

Environmental Governance in Mexico: Two Case Studies of Oaxaca's Community Forest Sector

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Abstract

This article recognises the paucity of scholarly work on environmental governance in Latin America. More specifically, it is hypothesised that community-based forest management in Mexico serves as an ideal case of ecologically beneficial and democratic decision-making, or ecological democracy. After introducing some of the relevant literature, this hypothesis is tested through a comparison of two indigenous forest-based communities in Oaxaca's Sierra Norte. Four key themes primarily emerged from semi-structured interviews, participant observation and other data collection techniques: local governance, equitable decision-making, forest management and environmental awareness. In comparing these two Mexican communities, this article aims to extend ideas of ecological democracy by linking empirical findings to political ecology theory and community forestry literature. While it is true that ecological democracy in Mexico has been facilitated under certain socio-cultural conditions, it is concluded that it can be simultaneously hindered. The empirical findings provide an analytical framework for subsequent research on ecological democracy in Latin America.