

COMMONS FORUM *Response*

Response to: Demographic Change and Commons Management: A Focus on Migration, by Leticia Durand and Rosalva Landa

Ties Woven to Defend the Original Territory

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The paper of Leticia Durand and Rosalva Landa points to a crucial set of problems in rural areas of developing countries. We cannot understand today the dynamics of rural communities without taking migration into consideration. Since the decade of the sixties, migration has been an important issue in the anthropological and sociological literature. This literature raises the question of the consequences of migration for the social and cultural dynamics of the peasant families and communities. This question has received numerous answers depending on the theoretical approach. Mainly, during the early years, migration was clearly associated with modernization and acculturation. Later, new research results demonstrated the complexity and the wide and contradictory range of social, economical, political, and cultural consequences provoked by migration. And only for the last decade, has migration has been discussed in relation with management of natural resources, common property, and collective governance traditions.

As the authors pointed out, migration alters social dynamics and resource allocation. In this sense, we have a patchwork of possibilities. In some cases, migration produces ruptures and loss of responsibility towards the original communities among migrants as well as among residents. This loss of responsibility, as the authors indicated, can lead to environmental deterioration and a loss of control over the conservation of natural resources. In these cases, migrants are not able to create networks that could maintain an identity feeling of belonging.

In some other cases, however, migrants of the same community have recreated new social networks in the different places of migration, often with residents of their original communities. Through a strong political organization, migrants can reinforce their cultural practices and identify feelings of belonging.

The new appropriation of territories results in a reterritorialization, as Michael Kearney has named it, which is strengthened by these social and cultural networks that structure the life of migrants at different levels. The sense of a new territory, and the loss of their original territory, means that, on many occasions, migrants recreate a symbolic territory. This sense of belonging produces a responsibility to conserve their ties to their original territory. As Durand and Landa have declared, this new scenario may fortify social institutions in the original communities.

When networks are continuously woven among migrants of many distant places, e.g. Chicago, New York, rural areas in California, Mexico City, or Oaxaca City, and their original

communities, e.g., San Esteban Atatlauca, Mixteca Region, social capital is being constantly recreated. Moreover, the dynamics of migration show a pattern where, in certain periods, permanent migrants can transform themselves, even after twenty years, back into residents of their original communities. In other periods, residents migrate. Hence a cyclic pattern develops. Many social, economic, and political factors can explain the rhythm of these cycles, indeed there exists an enormous literature about it, but what is important to understand are the ties that are woven in order to formulate a sense of responsibility to defend the original territory.

I certainly agree with Durand and Landa's general conclusion. The effects of migration on the common property resources depend on these networks, the social participation, the sense of belonging and the social capital constructed among migrants and residents in order to defend actively and collectively their territories and to struggle to conserve their natural resources.

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