



Oaxaca Times

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OAXACA OAXACA

SEPTEMBER 1991

ZAPOTEC WEAVERS OF OAXACA

A UNITED COMMUNITY OF ARTISANS

Teotitlan del Valle is an indigenous Zapotec community in southern Mexico's state of Oaxaca. For more than thirty years the local weavers have produced rugs and blankets for sale to tourists, the U.S. and Europe. The community is benefitting from weaving for export.

The overall standard of living has risen and the wealthier merchant sector has expanded to include many more families - a middle income group has emerged. Ritual has become refocused but remains an integral part of family and community life. The Teotitecos have proven that indigenous communities can appropriate economic development for their own use. Community control of resources and the maintenance of a strong local ethnic identity are critical in this process.

Until the 1950s the Teotitlan economy was based on subsistence agriculture. A small income was derived by households from weaving rugs for a local market. During the 1950s the economy in Teotitlan was dramatically affected by the completion of the Pan American highway which resulted in an increase in tourism in Oaxaca. In addition, the migration of Oaxacans to the U.S. through the second U.S. Bracero Program.

By the end of the 1960s most households in Teotitlan had one member who had migrated to the U.S., and tourism had become the second biggest income generator in Mexico. Teotitlan subsistence framers largely abandoned the communal cultivation of community lands and became weavers in the growing treadle-loom industry. The distribution network for the rugs and blankets produced in Teotitlan grew beyond southern Mexico to include Acapulco, Mexico City, Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, many parts of the southeastern U.S. and some cities in Europe. U.S. importers began to visit the community in force in the late 1970s when the Mexican peso underwent a major devaluation.

Rapid expansion in the market for Teotiteco goods affected the organization of production. During the 1970s the merchant sector tripled in size. Piecework operations became the predominant mode of production with merchants providing weavers with materials and designs and buying their finished products by the piece. Independent weaver households continued to produce. Teotitlan merchants developed contractual relationships with three other neighboring communities who began to produce on a larger scale.



The expansion of weaving production was paralleled by change and growth in local ritual. Prior to the 1960s, most of the community's ritual energy went toward Mayordomais, the sponsorship of cult celebrations for local saints and virgins. Recently the focus of ritual has shifted to ceremonies associated with households such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings and parties for family saints. The content of the mayordomia system has been transferred to these other types of ceremonies.

Ritual participation is now greater than it was during the 1950s and most households devote a significant portion of their income and labor time to its celebration. Teotitecos pride themselves on throwing the most extravagant fiestas in the region.

By and large the people have resisted government assistance in organizing cooperatives in their community. There is a network of cooperation: people working in the weaving industry have close family and compadrazgo ties.

For example, most weavers receive interest-free loans and materials from merchants who are often relatives or compadres as well as employers. Naturally, requests from relatives and compadres to do work receive priority.

Since the entire community can be traced to about 25 families, everyone in the community has at least one family or fictive kinship with everyone else. These ties bind together the community in both production and ritual.

There is a strong desire to support enterprises which originate in the community. Local decision making is made in open meetings led by local authorities. Members of the community decide what projects the community will undertake. In order to participate in community decision-making and to have rights to community resources such as land, water and forest areas, each household is required to provide a male laborer for approximately 10-15 days of communal labor per year and to accept appointments to civil cargos. Civic jobs such as mayor, judge, police and school committees are all done on a voluntary basis. Female household heads and children replace the male labor lost during civil cargo appointments which may last up to three years at a time.

The influx of cash brought into Teotitlan through the export of weavings has been invested in public works projects, including the construction of two schools, a new marketplace, several basketball courts, two bridges and a revamping of the irrigation system. Currently the community is undertaking an extensive restoration of its church which dates to the 17th century. All of these community financed projects have involved substantial communal labor contributions in addition to the use of specialized construction. When a new project is decided upon, a local committee is formed and goes door to door to raise money and to recruit laborers.

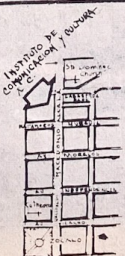
People in Teotitlan are proud of the facilities they are giving their community.

Economic development in Teotitlan has been capitalist development, but with a twist. It has been development controlled to a large extent by indigenous people in their own community. While Teotitecos didn't create the market for their product, they did respond to it in effective and creative ways. There was no technology transfer to Teotitlan other than the introduction of factory spun wool, and all the producers in the community now own their looms. Local authorities continue to regulate the behavior of community members as well as outsiders in accordance with the traditional values and customs of the community.

Today, Teotitecos are firm in their demands that the traffic of tourists, importers and curiosity seekers not infringe on community institutions. Beneath an exterior of acute business sense, Teotitecos are deeply committed to defending their right to control their own community and to conserve important local institutions.

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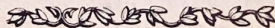
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THE ARTISANS OF OAXACA NATIONAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

The Mexican government has used tourism along with economic policies to encourage development of craft industries to raise the standard of living of the peasant population. The government sponsored FONART (Fondo Nacional de Artesania) is to "conserve, rescue and promote popular and traditional art with commercial support, credit and through supplying primary materials. FONART has a series of national stores with huge inventories of craft from all over Mexico. The FONART store in Oaxaca is located at M. Bravo #116 and is five blocks north of the Zocalo on the corner of M. Carera.

FONART was preceded by BANFOCO (Banco de Formento De Cooperativas) a weaving cooperative was formed by the state government of Oaxaca in an attempt to sponsor cooperatives for craft production throughout the Oaxaca Valley. The primary activity of the bank was to extend credit through loans to artisans for the purchase of materials. Lacking training by BANFOCO in how to market their products, independent artisans could not compete with local and Oaxacan merchants. Most cooperative members left BANFOCO and made contacts with Oaxaca merchants who paid them more and taught them merchandising skills as well.

FONART worked in Teotitlan from 1971 to 1983. The original program was to provide credit to those weavers who were producing "traditional" designs. FONART provided loans for the purchase of wool and yarn. The membership of the cooperative was small for most of its existence but ballooned briefly to 200 when the cooperative received a large sum of money to purchase wool yarn directly in Tlaxcala and Puebla. Because cooperative members had few skills in bargaining with industrial bureaucrats and in internal management, the purchase of the wool yarn never happened and the cooperative fell apart. The group was also plagued by problems of jealousy between local members vying for control. Today FONART continues to buy small quantities of rugs and weavings from some of the largest merchants in Teotitlan.

But, the Mexican government remains aware of the plight of other villages where everybody works in clay, or leather, or metals or straw and take their goods to markets miles away. They often get less than it cost them to make them.

The government is aware also of the irreplaceable asset of the artesanía. There is an economic concern by the government since so many of the population make their living by laboring at handicrafts. To help those in need, the government has sent teachers of handicrafts to the villages, has set up special banks to give loans to the artisans, and buys large quantities of quality goods to sell at small profit in their museums and shops.

"One of its purposes is to prevent the kitch from taking over, to encourage artisans to produce well-made and enchanting things. It is a matter of national pride - and national pride is numero uno in Mexico" (Peter Wallenberg in "For the Love of Mexico.)



TEOTITLAN DEL VALLE

This unique village is known internationally for its woven goods. The accompanying article describes the community spirit and control of community resources which have brought it the success it now enjoys. A strong ethnic identity has been critical in this process.

Teotitlan can be approached by four buses and vans, taxis or your automobile. It is a trip on highway 190 East-Southeast from Oaxaca of 25 km (15 1/2 miles) and off the highway 3 km (2 miles). The desk in your hotel will have information about available means of transportation.

MENSAJE DEL DIRECTOR

We Oaxacans are very proud to live in this beautiful city. We are reminded of our pride when a visitor tells us that Oaxaca is picturesque, culturally unique, the people are talented and friendly. We are told by visitors that Oaxaca is a wonderful place to come to and many promise to return.

To be certain anyone will be living here in a few years, Oaxacans must press to get the government to stop the exhaust emissions from the busses in our city. We citizens have not been able to reach the proper ears. The Oaxaca Times is asking the visitors who take pride in being here to help us. Please take a few minutes and go to the Mexican Office of Tourism at the corner of Cinco de Mayo and Morelos. This office has a bi-lingual staff and you can express your concerns and view directly to the only people who can stop the blight. Ing. Arturo Lopez Ramos is in charge of the office. It would be good for you to talk to him.

If you can not get by the Mexican Office of Tourism please write a letter to the Oaxaca Times expressing your concerns and we guarantee it will be delivered to Ing. Ramos. Thank you for helping us remain a beautiful city for the years to come.

The weaving activity was introduced in Teotitlan over 450 years ago by Gray Lopez Zarate. A visit to the home/shops in this village will give the visitor an opportunity to observe how the weavers work and live. Handmade products are proudly displayed on the floors of their shops.

Because of quantity buying, prices of rugs can be less in the Oaxacan shops and those on the Zocalo than at the villages where they are woven. Prices of these world famous rugs often are quite reasonable, and it is possible to have a rug produced from your own design.

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CULTURAL EVENTS

- 5 Cultural Activities-10:30 a.m.-Zapotecs from Tehuantepec
Concert-11:30-I.N.A.H. auditorium.
Zapotec festival-5:30 Alameda de Leon (in front of Cathedral)
- 13 Civic Ceremony-10:00 a.m. Alameda de Leon.
- 14 "Mexican night"-Popular music-7:00 p.m.(in front of Cathedral)
- 15 Philharmonic State Band-7:00p.m. Mexican music.
Parade-10:30 p.m. principal streets of the center of city.
The Grito-11:00 p.m.- in front of the government palace
- 16 Parade-10:30p.m. principal streets of the center of the city.
the ceremony in honor of the Mexican independence heroes-
11 p.m. in front of the government palace.
- 16 Parade-10:00 a.m. From Juarez Ave. to Zocalo.
- 28 Concert-6:30-in front of Cathedral
- 30 Cultural event-6 p.m.-Alameda de Leon park.

PERMANENT EXHIBITIONS.

INSTITUTE OF GRAPHIC ARTS-Graphics by James Enzor-Alcala # 507 (see ad for sched.)
THE MANO MAGICA -Water colors-3rd street of Alcala.
I.C.C. -art by Luis Jose -Alcala 307- 2nd floor.
HOLIDAYS- Sep.16 (banks will be closed,and stores also)

¡ VIVA MEXICO!

Join in the celebrations commemorating Mexico's independence from Spanish colonial rule on September 16, 1810. In Oaxaca Sunday night, September 15, the Zocalo will be illuminated and many bands will be playing. The food and drink stands will do a land office business. Fireworks will be a big attraction. But, what really draws the crowd is the carnival spirit. The real show is the people and their boundless sense of fun.

The air is saturated with smells - the aroma of frying food, of brown sugar syrup, of bunuelos, pozole, gorditas browning in the comal. Don't forget your funny caps, eyeglasses, mustaches and noisemakers. People seize the chance to make plenty of noise and also give all their off-spring rattles, horns, whistles.

At about 10 o'clock "La America", the young lady chosen to sing the National Anthem, will cruise the downtown area in a decorated float. At 11 the Governor will appear on the balcony of the Municipal Palace, make a short speech accompanied by catcalls given in jest by members of the opposition party. The governor will

cry "VIVA MEXICO" and ring the bell of freedom signaling the State Philharmonic Orchestra to play the national anthem. A brilliant display of fireworks will mark the end of the official festivities.

NOW THE PARTY WILL BEGIN!!! VIVA MEXICO!!!!

For those of you who would like to be more formal in your celebration after "The Night of the Cry" you should have a special dinner at one of our more famous restaurants. Traditionally Chiles en Nogada are the featured dish. It is a pepper stuffed with meat, baked, and topped with cream, nuts and fruit of the pomegranate. Delicious! You will be entertained by Mexican musicians and singers. Some restaurants require reservations so check on your favorite to avoid a disappointment - ask about their menu for that evening and the prices.

But, whatever you do, celebrate with us the Day of Mexican Independence.

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Bienvenidos amigos

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Oaxaca, is a beautiful, clean, colonial city with friendly people and a nearly perfect climate.

OAXACA TIMES aims to provide you, the English-speaking visitor, with valuable information which will enhance and enrich your stay. Write, call (6-3443), or come by our office in location **Macedonio Alcalá No. 307-12** with your tips and recommendations about Oaxaca.

Our office is 4 blocks north of the Zocalo at the Institute of Communication and Culture, A.C. Come by and get acquainted.

But, above all, enjoy our beautiful Oaxaca.
Yolanda García C.
Publisher.

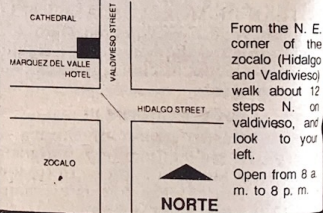
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