abandon production.

In response to this situation, initiatives of support undertaken by the Mexican government, such as PROCAMPO and PRONASOL served to ease the sufferings of the peasant indigenous population of Chiapas, but they did not reverse the decaying trend (Collier and Lowery Quaratiello 1994). Harvey (1995, p.15) reports how the support provided by PROCAMPO to maize producers could not compensate the losses created by increased competition and lack of services and credit (see Table 4). The same author argues that PRONASOL funding, although it increased considerably in Chiapas from 1989 to 1993 (465%), was largely 'designed to improve social welfare and public works, with only 12 percent going to support productive activities' (Harvey 1995, p.18). This was unable to solve the serious social problems of the state (see Table 5), and confirms that the main expectation of the government was that under the new circumstances the poor indigenous peasants of Chiapas would be forced to abandon their inefficient agricultural activities and move to towns where they could find jobs in the industry sector, especially in *maquiladoras* (in-bond processing factories). An increase in living standards was expected from this change, thus fulfilling the government's conception of development (C. de Grammont 2003, p.355).

**Table 5: Social indicators for Chiapas and Mexico - 1992**

| Indicator | Mexico | Chiapas |
|---|---|---|
| Illiteracy rate | 10.0% | 30.0% |
| Drop-out rate from primary school | 21.0% | 62.0% |
| % of homes without electricity | 12.5% | 33.1% |
| % of homes without drinking water | 20.6% | 41.6% |
| % of homes without drainage | 36.4% | 58.8% |

Source: adapted from Harvey 1995, pp.18-19

The end of land reform established by the modification of Article 27 of the Constitution also had serious implications in Chiapas. Many indigenous peasants in the state were at that time expecting resolutions for their demands of land, and many others were involved in invasions of large landholdings, given the unavailability of new land, hoping that with time both the state and the large landowners would have to compromise and reach some sort of agreement with them (De Vos 2002). The end of land reform implied a sudden end to the hopes of all poor indigenous peasants of ever being able to own land (Harvey 1995, p.26).

### 7.1.2. The appearance of cultural shock

I would claim that the implications of the neoliberal policies of the Mexican state just described clashed with the cultural features that make up the identity of indigenous peasants in Chiapas, thus provoking a cultural shock.

The argument here is that the neoliberal development policy adopted, by making economic decisions that implied that the indigenous peasants had to abandon their lands to go to work in factories, were directly negating what in Chapter 5 I have identified as the key cultural feature of these people, their attachment to land. What the government understood just as an unproblematic change of productive activity and place of residence that only required short-term financial support, was in fact affecting the cultural base of the indigenous peasants and precluding the fulfilment of their identity. This failure is as important as the failure to achieve material well-being, and both need to be taken into account in order to consider the success of development processes.

Understood in mere productive terms, as the Mexican government seemed to do, the situation of Chiapas can only be considered as irrational. Why would a group of people stick to a place and a productive activity that keeps them in precarious living conditions when an alternative that promises a higher living standard (or which at least is

presented as such) is available? My answer is not that indigenous peasants in Chiapas are irrational, but that in making decisions about their life and their well-being they consider not only the productive dimension, but others among which culture and the fulfilment of identity are key. Neoliberal policy implies that indigenous people have to abandon their land, and this for them means renouncing to a fundamental part of who they are. They have constructed their lives around a search for land and the products that they can obtain from it, and in the process they have created a collective identity, a way to define themselves which, in different ways (indigenous religious relationship to land, Mexican Revolution peasant ideals, etc.), puts land at the centre of their worldview. Externally imposed measures aimed at rapidly making them leave their lands prevented the fulfilment of their identities and precluded that they could live their life according to their essential value. The fundamental implication that this has for people's lives is what justifies the label of *cultural shock*.

However, the preceding argument does not mean that any policy that does not take culture into account will necessarily provoke a cultural shock, as the situation before the 1980s in Chiapas showed. The appearance of cultural shock will depend on the specific nature of the policies adopted, on the cultural features of the recipient population, and on the level of compatibility or opposition between them. What seems certain is that if the cultural dimension is not considered, there is no way to ensure that cultural shock does not occur.

Therefore, the main conclusion to be drawn at this point is that the lack of consideration of culture as defined in this paper meant that the neoliberal policies adopted by the Mexican state prevented the fulfilment of identity of indigenous peasants and resulted in a cultural shock, which in itself constitutes a failure of development. However, the analysis cannot stop here, as the relevance of a cultural shock for people's lives triggers reactions in the population that can have further consequences for development policy.

## 7.2. Emergence of conflict in Chiapas

### 7.2.1. Popular reactions to cultural shock

When dealing with the reactions to the neoliberal development policy adopted by the Mexican state in Chiapas, it is important to acknowledge the presence of different groups with diverse responses to the situation. However, it is fair to say that in general,

and contrary to the expectations of the Mexican government, the poor indigenous peasants of Chiapas did not take the support given through PRONASOL and abandon their agricultural activities to go to towns.

Through the network of grassroots organisations which had flourished in the previous two decades, numerous expressions of the type of reaction labelled as 'voice' in the conceptual framework began to emerge. On the one hand, the invasion of lands and the continuous reclamations for land redistribution had been common activities of many local organisations during the 1980s (see De Vos 2002, pp.247-285). In the early 1990s, with the declaration of the official end of land reform, the profile of the protests increased. In January 1992, more than 4,000 peasants demonstrated against the state and national governments in Ocosingo, and in October of that same year 10,000 indigenous people gathered to protest in San Cristóbal de las Casas[2] (De Vos 2002, p.350).

The latter event is interesting because it clearly exemplifies a tendency which had begun in the region in the 1970s. October 12th 1992 was the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus to America, and against the general celebratory tone adopted throughout the country, the demonstration of San Cristóbal de las Casas involved a protest against the oppression suffered by the indigenous people since the Conquest. This cultural element was already present in the way all the organisations of the region defined themselves and their fight, and it acquired increasing prominence in the early 1990s.

These expressions of 'voice' against the effects of neoliberal policies and the situation of the indigenous people in Chiapas experienced a fundamental change on January 1st 1994, the first day of application of NAFTA, when between three and four thousand indigenous revolutionaries who called themselves the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or EZLN) began an armed uprising with the occupation for several hours of San Cristóbal de las Casas (Harvey 1995, p.1).

The Zapatistas, representing the last stage of an organisational process which had started 20 years before, rebelled against the Mexican state, whom they blamed for the precarious situation in Chiapas, and summarised their demands in 11 points: 'right to

[2] Ocosingo and San Cristóbal de las Casas are the two principal towns in the Lacandon jungle and the highlands regions of Chiapas respectively.

work, land, housing, a proper diet, health, education, autonomy, liberty, democracy, justice and peace' (Leyva Solano 1998, p.38).

The first reaction of the Mexican government to the uprising was military. However, after a few days of armed confrontation between the Mexican army and the EZLN, the high level of attention to the conflict raised by the media led the government to halt all military operations and start a process of negotiation. This process coalesced around what later on were called 'indigenous rights', in which 'cultural' demands, mainly implying a certain degree of autonomy and self-rule for indigenous people, seemed to replace the more economic and social oriented requests which defined the first statements of the EZLN. This turn led to some controversy about the true goals of the Zapatistas. The EZLN justified the lack of stress on the 'indigenous' category at the beginning of the rebellion as a means to avoid being pigeonholed by the state as 'indigenous' and thus not representing broader problems (Pollack 1999, p.42). However, Harvey (1995, p.61) believes that the indigenous element never played a significant role in the reclamations of the poor peasants of Chiapas, and that it was only adopted as a way to find a common identity for the people making the reclamations. Another opinion, presented by Leyva Solano (1998, p.50), is that the demands for autonomy of the indigenous people only became important after more ambitious goals, such as the drawing up of a new constitution and the installation of a new congress, were unattained.

In any case, the process of negotiation around indigenous rights, although initially settled with the signing of the Agreements of San Andrés in 1996, continues to the present date as the government failed to apply the accords and passed an indigenous law which fell short of the initial agreement. In addition, during the entire political process and to some extent isolated from it, Chiapas has lived in a continuous situation of conflict (Barabas 1996, pp.8-9).

Although overt military confrontation finished a few days after the uprising, Chiapas became a zone with a high military presence, with the construction of several camps and the setting of many road controls and posts. This led to what later was called 'low intensity war', implying the persecution of Zapatista members and sympathisers both by army members and paramilitary groups (Weinberg 2000). Another aspect of low intensity war had to do with social policy, which was used by the government as an incentive for the Zapatistas to abandon the rebel cause. The main governmental programme to deal with poverty in Chiapas after the beginning of the conflict, called

Cañadas Programme, had to be discontinued in 2000 after unanimous claims that it was a counter-insurgency, and not a social, initiative (Bellinghausen 2001).

Just as a group of indigenous people decided to confront the government and express its voice (either violently or peacefully), others opted for loyalty and for the benefits supplied by the PRI and the government (Ouweneel 1996, p.92). The clash between both groups caused the displacement of those who were in minority in their communities, intensified by military and paramilitary selective actions. Given the prominent role that land plays in the state and in the peasant demands, there were disputes and invasions of lands, which in turn provoked more violence and deprivation. The situation got further complicated with the appearance of splits within the factions resulting from leadership fights, disputes about land, etc.

Although the Zapatista reaction can be labelled as ‘voice’, it also has a component of ‘exit’. In October 1994, the areas where the support for the EZLN was highest declared themselves as ‘autonomous regions’, meaning that they cut all their links with the Mexican state until their demands are met. These regions now engage in self-rule according to the indigenous traditions, have their own way of providing justice, social services, public works, etc. and only accept funds and support from civil society, not from the Mexican state (Nash 1997, p.263; Barabas 1996, p.8). This internal division has made all subsequent efforts to undertake development policy in the region very difficult.

### 7.2.2. Causes of conflict

The preceding section has shown how the reactions of the population after the adoption of neoliberal policies led to the emergence of conflict in Chiapas. However, the question remains about what the causes of the conflict were.

Most accounts of the conflict in Chiapas endorse one of two different explanations. The first one argues that the conflict is the result of the deteriorating living conditions faced by the indigenous population in the region and triggered by neoliberal economic policies (see Veltmeyer 2000; Harvey 1995). This version almost completely excludes culture from the analysis, or at the most incorporates it as an accessory factor. The second explanation goes to the other extreme and seems to find in the latent and repressed indigenous cultural features of the Chiapanecan peasants the driving force

for the appearance of conflict (see Cunninghame and Ballesteros Corona 1998; Esteva 1999).

According to the exposition presented above, I would contend that both explanations, although pointing to important factors, miss out the relationship between development and culture and therefore are unable to properly understand the processes taking place in Chiapas. In the first case, for instance, there is no satisfactory explanation of why the conflict did not arise sooner. As I showed above, the living and production conditions of the indigenous peasants of Chiapas before the 1980s were very deficient. Population growth meant that people could not make a living in their places of origin and had to embark on risky and difficult migrations to the jungle. Moreover, this process was taking place at a moment when Mexico as a whole was growing, with the consequent comparative disadvantage that this supposed. Not even in the mid-1980s, when the economic crisis was at its most severe point and PRONASOL had not started yet, was there violent conflict. As for the cultural account, it cannot explain what it is that, after 500 years of oppression, makes the current situation so special so as to provoke such a renewal of indigenous mobilisation. Moreover, it gives no clue as to what the implications for overall development policy are.

At this point I want to emphasise again the non-deterministic nature of the explanations presented in this paper. Just as the identity of the indigenous peasants of Chiapas did not have to be seen as unique and permanent, and as the appearance of cultural shock was not inevitable, the emergence of conflict is not a predestined outcome either. As the conceptual framework exposed, the relationship between government and citizens is not unidirectional, and citizen responses can be of different types (loyalty, exit, voice). There are many factors that can contribute to the appearance of one kind of reaction or another, and in fact, different types of responses to neoliberalism appeared in Chiapas. Although this complexity makes it impossible to determine the outcome of development policy beforehand, careful analysis of the different factors in place can help to understand the causes of extreme reactions and the appearance of conflict.

In the particular case of Chiapas, I would claim that the key reason leading to conflict was the cultural shock described above. This cultural shock was provoked by the *fundamental opposition* between the neoliberal policies adopted and the cultural characteristics of the indigenous peasant population. The centrality of attachment to land in people's lives was directly *attacked* by the government by adopting policies that

would force people to abandon their lands and adopt a completely different kind of life incompatible with their essential cultural value, and this is what triggered an extreme reaction against the government. The trauma that neoliberal policies imposed on indigenous peasants of Chiapas was so severe that even armed rebellion, with all its negative consequences, was seen as an acceptable reaction to the harm they were being caused.

However, this reaction of part of the indigenous peasant population of Chiapas cannot be attributed solely to a cultural shock without considering other factors. One of them, for instance, is the erosion of the clientelistic system that had contributed to the maintenance of social peace in the past. This erosion was more a tendency than a homogeneous process, and in some communities the clientelistic ties and support for the PRI remained strong, which could explain why some communities did not join the Zapatista rebellion and remained loyal to the government. Another factor worth considering is the undemocratic nature of the Mexican state, which made it irresponsive to the pacific expressions of voice that had been taking place in Chiapas during the early 1990s. The third factor that probably had a role in the emergence of conflict is the indigenous component of the identity of the peoples of Chiapas, as it contributed to give the Zapatistas a sense of unity and of difference from the Mexican state, as well as it gave them a history of oppression which contributed to their radicalisation. A further factor to consider is the organisational activities of the Catholic Church and Maoist groups in Chiapas since the 1970s, which gave indigenous people the operational capacity to raise in rebellion. Finally, a crucial factor for the emergence of conflict is the progressive decay of the living conditions of the people in the highlands and Lacandon jungle regions of Chiapas throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

This last factor recovers the discussion among scholars mentioned above about whether the Zapatistas were really motivated by material issues or by cultural issues. The hypothesis exposed here has tried to overcome such a dichotomy and reconcile both elements as key for the understanding of development. It is impossible to say that the cultural issues would have led to conflict irrespective of the material (and other) conditions, just as it would be impossible to claim the opposite. As the list of contributing factors above shows, the conflict is the result of the confluence of several elements. However, my analysis through the framework of the dimensions of development has shown that the cultural shock derived from the neoliberal policies of

the Mexican government plays a crucial role in the emergence of the conflict of Chiapas.

* * *

This case study has showed the importance that the introduction of culture in development analysis in a meaningful way has for the understanding of the appearance of extreme reactions to cultural shock and the causes of conflict. However, the discussion of the role of culture in development in the case of Chiapas should also explore the situation after the advent of the conflict. Irrespective of what the causes of the conflict are thought to be, it is undeniable that the Zapatistas have framed the conflict in cultural terms, as their recourse to the ‘indigenous’ label and their claims for indigenous autonomy show. This is consistent with the framework presented here, as the process of construction of the identity of the indigenous peasants in Chiapas continues and is now affected by the conflict itself. The framing of the conflict in cultural terms has definite consequences for the subsequent adoption of development policy because, as the Mexican government can certainly testify, the negotiations about the measures to be adopted by the state are mediated by the cultural demands of the rebels. This only emphasises the argument for the introduction of culture into development policy analysis, and at the same time signals the increased complexity that doing so entails.

# 8. Conclusions

The examination of the effects that the adoption of neoliberal development policies had in Chiapas has shown that the model of incorporation of culture into development policy analysis proposed in this paper is useful, at least in the context of this case study, for four reasons.

First, it allows one to go beyond the weaknesses of most of the literature about the relationship between culture and development and propose a method of analysis of development policy that incorporates culture with concrete practical applications.

Second, it sheds light on identity fulfilment as a key aspect of people's lives, thus expanding the range of development dimensions and making development a concept which reflects better the diversity of elements which contribute to people's well-being.

Third, it posits the existence of a cultural base which is affected by policies in all the dimensions, overcoming simplistic analyses which assume that the policies in each dimension do not have broader consequences.

Fourth, it identifies the failure to achieve identity fulfilment as a crucial factor in provoking cultural shocks and reactions of voice and exit in the population, which make the subsequent adoption of development policies more difficult and can potentially lead to conflict.

All these elements contribute to a better understanding of development processes and of the effects of development policy in Chiapas. Moreover, they also point at the double nature of the framework presented here. On the one hand, the introduction of culture into development analysis as proposed in this paper has a transformative effect on the conception of development. This occurs because, as discussed above, the recognition of the importance of identity fulfilment forces development policy to go beyond macro structures and to consider its effects on particular populations. And this, in turn, involves paying more attention to people's needs and points of views, also reinforcing the need for democracy and increased participation.

On the other hand, the framework can also be understood from a pragmatic point of view. Even if the implications of the incorporation of culture are neglected and

development is reduced to material advancement, the model proposed here can still be helpful because of its role in identifying the causes of extreme reactions of the population to development policies caused by cultural shocks. Hence the framework could be used in order to avoid possible extreme responses to a given policy, thus achieving greater effectiveness in the development activities undertaken.

This double nature of the framework is one of its strengths, as it implies that whatever the notion of development adopted it can make a positive contribution to the analysis of development policy.

However, in order to make the most of the assets of this framework it is important to recognise and be aware of its limitations. The first factor to mention is the partial and ongoing character of the model presented here. The dimensions of development embraced in this work respond to my particular selection and reading of development models, as well as to my main aim of focusing on culture. However, different priorities and more in-depth analyses could lead to the adoption of additional dimensions, which would probably involve further transformations in the framework, just as it happened with the incorporation of culture as defined here.

The question of the choice of dimensions directs our attention toward the importance of the context to which the framework is applied. The cultural factor has appeared to be of extreme importance to understand the effects of development policy in Chiapas, but this does not necessarily have to be the case everywhere. Therefore, the conclusions of the analysis undertaken here should not be transposed to other contexts lightly. I would claim that fulfilment of identity is in itself important enough for human life so as to, at least, consider the cultural dimension in any analysis of development policy. However, the relevance of this dimension will depend on each particular context, and wider conclusions would require further research that applied the framework to different cases.

As for the findings that this project has reached regarding the case of Chiapas, it is also important to be cautious. I have shown that the neglect of cultural elements in the adoption of development policy in Mexico was a key factor in provoking a cultural shock and the emergence of conflict in Chiapas. However, the situation in the state is much more complex and affected by many more variables than those portrayed here. Hence, the account presented above should be seen more as a contribution to

understanding the conflict of Chiapas which complements other analyses of the case than as an alternative explanation.

Finally, a note about the use of the framework for policymaking is required. The analysis of past development policies through the framework provides lessons that can then be used in the elaboration of subsequent policies. However, the kind of *a posteriori* application of the framework that has been used in the case of Chiapas has two characteristics which are not available when it is employed to inform future policies. First, it makes possible to rearrange the observations in order to make them fit neatly in the ideal type scheme of before-after the adoption of the policies. Second, it can recur to the study of the actual reactions of the population in order to make sense of the outcomes of development policy. The lack of these elements when the framework is applied *a priori* leads to the realisation that, in actuality, events and policies succeed one another dynamically and in a much more complex way than the framework suggests. Moreover, it also points out that the reactions of the population are the result of complex processes and that they can never be predicted with certainty. This implies that the utilisation of the framework for policymaking should avoid falling into the easy simplification of assuming that the effects of the adoption of future policies will mirror those of the past. The uncertainties and difficulties of the adoption of development policy can only be overcome through a careful exploration of the reality of the case being analysed. It is in this context that the framework can be helpful in pointing at relevant aspects that should be taken into account.

All the points above emphasise the complexity of development policy and the need to complicate its analysis in order to increase the comprehension of the processes that surround it. This work has tried to make a limited first step in that direction through the incorporation of the concept of culture, which the analysis of the case of Chiapas has proved useful. Through this, a re-conceptualisation of the relationship between development and culture has taken place, overcoming previous weaknesses by giving it a practical application. However, much more work still needs to be done in order to understand the nature of cultural processes and their connections with development.

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