

Divided over Tourism: Zapotec Responses to Mexico's 'Magical Villages Program'

Toomas Gross

University of Helsinki, toomas.gross@helsinki.fi

Abstract

In 2001, Mexico's Ministry of Tourism launched the *Magical Villages Program* (*Programa Pueblos Mágicos*) to promote tourism to "typical" Mexican communities. One of the 43 communities currently involved in the program is Capulálpam de Méndez, an indigenous Zapotec village in the State of Oaxaca. This article, based on the author's intermittent fieldwork in Capulálpam since 1998, discusses local reactions to the Magical Villages Program and the villagers' diverse perceptions of the impact of tourism on local culture and identity. These perceptions tend to be polarised and fall into two clearly distinguishable camps. Some villagers associate tourism with material gains and increased employment opportunities. Others, however, perceive it as a threat to communal intimacy and local ways of life, and accuse it of increasing inequality in the village. Such polarisation of approaches reflects, at least partly, the pre-existing divisions and hierarchies in the village. Similarly to some of the major anthropological approaches to the impact of tourism on host communities, especially in Latin America, the local discourse on tourism and tourists in Capulálpam centres on the notions of *development* and *destruction*.

KEYWORDS: tourism, development, indigenous culture, Oaxaca, Mexico

Introduction

Mexico has long been among the world's favourite tourist destinations. In the era of mass travel and an increasingly competitive tourism industry, however, even a country that can boast internationally acclaimed resorts, architectural sites pertaining to Mesoamerica's glorious past, over 60 different indigenous groups, and a regionally diverse cuisine that has a global appeal, is forced to seek novel ways of attracting tourists. An example of such recent innovation is the Magical Villages Program (*Programa Pueblos Mágicos*), launched by the Mexican Ministry of Tourism in 2001. Its aim is to promote tourism (both domestic and international) to "typical" Mexican communities and to offer tourists an experience of "true Mexico" in addition to (or rather instead of) beaches, resorts, and pre-colonial ruins.

The program has become one of the flagships of Mexico's tourism sector, and it is regarded as the ministry's most successful undertaking in recent years. One of the 43 towns currently involved in the program is the village of Capulálpam de Méndez, an indigenous Zapotec community in the State of Oaxaca in Southern Mexico that has served as the base of my intermittent research in the region since 1998.¹

This article will scrutinise the local perceptions of the social and cultural implications of the Magical Villages Program in the concrete example of Capulálpam de Méndez.² My focus will not be on the entire 'touristic process' as Nash (1981: 462) has called it, but mainly on the "toured" themselves and the manoeuvrings of the local community in the face of very real positive and negative consequences of this new program. As the case of Capulálpam demonstrates, local attitudes towards tourism and the changes it engenders are not uniform. Many associate the tourist influx that the Magical Villages Program has led to with development and material gains, as well as with increased employment opportunities. Being nominated a magical village (*pueblo mágico*) constitutes a source of great communal pride. Oaxaca is among the most indigenous and culturally diverse states in Mexico, and to be the only *pueblo mágico* in such a context is considered highly prestigious. However, the Magical Villages Program can also be seen as a project that reinforces certain existing divisions and inequalities in the village. Not everyone in Capulálpam benefits from the revenues generated by tourism. Opening the community up to excessive numbers of visitors is perceived as a threat to local culture, communal intimacy and ways of life. As a top-down program, it serves as a means of enforcing new forms of governmentality, surveillance and control over communal issues by the state.

The program and its implementation in Capulálpam also serve as an ethnographic window to addressing, at a more general level, some of the key issues in the contemporary anthropology of tourism. Among these are the relationship between tradition and change, the contested nature of cultural authenticity, the commodification of heritage, and the production and marketing collective identity. The insistence on the seemingly contradictory qualities of the communities involved in the program – their "magic" as well as their "typicality" – constitutes another anthropologically puzzling feature of the Magical Villages Program.

¹ In 1998–2000, I conducted anthropological fieldwork for eighteen months in the region called the Sierra Juárez in the mountainous northern part of Oaxaca, being based during my fieldwork in the village of Capulálpam de Méndez. The data collected specifically in this village included notes of participant observation in daily social and religious life, 66 unstructured interviews with villagers, and the results of a questionnaire with 125 respondents. My main research interests in the late 1990s were concerned with religious change, but the collected data also included observations and interviews on more general social and economic changes in the village, unemployment, migration, cultural identity, and customs. I returned to Oaxaca and Capulálpam for shorter stages of fieldwork twice after that: for a month in 2008 and for another month in 2009. These field visits resulted in a total of 23 interviews on various changes in the village during the past ten years, and on the impact of the Magical Villages Program, as well as observation notes on different civil and religious events.

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Anthropology of tourism: the 'old' debate revisited

It is a common knowledge that global tourism industry has grown rapidly in the previous two or three decades, now generating up to ten percent of the world's GDP and employing or indirectly benefiting a similar proportion of the global workforce (World Travel and Tourism Council 2011: 5). In light of this, it is not surprising that anthropologists have, somewhat belatedly, followed suit, and that the anthropology of tourism is now a rapidly emerging field.³ This is so not only because of the explosive growth of mass tourism; the subdiscipline owes its success also to the anthropologists' realisation that contemporary tourism is the dominant realm in which the meeting and hybridisation of cultures takes place (Nash 1981: 461; Yamashita 2003: 3–4). These themes have always been at the very centre of anthropological research. Furthermore, some forms of modern tourism, cultural and ethnic tourism in particular, intersect with various other topics of long-standing relevance for anthropologists such as acculturation, authenticity, identity construction, and consumption.

Most anthropologists would, of course, agree that tourism has an impact on host communities, especially in case of cultural tourism to indigenous regions. With regard to assessing the nature of the transformative influence of tourism on local cultures and identities, however, dominant scholarly approaches differ and their main emphasis has changed over time.⁴ Various earlier studies regarded tourism as having a predominantly negative impact on host communities, owing to the cultural degradation that it allegedly leads to (cf. Bryden 1973; Mathieson & Wall 1982; Rossel 1988; Crick 1989; Greenwood 1989). Such studies generally suggested that tourists' demands and tastes lead to the commodification of culture and local heritage. Through contact with tourists, it was argued, cultural practices and elements come to be evaluated mainly in terms of their exchange value, thus turning them into "commodities" that could be bought and sold.⁵ Shepherd (2002) suggests that underlying such reasoning is the Marxist notion of value. In the process of commodification, Marx's "natural" use value, regarded as profound, transcendent, creative, intrinsic and an end in itself, is being supplanted by an "unnatural" exchange value which is framed as superficial, repetitive, instrumental, calculative, and as a means to an end (Shepherd 2002: 190). This, in turn, is claimed to have a destructive impact on the putative "authenticity" of cultural elements and practices.⁶ The 'tourist gaze,' as Urry

³ In actuality, anthropologists' interest in tourism as a research topic in its own right is not that recent. Allegedly the earliest study in the field, TheronNuñez's account of *weekendismo* in a Mexican village was published in 1963; Valene Smith's seminal anthology *Hosts and Guests* appeared in 1977. However, it is only in the previous two decades that tourism has truly achieved the status of a *legitimate* topic in anthropology. An important indicator of this is the constitution of *anthropology of tourism* as a separate sub-discipline (cf. Graburn 1983; Nash 1996; 2007; Burns 1999; Chambers 2000).

⁴ A concise overview of different approaches to tourism in the late 20th century anthropological literature can be found in Stronza (2001).

⁵ Studies on the relationship between commodification of culture and tourism are ample. An interested reader may consult Cohen (1988), MacCannell (2001), Shepherd (2002), or Cole (2007), to name just a few.

⁶ It goes without saying that from the anthropological perspective that the concept of *authenticity* is highly problematic (cf. Shepherd 2002: 188–9).

(1990) calls it, is often determined by the stereotypical expectations that tourists place on local populations in their search for an “authentic” experience. In order to benefit financially from tourism, local populations adapt themselves to tourists’ expectations, thus reducing their culture to a set of distinguishable and highly performative practices and elements. MacCannell (1973) eloquently calls such a response ‘staged authenticity.’ Furthermore, adapting to the tourist gaze and relying on revenues from visitors can lead to dependence, as has been demonstrated in various ethnographic contexts (cf. Erisman 1983; Lepp 2008). As I will demonstrate below, these are not just scholarly conclusions – local critics of the Magical Villages Program in Capulálpam were quite explicit about tourism’s alleged capacity to undermine “authenticity” and create dependence.

On the opposite side of the discipline’s spectrum, predominantly in more recent studies, anthropologists have emphasised the capacity of tourism to reinvigorate certain traditional elements of culture and ethnic identity as well as to facilitate the emergence of new cultural forms (cf. Bendix 1989; Hiwasaki 2000; Yamashita 2003; Cole 2006; 2007). Central to these approaches is the argument that tourism – cultural and ethnic tourism in particular – has the potential to stimulate and revive a local population’s interest in its past. Hiwasaki (2000: 396) goes as far as coining the term ‘generative authenticity’ to emphasise the ability of tourism to “create” culture. The culture thus created is not “inauthentic” but cultural traditions simply acquire new meanings through commodification (Hiwasaki 2000: 397). Moreover, adapting to tourists’ interests may empower the local populations and increase their agency; many recent studies emphasise a strong link between tourism and local development (cf. Stanley 1998; Mowforth & Munt 2003; Cole 2006). In the most immediate sense, *development* here stands for economic growth, powered by increased revenues, better opportunities for employment, and renewed infrastructure. But the developmental impact of tourism can also be understood in a much broader sense, comprising social, cultural, educational, political and other realms.

This is, of course, a very schematic and exaggeratedly binary perspective on the anthropological approaches to the impact of tourism, and splitting *all* studies on the topic into *pro-tourism* and *con-tourism* camps would be a simplification. A more recent “critical turn” in the study of tourism (cf. Aitchinson 2006; Ateljevic et al. 2007; 2011) seeks to challenge some of the dominant discourses and juxtapositions in tourism studies. The emphasis has shifted towards more interpretative, reflexive and critical modes of inquiry, while locating tourism as a phenomenon into wider political, economic, cultural, and social contexts.⁷ Nevertheless, such a polarised perspective on the impact of tourism is not entirely outdated in the contemporary anthropological studies of tourism in Latin America. The distinctly negative or positive approaches outlined above are still discernible, also in more recent research. Various accounts published over the previous decade

⁷ Yet, despite its innovative methodology and its capacity to deliver new insights into the discursive, symbolic and performative realms of tourism, the “critical turn” in tourism studies is not without weaknesses. As Bianchi (2009: 487) suggests, the ‘critical tourist studies’ achieve their goals at the expense of a more thorough engagement with the issues related to the processes of globalisation, material inequalities, patterns of social polarisation, and structural power.

on tourism in diverse contexts in Latin America have treated it primarily as a threat to cultural authenticity that amounts to heritage commodification and cultural degradation (cf. Re Cruz 2003; Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos 2004; Gullette 2007). Others, in contrast, have put an analytical emphasis on tourism as a major source of revenue, a catalyst of development, and an engine of (positive) social transformations (cf. Medina 2003; Zorn 2004; Greathouse-Amador 2005; Berger 2006; Baud & Ypeij 2009; Babb 2010).

Returning to and to a certain extent reviving this admittedly not the state-of-the-art juxtaposition between pro- and con-tourism arguments also makes sense in the context of studying the local responses to tourism in Capulálpam. As I will demonstrate below, the reactions to and views on the implications of the Magical Villages Program in Capulálpam are reminiscent of the two analytical stances just outlined. However, the polarisation of attitudes towards tourism in the same village helps to problematise the approaches that make conclusions about the impact of tourism on host communities either in exclusively positive or in negative terms, without paying sufficient attention to the pre-existing social divisions.

Mexico's Magical Villages Program

The active involvement of the state in the development of tourism in Mexico is not a new phenomenon. Promoting tourism has been on the Mexican government's agenda since at least the 1920s, and this historical dimension has been extensively studied (cf. Pick et al. 2001; Clancy 2002; Berger 2007; Berger & Wood 2010). It is also important to note that the early development of tourism in Mexico was closely linked to the country's relationship with the United States. According to Berger (2010), Mexico's endorsement of tourism as a catalyst of economic growth in the 1920s was strongly applauded by the United States as a means to restore economic and political stability in the aftermath of the Mexican revolution. Both governments envisioned tourists as 'goodwill ambassadors,' as Berger notes in the title of her article.

During the administration of President Avila Camacho in the 1940s, the Mexican tourism industry was thoroughly modernised (Bryan 1956: 130; Berger 2006: 8), but the state's incentives to promote mass tourism truly exploded in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Pick et al. 2001: 3). Appropriate sites for new tourist resorts were identified and the government, through the National Trust Fund for Tourism Development (FONATUR), took various steps to implement the infrastructure and transform Mexico into one of the most popular mass tourism destinations in the world. Internationally well-known resorts like Cancún, Cabo San Lucas and Huatulco are the results of these developments. They are products of both national and transnational forces, mostly embedded in regions deeply divided by uneven development, as Torres and Momsen (2005) eloquently demonstrate in the case of Cancún.

With this historical perspective on the development of the Mexican tourism industry in mind, the Magical Villages Program could be regarded simply as yet another state initiative among many. However, whereas the country's tourism industry in the past forty years has been dominated by large-scale, purpose-built developments, the Magical Villages Program is novel in various important ways. Although indigenous, cultural and

other forms of alternative tourism have a long history in Mexico, they have never before been developed through such concerted nation-wide and top-down efforts. Also, never before has tourism played such an explicit role in the state's "cultural" policy.

The aim of the Magical Villages Program is to encourage tourism to towns and villages that constitute 'a fresh and different alternative to national and international visitors' (SECTUR 2006: 1), i.e. the "typical" and "authentic" Mexico beyond the commonly visited beaches and architectural sites. The authenticity of these new tourist destinations is supposed to be embedded in the attribute of "magic", the most iconic feature of this novel "brand". According to the program's guidelines,

a Magical Village (Pueblo Mágico) is a place (localidad) that possesses symbolic attributes, legends, history, important events, day-to-day life – in other words, MAGIC [uppercase in the original] that emanates from all of its socio-cultural manifestations with great opportunities for tourism (SECTUR 2006: 1).

It is noteworthy that whereas in the common discourse magic generally refers to something extraordinary and atypical, in the Magical Villages Program the notions of magic and (cultural) typicality become synonymous. Although cultural tourism is the primary focus of the program, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and medical tourism are also promoted, depending on the potential of the respective pueblo mágico. From the state's perspective, the program should diversify the "cultural products" that Mexico can offer tourists. From the perspective of the communities involved, the program is supposed to have a developmental impact, generating revenues, creating jobs, and functioning as a tool of cultural revival, sustainable economic growth, and "modernisation."

There are a number of formal criteria for becoming a participant in the program that automatically prevents most towns and villages from applying. For example, experiencing the "real Mexico" should be sufficiently comfortable. The "pueblo mágico" has to be situated no further than 200 kilometres or two hours' driving distance from a "consolidated tourist destination" (*destino turístico consolidado*) that is considered an "emitting market" (*mercadoemisor*), and the site should be accessible via reasonably good roads (SECTUR 2006: 1). In rural Oaxaca, certainly in the mountainous regions, the latter clause rules out many villages that from the perspective of cultural tourism would potentially be appropriate destinations.

The most important prerequisite for the nomination, however, is possessing magic. There are three main criteria for this. The first criterion concerns the urban image of the town. A potential pueblo mágico must comply with certain architectural and visual guidelines; for example, for the facades, roofs and balconies of the buildings. These should be painted in a single colour that can only be chosen from the seven colours accepted by the National Institute of Anthropology and History. Secondly, the town should be characterised by outstanding and distinguishable aspects of local cultural identity. The villagers "must" make handicrafts locally, and maintain their traditional ways of life. The third criterion is the particularity of the village environment and its surroundings. A pueblo mágico has to differ from other villages in certain ways, owing, for example, to its beautiful village square (*zócalo*) or scenic surroundings. The community should possess at least *one* major attraction that is different from those in any other community of the state or the region (SECTUR 2006: 5).

Once a village is chosen to participate in the program, it receives multi-level financial support, including federal funding for the modernisation of tourism-related infrastructure and businesses such as handicraft shops and restaurants. In principle, the title of *pueblo mágico* is indefinite, although it has to be renewed periodically, and the nominated villages are subject to yearly auditing. Since the launching of the program in 2001, an increasing number of communities, currently 43 in total and situated in nearly each Mexican state, have been enrolled in this program. Most of them owe their nomination to indigenous origins, colonial legacy, the preservation of traditional organisational principles, or to being the sites of significant events in the Mexican history.

Capulálpam de Méndez – a Zapotec *pueblo mágico*

The case of Capulálpam de Méndez serves as an ethnographic window to scrutinising the local population's perceptions of the Magical Villages Program, as well as to discussing the themes of authenticity, the commodification of culture, and the hosts' adaptation to tourism more generally. However, a brief overview of the broader ethnographic context is first in order, since it enables us to better capture the cultural idiosyncrasies of Oaxaca and the mainly Zapotec-populated region of the Sierra Juárez, where Capulálpam is situated.

Oaxaca is ethnically the most diverse of Mexico's 31 states. Its indigenous population, constituting nearly half of the state's total population and belonging to sixteen different linguistic groups, amounts to approximately 18 percent of the total indigenous population of Mexico.⁸ The ethnic diversity of Oaxaca has been known to cultural tourists for decades. The state is also politically and administratively distinct. Divided into 571 municipalities, the main unit of territorial and administrative organisation in Mexico, Oaxaca is by far the most fragmented state in the country. Such fragmentation further adds to its internal diversity, since municipalities (rural ones in particular) tend to develop strong territorial and communal identities.

Geographically, Oaxaca is divided into eight different regions. One of these, the northern mountainous region of the Sierra Norte, comprises an area called the Sierra Juárez, which has been the main geographical focus of my research since 1998. The vast majority of its population is Zapotec, although the indigenous language is no longer spoken in many villages. The level of marginalisation of the villages in the region varies: while some communities possess considerable natural resources (mainly forest), paved roads, and fairly good means of communication, others suffer from extreme poverty and the lack of most basic infrastructure. And yet, despite these differences, there are important cultural and social similarities between the communities of the Sierra Juárez. In most villages, the population ranges between 500 and 2,000 inhabitants. Strong communal affiliation constitutes the main basis for collective identity. Most villages face similar challenges, such as changes in traditional economic activities, the increasing role of monetary relationships,

⁸ This figure may actually be higher, since it only accounts for the population that *speaks* an indigenous language. Many people in the rural communities of Oaxaca consider themselves indigenous despite being monolingual Spanish speakers.

socio-economic stratification, unemployment and out-migration. And, probably most importantly from the perspective of cultural tourism, all the villages in the Sierra Juárez are characterised by traditional cultural and religious practices and ways of socio-political organisation. In the local discourse, the phrase *usos y costumbres*⁹ is generally used as a cover term to denote civil (e.g. the system of political positions or *cargos*, local ways of decision making, customary norms) and religious practices (e.g. the system of fiestas, religious sponsorships, as well as *cargos* with the Catholic Church).¹⁰ *Usos y costumbres* are widely regarded as “autochthonous” practices that are rooted in the past; in essence, the term is used as a synonym of *culture*. To quote one informant from the Sierra Juárez, ‘*Usos y costumbres* are the roots (*raíces*) of our ancestors left in our community and in our hearts.’ Such a perception, common among many villagers according to my field experience, provides *usos y costumbres* with particularly strong legitimacy and endows them with a moral connotation.

I first arrived in the Sierra Juárez in the summer of 1998. A colleague had invited me to the fiesta of the village saint (*fiesta patronal*) of Capulálpam de Méndez,¹¹ a Zapotec community of approximately 1,400 inhabitants, less than two hours driving distance from Oaxaca City. In many respects, Capulálpam at the time was *not* a typical community of the region. Its overall marginalisation level was considered low,¹² and most of its inhabitants were monolingual Spanish speakers. Contrary to many other communities of the Sierra Juárez, some of the streets in the village centre were paved; there were better opportunities for employment than in most other villages owing to the relatively good connections to Oaxaca City and the vicinity of the mine of Natividad. Yet, from the socio-cultural and macro-economic point of view, Capulálpam was fairly similar to the rest of the villages in the area. Despite the loss of indigenous language, most of its inhabitants still considered themselves to be ethnically Zapotec. The social and cultural life in the village was strongly centred on *usos y costumbres*, of which the most important ones were the system of *cargos* and various Catholic festivities, especially the celebration of the patron saint of the village (Saint Matthew). This yearly three-day *fiesta patronal*, held in September, was the most colourful and ritually complex in the long series of religious events in Capulálpam. Although lively and populous, the *fiesta*, judging by my observations in 1998 and 1999, was an inward-turned event, with very few outsiders participating in it, except for visitors from the neighbouring villages and natives of Capulálpam living elsewhere.

⁹ The concept cannot be easily translated into English. Probably the most appropriate translation is ‘habits and customs’ although this conceals the multiple connotations that the phrase has.

¹⁰ The body of anthropological literature on *usos y costumbres*, especially on civil and religious *cargo* systems in Mesoamerica in general (cf. Carrasco 1961; Change & Taylor 1985), as well as in Mexico and Oaxaca more specifically (cf. Stavenhagen 1992; Sierra 1993; González 1994; Gómez 1997; Durand 1998; Hernández 2007) is large.

¹¹ A shortened version “Capulálpam” is often used in common discourse and also from hereon in the text. Previously, the official name of the community was San Mateo Capulálpam after Saint Matthew, its patron saint, but in 1984 the village was renamed Capulálpam de Méndez after Miguel Méndez Hernández, a well-known Oaxacan liberal of the 19th century (Alatorre 1998: 151).

¹² According to the National Commission of Population (CONAPO), only fifteen municipalities in Oaxaca (out of 571) were socio-economically less marginalised than Capulálpam in the middle of the 1990s (cf. Alatorre 1998: 151).

Like in most villages of the Sierra Juárez, the traditional subsistence activities such as the cultivation of corn were in decline, and being replaced by the cultivation of cash crops and forestry. Although some people in Capulálpam were relatively well off, the majority were not, and upward socio-economic mobility was for most of the population achievable only by migrating to the cities in search for work. Judging by the census data (INEGI 1993; INEGI 2000), the population of Capulálpam decreased considerably in the 1990s, as many people, mainly men, moved to Oaxaca City, Mexico City or the United States. Various families, as I witnessed in the late 1990s, lived mainly on the remittances sent by these migrants. Like elsewhere in the region, there was only one phone in the entire village, no running water in many households, no internet, almost no tourists, and very few foreign visitors. Capulálpam could boast its magnificent San Mateo Parish Church, a veritable architectural masterpiece built in the 16th century, but its fame as a heritage site was predominantly local.

I left the Sierra Juárez and Capulálpam in 2000, after 18 months of fieldwork, and returned, for the first time, eight years later. Like any other anthropologist, I expected to encounter signs of both continuity and change, but the extent and the nature of the transformation of the village were perplexing, especially when compared to other villages in the region. Most streets of the village centre had been paved with cobblestones; many houses had been painted in a “typical” Mexican style. Woven into this canvas of authenticity were numerous internet cafés, little shops and restaurants, none of which had existed in the late 1990s. A brand new tourist centre had been opened at the village square and a sign on its wall invited visitors, both domestic and international, to enjoy their stay in the ‘Magical Village of Capulálpam.’ Leaflets invited tourists to experience the adventures of ecotourism in the village-owned forests that had earned a special recognition from the World Wildlife Fund in 2002. Tourists were also invited to go horseback riding, try their luck in trout fishing, spend a long weekend in the tourist cabins at the outskirts of the village, and visit the Centre for Traditional Indigenous Medicine. The latter, in the late 1990s, had been a simple house, where healers (*curanderas*) from the neighbouring communities rotated on a weekly basis to cure local people of *susto*, *mal de ojo*, *empacho* and other folk illnesses. Now, plans were being made to transform it into one of the biggest centres of its kind in the whole of Latin America.

Such a dramatic transformation of the village is largely explainable by the fact that in 2007 Capulálpam had entered the Magical Villages Program. Favouring its selection were the culturally distinct and “autochthonous” ways of social and political organisation (i.e. the *usos y costumbres*), well-managed forests and natural sites appropriate for ecotourism, but also the relative affluence of Capulálpam, the good condition of infrastructure and suitable geographical location. As of now, it is the only *pueblo mágico* in the State of Oaxaca, which, considering the ethnic and administrative diversity of the state and its tourist appeal for many decades, is a major distinction. Capulálpam has thus become not only a “typical indigenous village” but also a community that is supposed to be representative of the predominantly Zapotec-populated Sierra Juárez and, to a certain extent, of all the indigenous population of Oaxaca.

Typicality and *representativeness* are contested notions, however. Capulálpam, like many other “more developed” communities of the Sierra Juárez, owes its relative affluence to the politics of *indigenismo* in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s. The so-called *indigenistas* (state officials as well as anthropologists) looked for cultural impediments to the integration of the mountainous ‘refuge regions’ with an aim of developing ‘backward indigenous areas’ (Hewitt de Alcántara 1984: 178). Although not all *indigenistas* voiced an explicitly negative attitude towards traditional lifestyle, most of them advocated methods of community development and modernisation that often entailed eradicating certain elements of traditional indigenous culture. Capulálpam and some other communities of the Sierra Juárez were significantly affected by the politics of *indigenismo*, much more strongly than many other villages of the region. It was namely in these, the more easily accessible villages not very far from Oaxaca City or close to main roads, that indigenous customs and languages were most rigorously suppressed. Speaking the Zapotec language at school and in the public, for example, was strongly discouraged. It is noteworthy and probably somewhat ironic, that nearly a century later the Mexican state designed a policy of the Magical Villages Program, which also seeks to promote rural development, but this time with an approach towards indigenous culture and traditions reverse of the one promoted by *indigenismo* (Salvador Aquino, personal communication, September 18, 2009).

Furthermore, the natives of Capulálpam themselves seem to reject Capulálpam’s “typicality” as an indigenous village in the Sierra Juárez. In the late 1990s, my informants often referred to themselves as being more “civilised”, “advanced”, “educated”, than the inhabitants of other villages in the region, especially in the remoter district of Villa Alta. Whereas some traditional practices were perceived as progressive, especially the ones contributing to communal solidarity (*tequio*,¹³ the system of cargos), and cultural (religious festivities, traditional dances and music), people also hastened to stress their break with certain “backward” aspects of “indigenosity”. They no longer “ate with hands” or wore *huaraches* (traditional sandals) like people in more remote villages did. Most of them were literate and very few of them spoke any Zapotec at all. Their attitude towards *el dialecto* as the indigenous language is locally often referred to, was generally positive, although it was often perceived as a relic from the past, and in some contexts as a sign of backwardness.

Joining the Magical Villages Program has triggered significant changes in the village in accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry of Tourism, ranging from the modifications of the visual appearance of buildings and streets to the creation of new jobs and businesses, and the proliferation of accommodation facilities for considerably increased numbers of visitors.¹⁴ Although Capulálpam profiles itself most explicitly as a site for ecotourism, its cultural and religious practices also constitute “marketable” attractions for tourists. The performative and colourful nature of various Catholic festivities renders them a particularly appealing “cultu-

¹³ Tequio refers to collective communal work for the collective benefit of the community that is obligatory to all male members of the village.

¹⁴ It is not coincidental that Capulálpam is included as a suggested destination in the Lonely Planet’s most recent editions on Mexico.

ral commodity". As already argued, the most ostensible among these is the fiesta patronal. In 2009, when I attended the event for the third time, it had changed considerably both in terms of content and form. A great number of domestic and international tourists attended the fiesta, combining this cultural experience with a stay in nearby cabins and walks in the mountains. The touristic appeal of the fiesta had been deliberately increased by adding to it previously non-existent elements such as *guelaguetz a* or traditional dancing in costumes, a carnivalesque *baile de negritos*, and a form of bull-riding called *jaripeo*. An emphasis on commercialisation and entertainment was apparent also in various other ways. Considerably more stands were put up by street vendors than in the late 1990s, selling anything from fast food to handicrafts. The music scene had changed drastically. If earlier only traditional brassbands from the region performed during the fiesta, now musical groups from the cities are invited to play popular dance music and money is charged for attending their concerts. In fact, the new touristic role of the fiesta seemed to dominate over its religious and communal meaning. This was a source of concern for many locals. As one of my informants, an elderly woman, critically claimed when describing the contemporary fiesta patronal: 'Espura fiesta, no es la fê [It is just a party, not [a manifestation of] faith].'

Pueblo mágico: a catalyst of development or a cause of cultural degradation?

Local reactions to Capulálpam's involvement in the program are diverse, but they boil down to two oppositional approaches reminiscent of the scholarly takes on the impact of tourism outlined above. Those who perceive the Magical Villages Program in positive terms mainly emphasise the economic benefits it entails, while negative reactions are generally triggered by the program's allegedly destructive impact on local customs, especially religious practices, and by its adverse implications for communal intimacy. In itself such a polarisation of arguments is not very surprising, but what makes it analytically interesting is the fact that the divide coincides (at least in part) with certain pre-existing divisions in the village.

The proponents of Capulálpam's involvement in the program generally see it as an engine of progress (*progreso*), development (*desarrollo*), and advancement (*avance*). Pablo,¹⁵ a young man who had lived in Mexico City for many years and had only recently returned to Capulálpam to work as a car mechanic, proudly listed the changes that the title of pueblo mágico had brought to the village. He described these exclusively in positive terms, employing the words like *growth*, *development*, *work*, and *attraction*:

[The title pueblo mágico] has made the village nationally and internationally renowned, promoted growth and attracted more tourists. The village develops much faster, now we have access to things we did not have earlier, different forms of business, for example. There is more work for everyone. The village is growing – they will soon construct a new hospital of traditional medicine, one of the biggest in Latin America. This is a good project. Without the pueblo mágico, we wouldn't have all this.

¹⁵ All names in this article are pseudonyms.

The program has certainly benefited his own business and brought him more clients. But the proponents of joining the program and the growth of tourism in Capulálpam do not only emphasise economic growth—they also praise the diversification of cultural and religious life in the village. To render the cultural and ritual life in Capulálpam more appealing to visitors, a number of public events and novel festivities of both religious and secular nature have been “invented”.¹⁶ These are also welcomed by the natives of Capulálpam who have migrated to the cities, because such events enable migrants to maintain contacts in their native village and visit it more often. As Eva, an elderly woman living in Mexico City but visiting Capulálpam regularly, suggested:

It is a good thing that we have more fiestas and social events now ... They are, of course, not as important as *la fiesta patronal*, but there is also music, dancing, colourful processions, and many visitors. It is good because our *paisanos* [countrymen] living elsewhere now visit Capulálpam more often.

Eva also emphasised that it was owing to these more frequent visits to Capulálpam to participate in the new festivities, that she had been able to reconnect with her relatives and revive the relationships that had weakened considerably over the past decades.

The economic benefits of the title of *pueblo mágico* have evoked considerable envy and criticism by inhabitants of other villages in the Sierra Juárez. The critics from the neighbouring communities often claim that the state’s preferential treatment of Capulálpam as a *pueblo mágico* has increased regional inequalities because federal resources are invested into this one selected village at the expense of all others. Maritza, a middle-aged woman who had moved to Oaxaca City in search for work more than a decade ago, first laughed bitterly when asked about the Magical Villages Program, then sighed and contrasted Capulálpam to Tanetze, her own village of origin:

Yes, in Capulálpam everything is magical now. Whereas the title of *pueblo mágico* has put Capulálpam on tourist maps, Tanetze, like so many other communities of the Sierra Juárez, has remained a forgotten village (*pueblo olvidado*). It is not fair that the resources are poured into the selected few villages, whereas extreme poverty, the lack of basic infrastructure, unemployment and illiteracy loom large in others.

For decades, many people, mostly men, have left the villages of the Sierra Juárez in search for work in major Mexican cities as well as in the United States. The out-migration has transformed various communities into “ghost villages” (*pueblos fantasmas*) as they are sometimes called. The majority of inhabitants in ghost villages are women, children and the elderly. Most of these villages survive almost exclusively on the remittances sent by migrants, and the situation of such communities has not changed for better in recent years. Yet, the assumption underlying the critical accounts, such as Maritza’s, is similar to that of the proponents of tourism in Capulálpam: the title of *pueblo mágico* brings with itself resources and revenues, and contributes to development and economic growth.

¹⁶ Some of the new events in Capulálpam’s festival calendar are, for example, the fiestas of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (*Asunción de la Virgen María*) and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (*Exaltación de la Santa Cruz*), and the Anniversary of the Magical Village (*La Fiesta del Pueblo Mágico*).

In spite of the wide acknowledgement of the development-enhancing role of tourism, however, the changes that tourism triggers have not been welcomed unanimously in Capulálpam. Many of my informants claimed that tourism, although generating revenues and the influx of capital, has also rendered the village more vulnerable to outside influences. This was a recurring argument, especially among the elderly. As Oscar, an elderly peasant, suggested when reflecting upon the recent changes in the village: 'We are now at the mercy of tourists.' 'The village has changed beyond recognition, all kinds of weird people roam around here,' Pedro, another peasant, added.

The latter claim by Pedro is indicative of the idealised image of their native community that people often have, and of the threat to this ideal that tourism is believed to constitute. Villages of the Sierra Juárez have traditionally been characterised by a strong normative commitment to the ideals of unity, homogeneity and mutuality, and to what Nader (1990) has called 'harmony ideology.' The villages of the region can be perceived, at least by many of their native inhabitants, as something akin to Wolf's (1957) 'closed corporate communities.' From the analytical perspective, the term is of course outdated for describing the cultural, political and economic reality of contemporary Mexican countryside, but villagers nevertheless often talk and act building on such a self-perception. Now that the village has opened up to outsiders and various formerly intimate events and practices have been transformed into public occasions of entertainment, many people react with criticism. Complaints that participation in the program has meant sacrificing the intimacy of the village to monetary gains and altered local ways of life are recurring themes in such critical accounts. For example, Yolanda, a middle-aged woman living in the centre of the village where tourist groups mainly convene and tour buses stop, argued: 'Now many people come from the outside, and we don't know what kind of people they are. We have to greet them, show them around.' Yolanda also made a temporal comparison, referring to the adverse effect that the crowds of visitors have had on the everyday life of the village. 'Antes estabatr tranquilo [Earlier it was peaceful],' she claimed. In other words, for Yolanda, like for many others, the developmental impact of being nominated a *pueblo mágico* and the economic income it is generating did not outweigh the relative autonomy and intimacy of the village prior to the nomination.

Sergio, a young man in his mid-twenties similarly admitted that tourism significantly alters various aspects of everyday life in the village. He listed some of these changes:

People from the outside have other customs. Words that were not used here before are introduced by these people, thus changing our ways of speaking. Earlier people drank mainly *mezcal* during the fiestas since it was local and more traditional, but now they drink tequila and beer, and eat fast-food.

These changes, according to Sergio, were not necessarily negative, but nevertheless overwhelming and deeply transformative owing to their scope and depth. Many other villagers, however, were straightforwardly critical about such transformations. As Shepherd (2002: 185) claims, when responding to the tourist gaze and tourists' expectations, local populations run the risk of distorting their *own* view of themselves and consciously alter the cultural reality. Some formerly important cultural practices, when turned into "cultural

commodities”, may lose their initial meaning and eventually cease to form a part of the everyday culture. Similarly, practices and cultural themes that are not easily transformed into marketable “products” for tourists may also eventually be discarded. The negative impact of tourism on religious practices, religious identity and the moral ethos of the village was the most recurring concern in Capulálpam during my fieldwork in 2008 and in 2009. The elderly and religiously more dedicated villagers in particular lamented the transformation of the previously intimate veneration of the village patron saint into an entertainment staged for tourists. For example, Alejandra, a devout Catholic, commented on tourism, tourists and the changing fiesta patronal accordingly:

The ones like us, who are more dedicated to religion and to Catholicism, are often annoyed by tourism and tourists. People from the outside enter our Catholic church without respect. For us it is a sacred place, but there are people who only visit it to take photos, they leave their dogs tied up at the church entrance, they eat in the church, the young couples are hugging.

This does not necessarily mean that Alejandra and other critics deny the developmental and revenue generating impact of tourism. But the acknowledgement of this is often coupled with the claim that the *pueblo mágico* is an elitist project. The Magical Villages Program and the “modernisation” of the village benefit only a selected few, who were already privileged before, critics complain.¹⁷ This further reinforces the existing divisions and hierarchies in the village. Such arguments are reminiscent of some of the earlier scholarly criticism of the modernising and developmentalist impact of tourism. The argument is that while people may benefit initially from the tourist boom, in the longer run the traditional class structure is reinforced since tourism employment reflects the existing stratification system, (cf. Levy & Lerch 1991: 70).

One of the important dividing lines in Capulálpam, as well as in other villages of the Sierra Juárez, runs between the native villagers and migrants from elsewhere, usually from more remote and poorer communities. Migrants in rural Oaxaca often possess fewer opportunities than native villagers for social mobility and political participation. Villages jealously restrict access to their communal resources, and the person’s origin is a crucial factor determining his or her status in the village. Not being native can be a life-long stigma: after decades of residence, migrants are still often considered to be “outsiders” (*los de fuera*). Many migrants to Capulálpam reside in the slum-like eastern part of the village, depreciatively called “the colony” (*la colonia*). Most of them, according to my experience, tend to be bitter and critical about the Magical Villages Program, and feel being excluded from its benefits. As María, an elderly woman and a resident of “the colony” since the 1950s, sarcastically complained: ‘There is no magic anywhere where *we* live. Nobody paves the roads here in the periphery and no tourists ever come here.’

¹⁷ Similar claims against *pueblo mágico* have been made in other contexts. For example, in 2008, the population of Bacajipare, a Raramuri indigenous community in the state of Chihuahua, moved against the plans of the state government and private investors to create a *pueblo mágico* and to build an adventure park on their communal lands (Breach Velducea 2008).

Another important dividing line runs between the Catholic and Protestant populations. Like in the rest of Oaxaca, most communities of the Sierra Juárez have experienced a fast growth in their Protestant population in recent decades. Missionaries of various denominations arrived in the area mainly in the 1930s and 1940s, and the rate of conversions has gradually increased, especially since the 1960s. It goes without saying that Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh Day Adventists in the case of Capulálpam, have distanced themselves from various Catholic practices and festivities that are also central to the "magic appeal" of the village. Owing to their "dissident" religious convictions, Protestants do not regard these communal events as their own. Furthermore, many Protestants (Jehovah's Witnesses in particular) consider it to be idolatrous to use the notion of magic, even as metaphor, to attract tourists.

The fact that differences in attitudes towards tourism and the existing socio-economic stratification structure can be congruent with each another has also been demonstrated in other studies in Oaxaca. Gullette (2007), for example, shows in his account of tourism to Huatulco in Southern Oaxaca that contact with affluent tourists and the social inequalities that result from tourism lead to a situation where the excluded groups feel even further marginalised. For most of his informants, Gullette (2007: 607) argues, exposure to affluent tourists altered (in the negative direction) the perception of their own lives, their deprivation, and poverty. This new referencegroup of tourists, as well as those locals who benefited from tourism most directly, constituted a reason for many to migrate to the cities, despite the net developmental and revenue generating impact of tourism in the town.

Novel forms of governmentality

Cultural policy based on tourism also affects local life in more indirect ways than generating job opportunities for some and increasing the vulnerability and marginalisation of others. Local culture and ways of life are often perceived by anthropologists as potential 'weapons of the weak,' to use the term by Scott (1985). *Usos y costumbres* in Oaxacan indigenous villages fit this perception well. Customary norms and indigenous forms of social organisation have been widely regarded, both by anthropologists as well as by many villagers themselves, as a form of resistance against the forces of globalisation. They have constituted a source of relative independence and autonomy from the administrative and political control of the state and political parties. The Magical Villages Program, however, shifts these culturally embedded practices under the partial control and surveillance by the state. It instrumentalises the local culture and puts it at the service of generating revenues from tourism. An immediate administrative implication of this is the introduction of new forms of governmentality.

Foucault (1991) understood governmentality as the 'art of government' – in other words, the modes and techniques that render society governable. These techniques entail not only the exercising of top-down hierarchical power, but also the internalisation of social control in the population via various institutions, discourses, and forms of knowledge. This turns power exercised from the outside into what Foucault (1988) would call the 'technology of the self.' The consequent self-governing mentality is a highly efficient tool of social control. Tourism and power are inextricably linked and analysable

in Foucauldian terms (e.g. Cheong & Miller 2000; Martín 2004), and Foucault's approach to power and control is also illuminative when looking at the implications of the Magical Villages Program in rural Oaxaca.

The introduction of novel forms of social control, surveillance and auditing is structurally probably the most significant change that joining the Magical Villages Program leads to in the administration of an indigenous village. Such new forms of governmentality stem from the federal government and may override the local *usos y costumbres*. For example, the indigenous communities of Oaxaca have well-developed traditional mechanisms for communal decision-making. All decisions concerning the village, its development and its projects are regarded as internal matters and are made exclusively by all (adult male) villagers during communal assemblies (*asamblea comunal*). Joining the Magical Villages Program has forced Capulálpam to trade some of its decision-making autonomy for federal funds. This has consequently enabled external decision-makers, tourism experts, managers, state officials, and auditors to have far more say in the life of the village than before. Various decisions about village affairs are now made not locally but at the state and federal level, or, at the very least, complying with the requirements of the Ministry of Tourism.

Joining the program has made the village administration a part of an extensive bureaucratic machinery, and introduced it to a wholly new 'audit culture,' to use Strathern's (2000) term. There is a multitude of complex bureaucratic steps that a potential *pueblo mágico* has to take in order to be incorporated into the program. The program's criteria also determine the ways villages should be administered by stipulating a required level of the involvement of the village population and local authorities in advancing tourism. According to the rules of the program, a special permanent committee (*Comité Pueblo Mágico*) has to be established, which functions as an intermediary between the village and the Ministry of Tourism. The program's guidelines strictly and clearly stipulate the structure, the responsibilities and the *modus vivendi* of this new body (SECTUR 2006: 16–8). In the case of Capulálpam, a special position (*Regidor de turismo*) was added to the traditional system of cargos, in order to meet the administrative requirements associated with the participation in the program.

Nomination as a *pueblo mágico* subjects the village to continuous self-auditing, and obliges it to draft development plans and strategies for promoting tourism, to increase the competitiveness of the village on the tourism market, as well as to maintain and improve the image and the "brand" of the village.¹⁸ In order to retain the status of a *pueblo mágico*, the villages incorporated into the program are audited annually and examined against a set of indicators and criteria. Among the aspects audited are village institutions and authorities, the sustainability, integrity and authenticity of the local cultural heritage, the economic and social efficiency of the tourism sector, and the capacity of the village to attract a sustainable flow of tourists. If the town does not fulfil the auditing criteria, 90 days of "mercy" are given by the Ministry of Tourism to meet the auditors' demands.

¹⁸ A *pueblo mágico* should, for example, possess a plan for urban tourism, the regulations for the community's visual image, and the program for reordering street commerce (SECTUR 2006: 11–5).

Otherwise, the town will lose its status as a *pueblo mágico* and is allowed to reapply for the status only once (SECTUR 2006: 15).¹⁹

All this transfers a considerable share of control over local development to external agents and institutions, and strongly influences the decision making process in the village. Being subject to continuous scrutiny and surveillance can be a source of substantial stress. For example, Jorge, a former municipal president of Capulálpam, lamented: 'The village has to constantly prove that it is worthy.' *Stress, responsibility, and control* were the words that were often used by many of those who were directly responsible for administering the program locally.

Conclusion

As Stronza (2001: 269) has suggested, the literature on the anthropology of tourism includes many excellent descriptions of what can go wrong when tourism is introduced into local communities, but most accounts of this phenomenon have been devoid of local voices. Consequently, we know relatively little about how the local people themselves perceive the pros and cons of tourism. The aim of this article has been to explore the local perceptions of the effects of tourism, by giving voice to both the critics and proponents of the "opening up" of a village formerly relatively untouched by mass tourism.

The communities participating in the Magical Villages Program, a successful tourism project launched by the federal government of Mexico a decade ago, are revealing ethnographic examples of the dynamics of tourism and the local population's adaptation to it. The fact that most of these communities are fairly small and that tourism for them is a top-down initiative by the state renders *pueblos mágicos* veritable "laboratories" for analysing closely how collective identities, imaginaries and cultural practices can be moulded, redesigned, reinvented and reinvigorated in order to attract more tourists, and how host populations react to and come to terms with the consequent influx of visitors. As such, these communities are also an appropriate ethnographic context for discussing the notions of development, social control, the commodification of heritage, authenticity, as well as typicality that are central to many anthropological studies of tourism.

As the case of Capulálpam, to date the only *pueblo mágico* in Oaxaca, demonstrates, local responses to tourism are heterogeneous but not random. First of all, the diverse and polarised reactions at the village level tend to echo some of the major scholarly approaches to tourism and its impact on host communities. Some villagers regard tourism at best as the selling of Capulálpam's cultural or natural imaginaries that benefit a selected few, and at worst as a phenomenon that increases the villagers' dependency on visitors, and the social control by the state. Others, however, emphasise the positive developmental impact of tourism for "everyone" as well as its potentially stimulating influence on local socio-cultural identity and practices.

Secondly, the differences in the local population's reactions to and perception of the impact of tourism reflect certain pre-existing socio-economic divisions in the village. Hence, even though tourism can have a radically transformative impact on the host community, the ensuing changes are often shaped and directed by the pre-existing social realities.

¹⁹ Various communities have lost the title as a result of such auditing.

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POVZETEK

Leta 2001 je mehiško Ministrstvo za turizem sprožilo Program magičnih vasi (Programa Pueblos Mágicos) z namenom promocije turizma "tipičnih" mehiških skupnosti. Ena izmed 43 skupnosti, ki je trenutno vključena v program, je tudi Capulálpam de Méndez, staroselska zapoteška vas v državi Oaxaca. Članek, ki temelji na avtorjevem neposrednem terenskem delu v Capulálpam od leta 1998, obravnava lokalne reakcije na Program magičnih vasi in različne zaznave vpliva turizma na lokalno kulturo in identiteto s strani vaščanov. Te zaznave so bile polarizirane in so se razvrstile v dve jasno določeni skupini. Nekateri vaščani turizem povezujejo z materialnimi koristmi in povečanimi možnostmi zaposlovanja, drugi pa ga zaznavajo kot grožnjo zasebnosti skupnosti in lokalnim načinom življenja ter ga obtožujejo povečevanja neenakosti v vasi. Takšna polarizacija vsaj delno kaže na predhodno obstoječe delitve in vaške hierarhije. Podobno kot v nekaterih drugih antropoloških pristopih na vpliv turizma a gostujoče skupnosti, še posebej v latinski Ameriki, tudi v lokalni diskurzu v Capulálpamu izstopa osredotočanje na pojme *razvoja* in *uničevanja*.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: turizem, razvoj, staroselska kultura, Oaxaca, Mehika

CORRESPONDENCE: TOOMAS GROSS, University of Helsinki, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, P.O. Box 59, 00014 Helsinki, Finland. E-mail: toomas.gross@helsinki.fi.