

# Social environmental perception and meaning of conservation in Zapotec communities of Oaxaca, Mexico

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Community Conservation  
Research Network



# Introduction

- The implementation of **policy conservation in the form of Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs)** has attracted worldwide attention.
- **In Mexico** this policy has been launched as a program called **Voluntary Designated Areas for Conservation (VDAC)**.
- The National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) participated as the evaluator responsible.



# Oaxaca

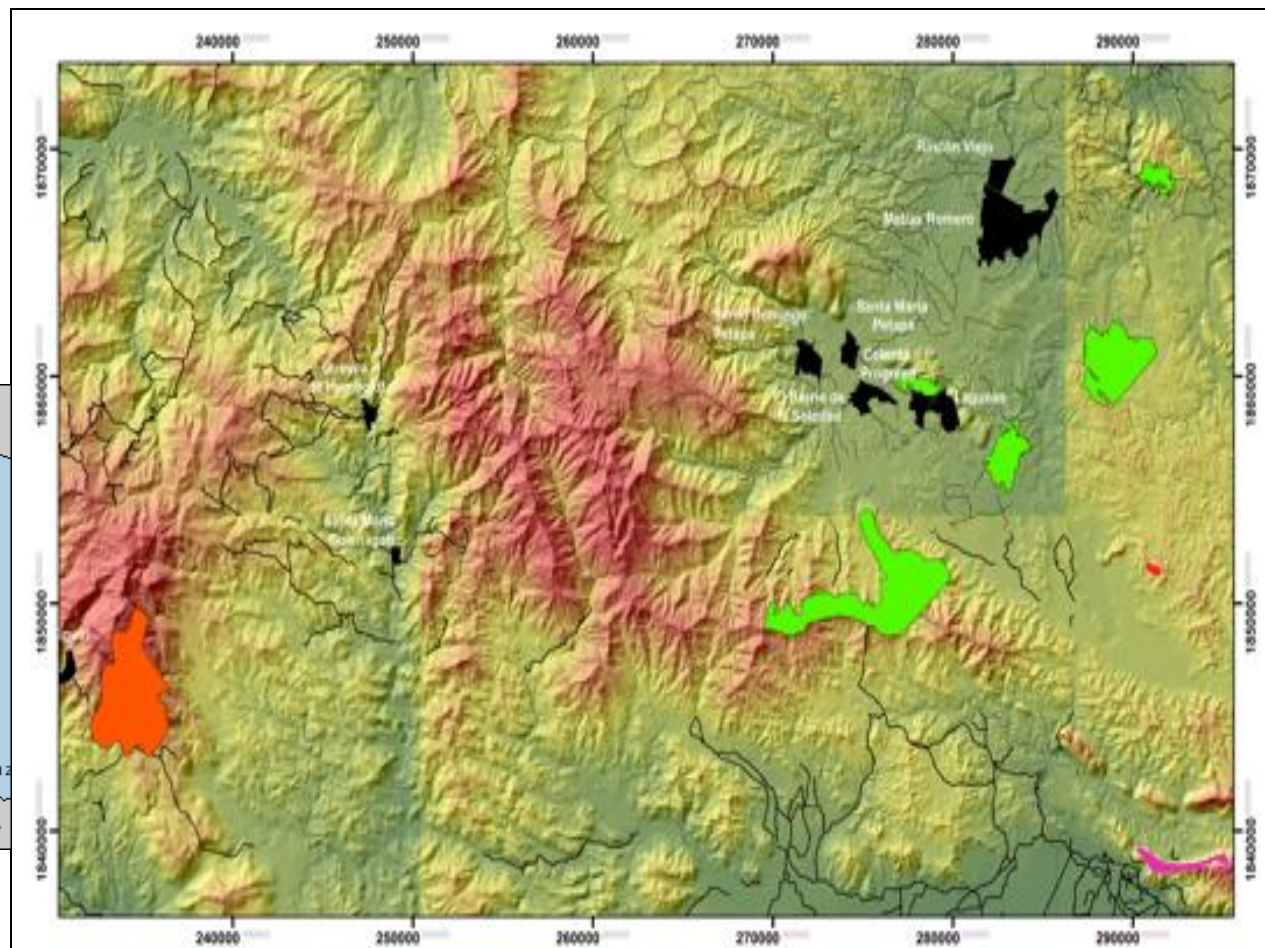
- Represent the **largest biocultural diversity in Mexico.**
- **16 ethnic groups.**
- **77 %** of land is **Common property.**



# Objectives

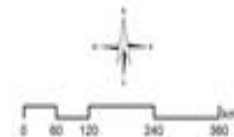
- ✓ To discuss the meaning of conservation that is understood after the implementation of the VDAC in territories where the Zapotec culture prevails, from the environmental perceptions of the local actors.
- ✓ To examine if there are local words in Zapotec or Spanish that are similar to the term conservation.





**SIMBOLOGÍA**

- 70 Z-1 P 1-1 - Ejido Chivela
- Área de Uso Común del Núcleo Agrario "El Barrio de la Soledad"
- Zona de Preservación Ecológica Cerro de las Flores (Revocado)
- Zona de Uso Común en Cerro Bandera
- Áreas Urbanas
- Caminos



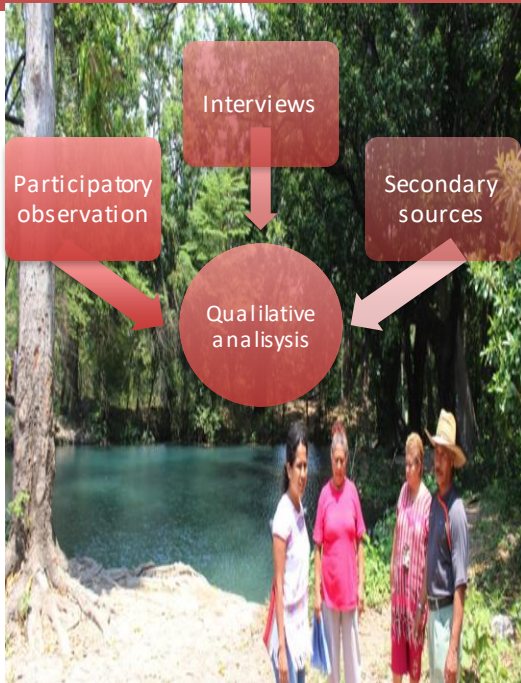
- The region with both, the highest number certified areas, and the first VDAC in Mexico.
- Four territories with decision making processes are primarily guided by community statutes and by customary law.
- Previous informed consent from the communities' authorities and the persons who participated in this work.

## Zapototec ethnic group



# Met-F-Data

## 1. Methodology



## 2. Fieldwork

- Between **January and May 2015**
- **Owner with different type of property:**
  - 1) **Communal assets**
  - 2) **Ejido**
  - 3) **Private plot**

## 3. Data analysis Categories

- Conception; meaning;
- local denomination; uses;
- Practices
- Norms and rules.
- **QSR N6<sup>®</sup> software**

Characteristic	Santiago Lachiguiri	El Barrio de la Soledad	Mazahua	El Morrito
Ethnic group	Zapotec	Mestizo	Zapotec	Zapotec
Land ownership	Communal assets (Bienes comunales)	Communal assets (Bienes comunales)	Ejido	Private property
Name of its VDAC	Zone of ecologic preservation Cerro de las Flores	Area of common use from the agrarian nucleus Barrio de la Soledad	Zone of common use in Bandera Hill of the Sierra Tolistoque	A private Plot
Size of Certified area (VDAC)	1453.86 ha	3555.49 ha	327.82 ha	36.07 ha
Number of entitled persons	1200 comuneros	2600 comuneros	87 common holders (ejidatarios)	1 private property holder
Main productive activities	Coffee producers and “milpa”	Small-scale ranching, Employees at Cement industry, and	“Milpa” and small-scale stony material industry	Bricklayer, small-scale ranching, and house keeping



# Results

1. Conservation, a new term
2. Local words similar to the term conservation
3. Local practices: To care, to use, to have cycle



# 1. Conservation, a new term

**They referenced to the conservation zone**

- It was heard during exchanges with external actors
- In television ↓

**Has been gradually incorporated into the local discourse**



*I have heard “conservation” but I didn’t understand it. (...) I had heard it for some time now in [the community of] Santa María (Interview to community assembly member, Santiago Lachiguiri, April 2015).*

Conservation implies a different space than local spaces, it implies exclusiveness because it is not subject to daily use; actually, the use of the certified areas are forbidden and this is how it is perceived by the inhabitants of the communities.



## 2. Local words similar to the term conservation

Study site	Local words	Meanings
Santiago Lachiguiri	Gain to, Gan chi to	To have, to care
Mazahua	Gapanu, Gupano	To have
El Morrito	Gapanu, Yapani Shaa, Que iruti caa ni valla	To have, to care; to care for; to have it; no one should touch it
El Barrio de la Soledad	Care	To care for; to take care of

# The zapotec communities

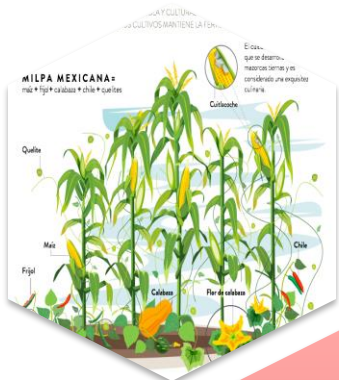


In this case, it is cared for in order to maintain certain conditions of use, some of which are related to traditions and local worldviews.

Once you care for it, you have it, which is identified as a responsibility, not in a sense of property as the space for caring is primarily for collective use in both, the domestic and community dimensions.



# 3. Local practices: To care-to use-to have



Protection norms

Wild meat



Agroforestry system

Species to decorate twon parties



Agricultural activities

Wood for construction

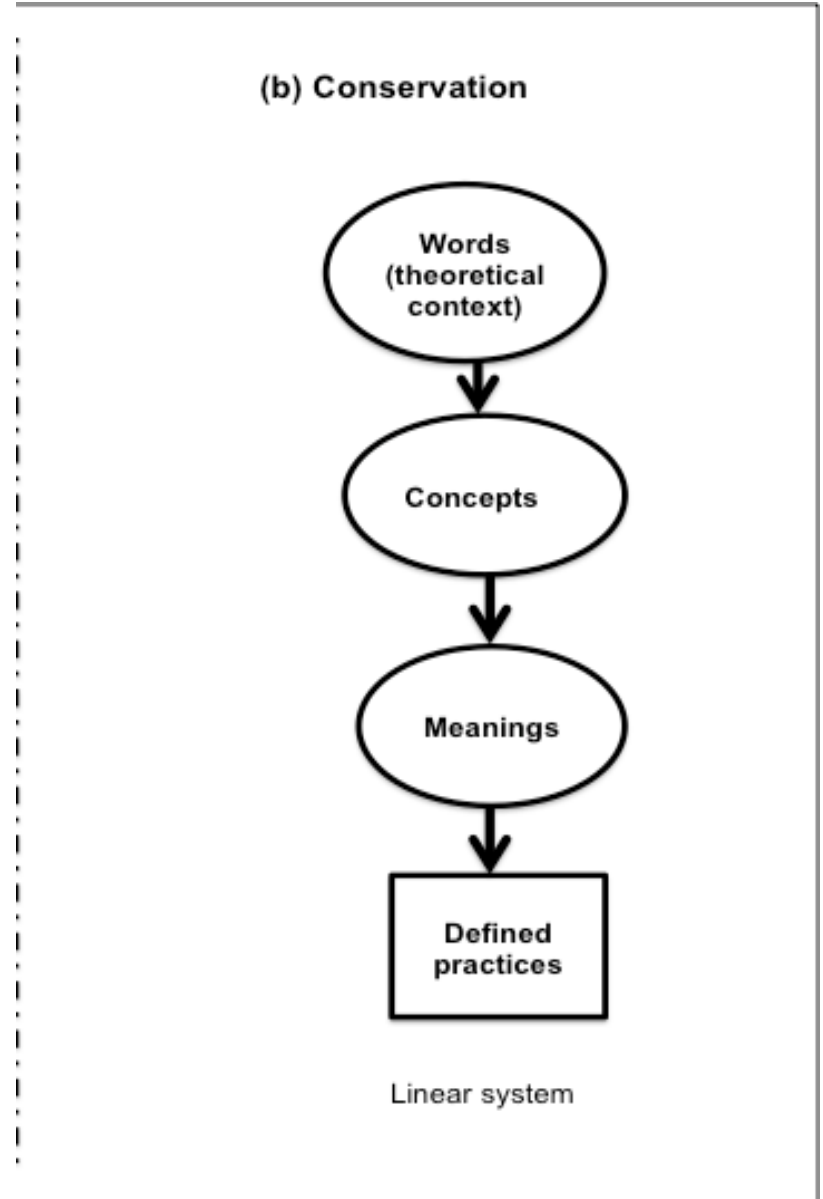
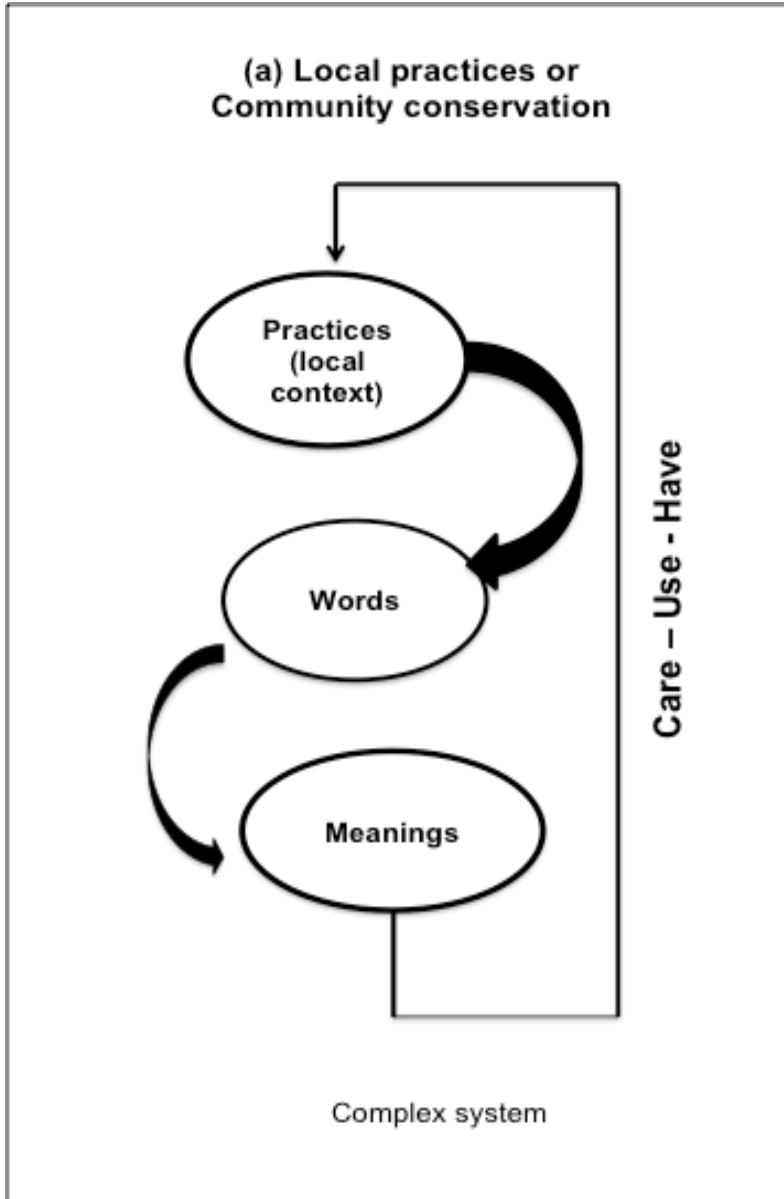


That Zapotec words, which are similar to the term conservation represent a cycle of to care-to use-to have practices or community conservation conducted in the territory. For them, caring is for using; they interpret it as *to have it, to care for it* and it implies a responsibility since the use of the territory is mainly collective.





# Two epistemological models



# Conclusion

## **Conservation**

Is primarily achieved through protecting the species and habitats, or more specifically, through the establishment of Natural Protected Areas (including VDAC).

## **Local practices of community conservation**

Is based on the ownership of the territory, as a space in which their society is reproduced, with worldviews, meanings, traditions, values, and uses. This generates an encounter of two different logics regarding conservation, with absence of dialogue.

To not consider the role of local communities in the definition of management and conservation of their territories, as well as their interests, motivations, life dynamics and meanings does not promote locals to be protagonists in the call for conservation.





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