

FIELDWORK REPORT

1. Background

In order to face the high levels of violence, in 2006 the Federal Mexican Government decided to mobilize the police, military and navy in the fight against the drug trafficking groups. Military operations have been taking place along the Mexican territory. The policy has not been able to reduce the violence, instead it increased and spread the confrontations and executions. As a result around 60,000 murders related with the organized crime have occurred, the victims include criminals, security corps and civilians. Due to the wide spread violence 230,000 people have changed their place of residence.

Morelos, where the communities of Tejalpa and Altavista are located, has become one of the main venues of drug related violence. In the mean time, its status has changed from a place where the drugs used to pass through to a place for destination and consumption of drugs. This is a consequence of the detentions and confiscations in the Mexican territory which have made it difficult to reach the market in the United States. As a result, besides the high levels of violence, the rise of drugs consumption has become a serious problem. In order to keep their profits, the drug trafficking gangs are seeking for new markets and in the process; they rely on different illicit activities like kidnaping, extortion, robbery and looting. The current situation is the excuse for a strong presence of the army and police in the streets who also have been accused of arbitrary arrest, cruel treatment and torture.

The population of Tejalpa and Altavista is exposed to direct and indirect forms of this violence. The former through the media which persist reporting about murders and executions, the later through the abuse of power from the army and police, the arrest and murders of some neighbors who turned out being part of the drug trafficking gangs or were innocent victims. With some exceptions, the violence still limited to some areas

of the community and takes place after midnight. The daily life of people has been disrupted especially with the presence of fear, but somehow they continue with their daily activities like going to work or to the school.

2. Research Project

For PhD course a comparative analysis on the basis of the findings from the Master course is being conducted. The findings are the results of three rounds of fieldwork in the community of Tejalpa, Morelos, Mexico during August 2012 and August 2013, and in the communities of Altavista in April, 2014. Due to the particular characteristics of the drug gangs controlling Morelos territory, especially their need to create new markets and recruiting new members, the most vulnerable group is youth from low-income group. The gangs are particularly interested in recruiting these children because:

- The drug gangs can pay children much less than what they pay to an adult.
- Drug gangs can use children's social networks in their school and neighborhood.
- If children get caught by the police the sentence is less severe.

The comparative research points out the fact that even people living in Altavista have a higher income and better living conditions than people living in the Tejalpa, people in Altavista are facing higher levels of drug related violence. In contrast to the community of Tejalpa, the children living in Altavista have changed some important daily activities since classes have been suspended for several times at the request of the parents who are afraid of the wave of violence. Recently, the afternoon shift of the community's high school was closed since there was a lack of students interested in enrolling the afternoon classes. Such comparison helps to identify other factors that can make children vulnerable to drug related violence and particularly to the recruitment of gangs. Studying children that seem to have more and different choices will give a better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of joining a drug gang from children's perspective. Also, conducting research in other community provides a better idea of the role of the community members in increasing or decreasing the vulnerability

of children. The comparison will also give the opportunity to find out different efforts to protect children not only from the violence, but more importantly from the gangs' overture in recruiting children.

3. Research Proposes

The research tries not to focus just in the major events that are the most radical consequences of drug related violence: deaths, arrests and displaced people showed by the statistics. But, it tries to understand how people living in a community exposed to drug related violence cope with it. The purpose is:

- To examine why children from low-income group are more vulnerable to the new presence of violence
- To examine if these children change their behavior and how they change given the violence
- To examine the role of the community in reducing (or increasing) vulnerability among these children

4. Significance of the research

Policy makers and community members are so worried about reducing the levels of crime that they do not realize the situation is getting worse not just because of the violence itself but because the way they are constructing the problem. Thus, the present research has a great significance since it highlights the fact that being neglected as victims is what makes these children even more vulnerable. If these children continue being isolated, by their community and the police, they might join a drug trafficking gang and become a real threat for the community. The members of the community and the policy makers need to become familiar with the experiences and perceptions of young people, so they can be aware of how the most vulnerable group is neglected as a victim, to change the way people in the community and policy makers think about the impacts of drug related violence and the best ways to prevent it.

5. Methodology

The primary data will be gathered from field observation and in-depth interviews with young people and members of local organizations. Time-space tables for the interviewed teenagers, historical overview and a detailed map of the community will be done. The secondary data will be obtained from reviewing related literature and information from the different government ministries and NGOs involved.

6. Fieldwork location and target informants

The fieldwork of the present research will take place in the communities of Tejalpa and Altavista in Morelos, Mexico. The main informants of the research will be young people between 13 and 18 years old (middle school and high school students). Even though the main focus is the youth; interviews to some parents, teachers, social workers and government officers will provide important additional information.

7. Fieldwork report

This round of fieldwork was focused in gathering data to clarify the research background in one of the two communities: Tejalpa. In order to understand why people can live with apparent signs of drug violence in their living environment? The information about the community is very limited, thus most of the data presented here was gathered from interviews to community members.

In 1940 Tejalpa was a rural community with 700 people sharing the communal ownership of 2892 ha with the right to live in the land, work it, but not sell it. Community members had an economy based on agricultural production and **shared farming activities** producing market crops like sugar cane and rice as well as corn and vegetables for self consumption. Their life was secure, they produced their own food and used cash income to cover other basic needs like clothing. From 1946 1 textile, 1 cement and 1 match factory were established nearby attracting the first migration waves from Guerrero and Estado de Mexico.

New comers were given access to land for living and also agricultural land for farming

easily adopted the live style and integrate with community members. The young ones, along with some natives, worked in recently opened industries enjoying fix work hours, social benefits an access to labor unions. Their children went to the same schools and they went to the same church. The 3 shifts in the industries allowed them to keep helping their families with farming activities. Their life became more secure: they had an extra stable cash income, and workers and family members had access to health care and basic education for their children provided by industries,

In 1960 the population was 2500 people. 50% of people were now working as laborers and employees in the industries, its stable salaries and social benefits were more attractive for young community members and new comers than farming, there rest were still living on farming. In 1963 the federal government expropriated 392 ha to build and industrial park for public use compensating land owners . The construction of the industrial park attracted a wave of construction workers increasing the population twice by 1970. When the park started operations they stayed on to work integrating with the community: many of them had relatives that helped them, they worked in the same industries with locals, buying land in payments from them or renting a place to live. By 1970 the population doubled.

In 1974 34 industries were operating in Civac in (Mainly foreign car, pharmaceutical and textile) attracting more workers and their families which by 1980 increased the population 4 times to 20,000 people. However, they found stable jobs integrating in the community since their labor was needed and they contributed positively to the local economy. Many of them had relatives, they worked together in the industries, children went to the same school and they went to the same church and entertainment places. Locals who got benefited with the land compensations started small and medium business to satisfy the demand of goods and services from the industries and people, commercial activities started having an important role. Commerce, the industries and selling land for urban use became more attractive than farming for landowners. Rice and sugar production practically disappeared. Farming stopped being a representative

source of income and majority of population stopped being food self-reliant.

Unstable crop prices and the lack of subsidies worsened living conditions in rural areas pushing migrants from Guerrero and Estado de Mexico., Industries were not able to meet the job demand forcing majority of migrants to join the informal economy. Without money to buy land or rent a house, they started creating illegal settlements in the community's communal lands entering in conflict with locals since they look at them as invaders. Majority were males (no families) with no relatives in the community. Also Tejalpa was a completely urban community, new comers had a rural living style (they dressed up differently, spoke differently). The industries and irregular human settlements wastewaters contaminated seriously the water aquifers increasing tensions and protest against the industries and the irregular settlements. Even after the irregular settlements were provided with public services and regularized 10 years later, they never integrated with the community. They built their own church were they had their own celebrations and were provided with their own school.

As for the community, majority were now involved in commercial activities followed by workers in the industries enjoying stable salaries and social benefits, but this secured condition didn't last much longer. Since 1982 dropping oil prices, currency devaluations, increasing interest rates and inflation affected industries an the purchasing power of citizens. Industries couldn't meet the demands for salary increase leading to continued strikes. In 1986 the match company closed and layoffs started taking place. By 1990 the population was 30,000 people

Agriculture kept reducing its participation in the local economy. Due to the polluted aquifers in 1991 the area was ban to produce crops for human consumption. Farmers without the know-how and resources to produce ornamental crops started renting their lands losing food security and a constant cash income. Migrants kept coming from Guerrero and Estado de Mexico increasing the population of the area to 50,000 in 2000 with similar characteristics to the previous migration wave, they invaded an area of the community designated as natural reserve leading to serious conflicts with community

members that have had several attempts to evict them up to now since it hadn't been regularized. New comers were pushed to enter the informal economy since layoffs kept going on and became massive after 1994 when the largest depreciation of peso in history took place. In 1998 the cement company decided to shut down and the auto and pharmaceutical companies automatized many processes to reduce labor cost.

The layoffs continued with the bankruptcy of the labor intensive textile companies that were unable to compete with cheaper textiles imported from the US after the Free Trade Agreement. Around 60% of the population lives now from commercial activities, but unlike previous business in the 80's that were providers for the industries, these are mainly small shops for everyday use products or internet cafes with lower profits and less income stability. Very Few medium size business with larger capital were established like agroindustries for export (fresh herbs, flowers On the top of that 50% of these commercial activities are informal. Meaning the big majority of the people in the community is now relying in small shops or informal economy carrying out trades they learned while working in the industries like blacksmith or plumber with a very unstable income and without access to any social security.

From 2002 the closed industries were substituted by transnational supermarkets offering less jobs, temporary contracts and lower salaries and affecting the local small shops that cannot compete. After 1994 the industries changed the contracting conditions, 70% of workers have temporary contracts that deprived them from most social benefits.

The massive population growth, the illegal invasion of people, the lack of stable jobs and stable source of income along with the lack of access to social security have made the life of people living in Tejalpa increasingly anxious and insecure. Thus when violence started taking place in the community it had to compete with many other worries that reduced its impact.

The main conclusions from this round of fieldwork are:

1. Economic changes and population growth have made community members increasingly anxious and insecure, giving people many immediate needs to worry about. **Drug violence is neither their only concern nor the most significant one.**
2. They perceive a drug violence related event like **unusual, unpredictable and random** event rather than a consequence of an action. As something they cannot prevent from happening.