

**IN THE MARKET BUT NOT FOR THE MARKET: CIVIL SOCIETY
PARTICIPATION, COLLECTIVE ACTION, ORGANIC FARMING AND FAIR
TRADE. A CASE STUDY OF *UNIÓN MAJOMUT* AND ITS IMPACT ON THE
LIVING CONDITIONS OF ITS MEMBERS.**

By
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Abstract

This thesis explores the results of trade liberalization, which took place in Mexico in the 1980s and gave birth to many changes in the organization of its productive sectors. The coffee sector, composed mainly of small-scale producers from indigenous communities, was one the most affected because of the volatility in coffee prices and the dismantling of the institutions that gave financial and technical assistance. Therefore, small-scale coffee producers have explored alternatives within the new dynamics of the process of globalization. This thesis uses as its case study *Unión Majomut*, a small-scale coffee producer organization. The findings of this research, which focus on civil society participation and collective action alongside the practices of organic farming and fair trade, reveal that small-scale producer organizations could be an effective means to survive the impact of neoliberalism.

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List of Acronyms

ANAGSA – *Aseguradora Nacional Agrícola y Ganadera* (National Agriculture and Livestock Insurer)

BANRURAL – *Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural* (Rural Development Bank)

CERTIMEX – *Certificadora Mexicana de Productos y Procesos Ecológicos* (Mexican Certifier for Organic Procedures and Products)

CLAC – *Coordinadora Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Pequeños Productores y Trabajadores de Comercio Justo* (Latin American and Caribbean Network of Small Fair-Trade Producers and workers)

CIESAS – *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (Centre for Research and Higher Learning in Social Anthropology)

CNC – *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (National Peasant's Confederation)

CNOC – *Consejo Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras* (National Council of Coffee Organizations)

CoCoPla – *Comités Comunitarios de Planeación* (Committees of Community Planning)

CONAVI – *Comisión Nacional de Vivienda* (National Housing Commission)

ECOSUR - *El Colegio de la Frontera Sur* (Southern Border College)

EFTA – *European Fair Trade Association*

EU – *European Union*

FAO – *Food and Agriculture Organization*

FDI – *Foreign Direct Investment*

GATT – *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade*

GDP – *Gross Domestic Product*

ICA – *International Coffee Agreement*

ICO – *International Coffee Organization*

IFAT – *International Federation for Alternative Trade*

IFOAM – *International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement*

IMF – *International Monetary Fund*

IMO-LA – *IMOCert Latinoamérica Ltda*

INI – *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (National Indigenous Institute)

INMECAFE – *Instituto Mexicano del Café* (Mexican Coffee Institute)

ISI – *Import Substitution Industrialization*

ISMAM – *Indígenas de la Sierra Madre de Motozintla* (Indigenous People from the Sierra Madre of Motozintla)

MERCOSUR – *Mercado Común del Sur* (Southern Common Market)

NAFTA – *North American Free Trade Agreement*

NEWS! – *Network of European World Shops*

NGO – *Non-Governmental Organization*

NGOs – *Non-Governmental Organizations*

NORA – *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*

OECD – *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*

PEMEX – *Petróleos Mexicanos* (Mexican Petroleums)

POs – *Producer Organizations*

PROCAMPO – *Programa de Apoyos Directos al el Campo* (Direct Rural Support Program)

PROCEDE – *Programa de Certificación de Derechos Agrarios y Titulación de Solares Urbanos* (Programme for the Certification of Ejido and Land Ownership Titles)

PRONASOL – *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* (National Solidarity Program)

PROVICH – *Promotora de Vivienda Chiapas* (Chiapas Housing Developer)

REB – *Research Ethics Board*

SPP – *Símbolo del Pequeño Productor* (Small Producers' Symbol)

UCIRI – *Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Región del Istmo* (Association of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus)

UEPCs – *Unidades Económicas de Producción y Comercialización* (Economic Units for Production and Marketing)

UN – *United Nations*

UNORCA – *Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas* (National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations)

WB – *World Bank*

WHO – *World Health Organization*

WTO – *World Trade Organization*

Chapter 1

Introduction:

Unión Majomut in the Market But not For the Market

1.1 Introduction

The sun begins to rise in the mountains of the Highlands, Chiapas. Emilio is ready to go to work in his coffee farm with his wife and children. Together, they have overcome the fear of paramilitary threats and they hope to sell their coffee at a better price. When they get to their coffee farm, they sing, dance and pray to God for the permission to work their land. Then, they begin to cut the red cherries of the cafeto. They are very careful not to let the red cherries fall down or to mistreat them and, in doing so, they spend the day working until the sunset. Afterwards it's time to go back to their humble homes, made out of wooden planks and a rustic floor; carrying baskets filled with coffee cherries, between the forehead and the back. Then, the coffee cherries must go through a process of family and community work, and finally all this work will result in a cup of coffee being served somewhere in the world.¹

This image takes us back to the rural world of Mexico, the same one that has been in crisis for more than four decades, the same one that has made its peasant and indigenous population pray for good luck in the face of vulnerability stemming from the current world order, where they are not capable of producing enough to satisfy their own basic needs (Zamora Lomelí, 2003).

¹ Adapted from Zamora Lomelí, 2003.

We are living in a world that is richer than ever before in history, yet 840 million people suffer from hunger daily and do not have their basic needs satisfied (Kent, 2005). Globalization, leaving everything to the market, competitiveness, efficiency and the reduction of the state's power, has made it difficult to improve the living and working conditions of the poor. None of the above factors include land reform, agricultural production and economic security for the vulnerable sectors of the population (Mercado & Lorenzana, 2000). At the World Food Summit, held in 1996 and resumed in 2002, world leaders committed themselves to reduce the number of people affected by food insecurity to less than 400 million by 2015. Nevertheless, with a reduction of about 8 million per year, there was no possibility of achieving this goal (FAO, 2012). In consequence and according to the results provided by the Food Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in its annual report, there are still 795 million people suffering from hunger and experiencing food insecurity, mainly in the developing countries (FAO, 2015).

There has been hunger and malnutrition throughout the history of humankind. This continues to be one of the most serious social and economic problems in the global South (Stedile & Martins de Carvalho, 2010, p.3). During the recent crisis, a rise in food prices caused hunger levels to peak in 2009, as 1.02 billion people could no longer afford to buy food, prompting the international community to search for solutions to the growing levels of food insecurity (Gordillo, 2004). This complex problem especially affects the global South, where ironically in many countries small-scale farmers make up a large portion of the population suffering from hunger, malnutrition and moreover the inability to satisfy their basic needs, not only regarding food but also housing and health conditions. Such is the case of Mexico and specifically the state of Chiapas where its

people have been trying to find ways to recover the peasant dominated agricultural sector in order to improve living conditions.

It is worthwhile to acknowledge that the nutritional status of a nation affects all aspects of development. Hunger, malnutrition and loss of livelihoods are manifestations of the failure of the development process to reach certain segments of the population. Consequently, any organization that seeks to measure development should not overlook the nutritional dimension (Afonso, 2007).

Food security and poverty problems are worsened by inequality in income distribution (Gordillo, 2004), by food production seasonality, as well as by economic processes and technological changes that incorporate local rural societies into market dynamics (Melgar-Quiñonez, Zubieta, Valdez & Whitelaw, 2005). Latin America is one of the regions with the highest level of food insecurity associated with extreme poverty, and one of the main causes stems from the macro-economic structure, as well as the political instability that most countries in the region have experienced in the past several years (Mercado & Lorenzana, 2000).

The economic crisis (1990s-Present) that the world is facing is well known. Moreover, this situation is likely to worsen in future years, due to the direct connection that the economic crisis has with the financial and political instability that the world is going through (Jimenez, 1995). It is worth pointing out that in Mexico, there has not been any significant reduction in extreme and moderate poverty since the early 1990s and it is the south-eastern region which presents one of the highest incidences of extreme and moderate poverty, including three of the poorest states in the country: Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca (CONEVAL, 2015; Lustig & Székely, 1997).

In the state of Chiapas there has been a decrease in the population's living conditions due to the constant fall of families' purchasing power and the rise of informal non-agricultural employment and unemployment, which is more than 50% higher than in 1990, and which has produced an increase in the number of poor families and those in extreme poverty conditions (Salvatierra *et al.*, 2002; Torres, 2002). According to recent numbers from The National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, 2015) poverty in Chiapas increased from 74.7% in 2012 to 76.2% in 2014. The increase in poverty is reflected in a growth in the number of families with difficulties to access a sufficient diet, both in quantity and quality, to ensure good health.

Hence, the high incidence of moderate and extreme poverty found in Chiapas is the result of the impact generated by the sudden drop in international coffee prices, social exclusion, especially of indigenous groups, and the introduction of agrarian reform during the 1990s (Lustig & Székely, 1997). This means that despite the changes that the agrarian reform brought to Mexico, these changes were not enough to help small-scale farmers to survive the imminent privileges that the *city* (the industry and service sectors) received since 1940. It is a situation less and less bearable for farmers, who were caught between the rising of production costs and the relatively low prices of their crops (Otero, 2004, p. 85).

In the same vein it is important to emphasize that, despite the implementation of social programs by the government such as *Oportunidades* (now called *Próspera*), the development of these communities, specifically the indigenous regions, does not show any significant progress. Confronted with this scenario, small-scale producers, mostly of Chiapas, have been organizing themselves in search of new options to confront the reality

of unevenness, inequality and social backwardness in their region. These small-scale producer organizations have adopted alternatives to overcome poverty and they have set an example of determination and self-motivation towards a new reality, for them, their families and their communities. As an example, some small-scale producer organizations, like *Unión Majomut*, have turned Mexico into one of the world leaders in production of organic coffee (Pérezgrovas, Cervantes & Burstein, 2001).

Similarly, one proposed solution, presented by the FAO, cites recent evidence showing that small-scale producer organizations are able to face the instability of the market oriented strategies and to improve the living conditions of its members (Jaworski, 2014). In this regard, the FAO sees that small-scale producer organizations,

[...] Are able to play a greater role in meeting a growing demand for agricultural produce on local, national, and international markets, and they can enable small producers to have some influence over the policy and programs that affect their lives [...] The contribution of cooperatives, producer organizations (POs) and other forms of collective action to the achievement of food security and poverty reduction is being increasingly recognised. FAO has highlighted the crucial contribution of POs and cooperatives to achieving the Organization's mandate, particularly in reducing rural poverty and enabling more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international levels in its new Strategic Framework (FAO, 2014).

This thesis offers a modest contribution to this discussion, noting that, as the Mexican government continues to promote policies that benefit large-scale producers in the country's agricultural sector, regions like Chiapas are mostly excluded, and small-scale

producers are not able to participate in the decision-making that affects local development.

This thesis claims that the development of the indigenous communities in rural Chiapas can be achieved with the active participation of civil society and through the collective action of small-scale producers. Therefore, this research suggests that development for indigenous communities should be understood as a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. In this sense community well-being (economic, social, environmental and cultural aspects of the community) often evolves from this type of collective action being taken at a grassroots level. Community development ranges from small initiatives within a small group to large initiatives that involve the broader community (PeerNetBC, 2016). Along these lines, development can be measured qualitatively, based on the assessment of the local 'subjects' of development and using the indicators that they chose. At the same time, in order to provide common ground for evaluation, a number of 'indicators' can be used, in this research, by asking about, for example, income, production, housing, self-esteem, etcétera.

In this way, the experience of *Unión Majomut* is viewed as an example of social capital formation through collective action. By managing information through qualitative techniques, this thesis suggests that small-scale producer organizations can be an effective means for promoting development for its members and their communities. Some criteria for evaluation this include: a long-term endeavour, with well-planned strategies that are inclusive and equitable, holistic and integrated into the bigger picture, with widespread benefits to the community, grounded in experience that leads to best

practices, and initiated and supported by community members.

Accordingly, this research addresses *development* on a regional and local level. According to Boisier (1999), development on these levels is a process of structural change associated with a permanent progress of the territory, the community and the individual towards a higher quality of life. This process is determined by the systematic transformation of the population in a regional territory into a collective subject, which, through the strengthening of civil society, allows for the self-realization of individuals. What constitutes a good quality of life? For the purposes of this research, it can be understood as encompassing the general well-being of individuals, families and communities, based on the self-evaluation of life satisfaction, from emotional to physical health, proper housing, family relations, religious expression, political and cultural ideologies, environment and the acceptance of all the differences that these aspects may bring between the different groups of individuals. As such, this thesis proposes to understand quality of life in a way that goes beyond income amelioration.

In this conceptualization of development there are key elements such as territory, community and the individual. Additionally, human development represents the progress or failure within the region to improve quality of life indicators. The elements that Boisier highlights in his concept of *local development* are adopted in this thesis, in order to analyze on different levels coordinated action to promote change on a regional level. Territory, for example, is considered as the reproduction space, the space of life and a survival site, which shows the degree of development in the region (Rubio, 2006, p.29). Accordingly, the individual and the community (defined as the concentration of individuals within their territory) are considered as the generators of change. Boisier

(1999) calls them the space, individual and social dimensions of regional development, respectively.

This thesis seeks to highlight the importance of organized participation of individuals in promoting the progress of their communities—*local development*. It analyzes the southeast of Mexico, in the Highlands region in the state of Chiapas, whose main commercial activity is the production of organic coffee. As stated above, the current economic crisis within the country has made producers organize for better access to markets and better payment for their coffee. Obtaining better prices can be seen not only as an improvement in their revenues but also with regard to non-monetary benefits that impact the health and self-esteem of individuals.

The concept of regional-local development, selected as an analytical framework of this research, highlights the importance of civil society as a precursor of the structural changes that enable the development of subjects as individuals, the development of their communities and their local environment in general. In this way small-scale coffee producers have organized themselves in producer organizations as a collective agency to adapt to a globalized market.

Producer organizations form part of the requirements that the organic and fair trade market² established to allow for the participation of small-scale producers. Hence, this thesis takes markets into account as a framework to explore the possibilities offered to small-scale producers to improve their quality of life, both in monetary terms and otherwise. Thus, this research focuses on determining whether participation in the small-scale coffee producers organization *Unión de Productores Orgánicos Beneficio Majomut*

² These markets, so called alternatives markets, offer better prices to small-scale producers for their products and they also provide additional non-monetary benefits.

S. de P.R. de R. L—often referred to as simply *Unión Majomut*—has been effective enough to stimulate local development in their communities and by consequence promote a better quality of life for its members.

This development process recognizes the connection between social, cultural, environmental and economic matters, the diversity of interests within a community and its relationship to build the capacity of autonomous decision, which serves for the benefits of all involved in such process.

1.1.1 Context and Rationale.

The changes that have occurred in the world with the latest stage of globalization³, characterized by the importance given to the international trade of goods, services and capital as well as the decreased intervention of the State in the economy has had—in some cases in countries of Latin America and Africa—a negative impact on sectors where their level of development (when adopting the measures of the Washington consensus) were not adequate enough to face the challenges of the new world order (Stiglitz, 2006).

For this reason, the primary, secondary and tertiary economic sectors within these countries needed to readjust their strategies in order to meet the challenges of the new era. Additionally, these countries needed to establish new strategies not only in the institutional ambit but also in the private sectors in order to ensure an effective

³ According to Kuri (2003) the world has been through different stages regarding the globalization process. The first, from the late 19th century to WWI, was characterized by an increase in foreign investment and commerce). The second, from 1950s to 1970s, was characterized by a decrease in productivity, stagnation, rapid commercial expansion and an increase in foreign direct investment. The third, from the 1980s to the present is a period distinguished by open markets, integration of financial markets, advances in technology and communications, as well as lower costs in transportation. For further reading see Kuri Gaytan (2003).

performance to face the internal problems of each sector of the economy. Furthermore, Mexico was one of these countries that experienced both types of adjustments within its economic sectors; institutional and private, these adjustments led to new stages of organization and their effects are still present today. Thus, the adjustment of the agricultural sector in Mexico, specifically the coffee industry, is the context within which this research problem is placed.

The situation of the Mexican coffee industry was specially aggrieved after the *Instituto Mexicano del Café*⁴ (Mexican Coffee Institute, INMECAFE) was disbanded because the coffee producers were not able to make decisions regarding prices, means of distribution or even managing their own coffee activities. Furthermore, the small-coffee producers did not have the economic capital to acquire the equipment to process their own coffee for exporting. Additionally, the issues regarding land ownership made harder the process of integration within the market due to the absence of support from State authorities and because of the lack of financial aid (Barton Bray, Plaza Sánchez, & Contreras Murphy, 2008).

Hence, the coffee producers sought new alternatives to stay in the *market*. In some cases, they used the organizational structures developed in the *coffee bonanza*⁵ and explored new niche markets in which they would be able to compete in the global trend.

This was the context that made possible the development of coffee organizations

⁴ INMECAFE was assigned the mission of regulating coffee prices, providing technical assistance, and functioning as a regulator of the coffee industry in Mexico from 1958 to 1989, when it was disbanded (Fridell, 2007).

⁵ This period was considered between 1970 and 1989, when the value of coffee exports in Mexico averaged around 5 percent of the total value of all national exports, and 34 per cent of the value of all agricultural exports, making coffee a key source of foreign exchange (Synder, 1999 as cited in Fridell, 2007). Also this stage is considered when INMECAFE was in charge of the coffee activities regulations in Mexico. One of INMECAFE's objectives was the eradication of intermediaries, the price guarantees to producers increasing their participation in the coffee industry, and the financial support for their activities.

such as the *Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras* (National Council of Coffee Organizations, CNOC), the *Coordinadora Estatal de Productores de Café de Oaxaca* (State Coordinator of Coffee Producers of Oaxaca) and the *Red de Organizaciones Cafetaleras en Chiapas* (Network of Coffee Organizations in Chiapas), among others. These organizations sought new alternatives for coffee production and marketing, and incorporated, with the assistance of Catholic missionaries (as the case of *Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Región del Istmo*, UCIRI⁶) new patterns of production and marketing systems, such as organic farming and fair trade.

The organic farming system was one of the alternatives that the small-scale coffee producers embraced. This strategy was mainly used because organic production represented a process which uses farming methods that respect the environment, based on minimal use of external inputs, abandonment of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in order to reduce to a minimum soil, water and air pollution. Therefore, this farming method will optimize the health and productivity of communities that are respectful of and dependent on soil, plants, animals and moreover on traditional ways to produce. Consequently, a differentiated classification of the product arises from this new agro-ecological mechanism that has been implemented (Bray, Plaza Sánchez, & Contreras Murphy, 2008).

So, a new market is created, where the quality of the product is essential. The price paid for the organic coffee is better, taking into consideration the quality requirements of the consumers. Similarly, a new marketing model emerged, called *fair trade*. This model according to *Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International* (FLO),

⁶ UCIRI is a small-scale coffee processing and marketing organization composed of members from fifty-four communities in twenty municipalities located in Oaxaca (Fridell, 2007).

aims to create opportunities for producers and workers in the global South who have been marginalized or placed in a disadvantageous economic situation because of the conventional trading system (Coscione, 2014).

This fair trade market offers a price above conventional market prices that considers the initial investment of the producers, the costs of production, the quality offered and the satisfaction of the consumers. For conventional coffee, a minimum price is established plus a premium of 1.4 US dollars per pound for green Arabica beans (washed) plus 0.20 US dollars (of which at least \$0.05 are for productivity and/or quality) of the premium (if conventional prices rise above this price, the fair trade price will readjust to remain at least \$0.05 above conventional prices). Similarly, for organic coffee the price is established as follows: minimum price or market price plus organic differential plus premium, which add \$0.30 to the conventional one (Fair Trade, 2016; Fridell, 2007, p. 191)

In this sense, organic production in addition to fair trade promotes not only a new way of producing but also a more holistic system of economic production. Hence, the entrance to these alternative markets was a response from the individuals and groups involved in the coffee industry and the problems experienced within the sector during the eighties. The disappearance of public institutions that supported the coffee industry distorted its functioning and brought other responses to this problem like migration or replacement of productive activities (Martínez-Torres, 2006).

Although the results were diverse, the effects, such as a reduction in unemployment and poverty, could be seen by for those who were directly involved in the coffee industry. These two elements, according to Hernández Navarro (1996), are highly

important for a good quality of life. Thus, the existence of unemployment, poverty and lack of opportunities within the context of the coffee industry, and the whole country in general, can be seen as an indicator of underdevelopment. For example, in the early 1990s in Chiapas one out of three people was illiterate and two out of five people suffered chronic hunger (Coneval, 2012). Likewise, in this period of time 2.3 million people in Chiapas were living in poverty, 1.2 million had not access to water and 1.5 million did not have flooring or adequate housing conditions (Coneval, 2012).

Therefore the entry into the alternative markets is regulated by a rule that they must be part of an organization⁷. Due to the fact that the activities of these markets have elements that can be seen as components of a process promoting development, it can be said that producers organized themselves as a means to promote local development. In a similar line, Rosset (2003) argues that

[...] The only lasting way to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty is through local economic development. One way to achieve such development in rural areas is to create local circuits of production and consumption, where family farmers sell their produce and buy their necessities in local towns. Money circulates several times in the local economy, generating town employment and enabling farmers to make a living (Ibid, pp.1-2).

Nevertheless, when local markets are not willing to pay or to help the local small-scale producer, alternatives must be created to provide new paths for pursuing the same goals,

⁷ The most common form of organization within indigenous communities is the integration of cooperatives [small-scale producer organizations]. The goal of the cooperatives is not the maximization of individual profits, but rather to satisfy the human development needs of its members, which are inevitably linked to the needs of their surrounding communities and the nation, and even to the "human family" (Piñeiro Harnecker, 2011).

which was and still is the subsistence and better quality of life of the individuals of a particular region. According to Boisier (1999), civil society is the main agent for regional and local development. The organization of small-scale producers allows them not only to gain greater revenues but also to obtain intangible benefits that are reflected in a better quality of life for its members.

1.1.2 Relevance of the Research.

The interest and importance of this research is defined by the inequality of some regions in the *global system*, more commonly described as the *process of globalization*. The poverty and deprivation in the indigenous and rural regions of Mexico represent an important research gap that has not been fully addressed. This thesis seeks to analyze feasible alternatives for these regions. It focuses on community, cooperation, autonomy and local development as avenues to end economic dependence. The participation of civil society and cooperativism are seen as means to express, manage and address the problems of development in a given territory, in which individuals are organized. This new agent of action, the small-scale producer organization, promotes structural changes and with collective strength, it could represent the solution or at least an alternative to overcome problems such as hunger, poverty, unemployment and loss of self-determination⁸.

Thus, this thesis seeks to investigate the importance of participation from civil society actors and collective action as a means to generate improvements in the quality of

⁸ It can be said that one of the freedoms that promote development, as Sen argues is the ability for every individual to take decisions. These actions correspond to a greater extent of the individual that can be translate as identity, self-esteem and pride for his own determination. For further reading see Sen, A. (1999) *Development as Freedom*. New York: Anchor Books.

life of small-scale coffee producers in the State of Chiapas. This participation is analyzed within the context of organic coffee production and fair trade on larger scales. Specifically, the case study of this research seeks to test the hypothesis that collective organization for the production of organic coffee, which is marketed through fair trade channels, has brought tangible economic and social benefits for its members, reflecting local development.

1.1.3 Research question.

1) What is the role of small-scale producer organizations, particularly *Unión Majomut*, in promoting organic farming and marketing coffee through fair trade? And how has this impacted the quality of life⁹ of the members of such organizations?

2) In what ways, if any, has the quality of life of its members improved and how has this translated into community development¹⁰?

1.1.4 Research objectives.

In accordance with the research questions, this thesis has these objectives:

1) To examine the importance of the small-scale producer organizations in promoting organic coffee production and in gaining access to fair trade markets, as a

⁹ Quality of life and development are by no means straight forward definitions that is why for the purposes of this thesis quality of life is defined in relation with a general well-being of individuals, observing life satisfaction, from emotional to physical health, proper housing, family relations, religious beliefs, political and cultural ideologies, environment and the acceptance of all the differences that these aspects may bring between the different groups of individuals. Moreover, the thesis proposes to understand quality of life beyond income amelioration.

¹⁰ In the same line of thinking, development for the purpose of this thesis is defined as the improvement of a community quality of life according to what the individuals of the community call improvements and which the methods to reach such improvements do not go against their collective and individual identity; henceforth, emerging from an integral practice in which the members of the community have their input in such developmental process.

means of achieving a better quality of life for small-scale coffee producers and their families.

2) To evaluate the impact of *Unión Majomut* on local development and the feasibility of this strategy as an alternative.

1.1.5 Thesis statement.

Small-scale coffee producer organizations play a central role in the practice of organic farming and in gaining access to fair trade markets. The interrelationship between these practices enables producers to raise their quality of life, and therefore stimulate local development. By applying the principles of collectivity, cooperativism, solidarity and unity, small-scale coffee producer organizations promote economic and social benefits that enhance the quality of life of its members. Examples of these benefits are better trading conditions, better monetary payment and better opportunities regarding food security, housing and healthcare. Communication between producers and buyers not only leads to collective agreements but also to improved environmental conditions for the communities that are involved. All of this leads to development on three levels: individual, household and community.

1.2 Methodology

This thesis is the product of twelve months of full-time research. This section presents the method and techniques used to collect the data needed for this research. The section is divided into two sub-sections. The first addresses the research method used to

construct this research project; the second describes the techniques employed to collect the necessary data and some final remarks.

1.2.1 The proper method for the proper project.

The case study method was selected for the development of this research project. As Yin (2009) argues, “the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as individual life cycles, small group behaviour, organizational and managerial processes, international relations and the maturations of industries” (p.4).

A qualitative case study approach allows the researcher to get closer to participants and settings, allowing for complex interconnectedness between disciplines, fields, and subject matters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.3). In other words, this approach allows the researcher to make sense of personal stories, interviews and cultural texts while drawing on history to make a strong analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.5). Moreover, this approach looks at the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the problem that is addressed within this research.

A common concern that arises when conducting a case study is the idea that case studies provide little basis for scientific generalization. However, this concern can be answered by arguing that case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not merely to populations or universes (Yin, 2009, p. 15). Therefore, the case study does not represent a “sample,” and in doing a case study, the goal is to expand and generalize theories and not to enumerate frequencies; “the goal is to do a

generalizing and not a *particularizing* analysis” (Lipset, Trow, & Coleman cited in Yin, 2009, p. 15).

When analyzing the stages of the integrated research process¹¹, the first thing that had to be addressed in order to select the proper method was to determine the main questions to be asked, the issues to be explored and the field of interest to be studied.

The first stage of the research process, the exploratory part of the research, took place between the spring and summer of 2015. I began by reading a wide variety of literature about Mexico’s developmental problems, namely: land dispossession, poverty, food insecurity, health issues, violence, and political structural problems. Based on previous empirical knowledge, the area of study was delimited to the state of Chiapas, the poorest state in Mexico, with the lowest level of human development, according to the Human Development Index (Coneval, 2012). By analyzing the current situation in Chiapas—the main problems of the region and how those problems have been addressed in the past, the outcomes of these solutions and the developmental strategies implemented—it became evident that the *coffee boom* period was intimately linked to these issues.

The state of Chiapas has a high concentration of indigenous groups, whose main economic activity for commercial purposes is the production of coffee. Furthermore, over half of the 52 indigenous groups in Mexico are involved in coffee production (Pérezgrovas, Cervantes, & Burstein, 2001, p. 14). These characteristics lend themselves to pursuing the objectives of this research project.

¹¹ The integrated research process described in this section, as stages, has been adapted from L. Mayoux (2006, pp. 124-125) in Desai, V., & Potter, R. (2006). *Doing development research*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

The importance of coffee production in Mexico, and particularly in the state of Chiapas, due to the large profits that this economic activity brings to the country, led to two preliminary questions of this research: 1) who are the main beneficiaries of the commercial dynamics of coffee production? 2) How is this activity organized? The preliminary knowledge about the coffee sector was based only on a literature review, and a visit to one of the indigenous communities in the Highlands, Chiapas in 2012, in the municipality of San Juan Cancú.

Subsequently, stage two of this research project began with the refinement and piloting of specific research questions, leading to the identification of more literature to review, in order to contextualize the case study. It also pointed to the data necessary to be collected in answering these questions. Statistical information on coffee production in Chiapas, investment and planning for the coffee sector in the region, the amount of coffee produced, land-use for purposes other than coffee production, and the role of producer organizations within this frame of analysis were all used to delineate the importance of the coffee sector in Chiapas, the particularities of small-scale producer organizations, and the characteristics of the chosen community for this case study.

I reviewed diverse databases and archival records such as those provided by INEGI, Perfiles Municipales, CONEVAL, and the Instituto del Café de Chiapas (Chiapas Coffee Institute), as well as the official websites of institutions such as FAO, ONU, WHO and SEDESOL. Government documents were also reviewed in order to understand how policies shaped Chiapas' coffee sector and the reason for their implementation at that time.

Similarly, books and articles were reviewed. Two of the most helpful books for my purposes are: *In defense of the small producers: The story of CLAC* by M. Coscione, (2014), *Los pueblos originarios: El debate necesario* by R. Stavenhagen, (2010), and *México Profundo: Una civilización negada* by G. Bonfil Batalla (1989). My literature review included texts from the collections of the Patrick Power Library of Saint Mary's University, Killam Memorial Library of Dalhousie University, the library of ITESM, Campus Sinaloa, and the Central Library of Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas.

Based on this literature review, the main focus and unit of analysis of this research was delimited to Chiapas and its coffee sector. In this context, small-scale producers and their producer organizations are considered to be key components to solving the state's poor living conditions through a civil society and collective action framework. This led to the need to explore literature on organic farming and fair trade, as alternatives for facing the developmental problems of the small-scale coffee producers and to promote development within their communities (Van der Hoff, 2011, Fridell, 2007, Martínez-Torres, 2006, Bacon, 2008, Coscione, 2014).

By using an embedded, single case study method, this research will focus not only on a single unit of analysis but also on the subunits of the case, which are organic farming, fair trade and the role of the small-scale producer organizations within them. It is worth noting that, even though the analysis is about a single organization, it includes outcomes of the subunits being analyzed (Yin, 2009, p. 50).

After the definition of the units of analysis, the necessary information to construct the theoretical framework was developed so as to define the proper research techniques to use in the next step for gathering the data needed—fieldwork. Once sufficient data

collection through documentary evidence and archival records was complete, fieldwork was planned and carried out for the gathering of more relevant data.

The fieldwork was carried out during the period January - February 2016, in the coffee region of the Highlands of Chiapas, in México. The subjects of analysis for this case study are the small-scale coffee producers of the organization *Unión Majomut*, their role as individuals that are part of a civil society with a common activity, which is the production of coffee, their role as members of a household with specific needs, and their role as part of a community with specific social demands.

Unión Majomut was selected as a case study not only because of its openness and willingness to cooperate with this project but also for its remarkable experience as a 33-year old organization of small-scale coffee producers. This latter factor was crucial in this selection, as their experience served as the basis through which this case study unfolds. Among the characteristics that I found within *Unión Majomut* are: transparency in its results, shown in its current assemblies and meetings; a strong commitment to its principles of solidarity, reciprocity, equality and sustainability; a sense of unity and cooperation that goes beyond cultural, political, gender and religious differences amongst the members of the organization; respect for the indigenous groups that comprise the organization, as well as their traditions, festivities and beliefs; the value posited on the indigenous cultures and their effort to maintain their ethnic identity; *comunalicracia* a form of democracy, placed at the center of their decision-making process; the cleverness to work together in partnership with government agencies, civil society organizations and other small-scale producer organizations to build solid and stronger social capital; the solidarity that they express to newer or smaller producer organizations by helping,

advising and coaching them. These characteristics among several others were what made *Unión Majomut* a relevant and useful case study for my research purposes, the objective of which is to evaluate how participation in such organizations is impacting the quality of life of its members and promoting development among their communities.

The first contact with the organization was through Mr. Jorge Cota, Operational Coordinator of *Unión Majomut*, who made it possible to coordinate my stay with the organization's schedule of activities. The time in which this fieldwork was conducted was aligned perfectly with the beginning of the coffee season, the first general assembly reunion, the opening workshops of the year, and the commercial meetings among international (French and American) buyers.

In this context, the fieldwork activities were coordinated with the organization's activities, allowing for interviews with key informants, attendance to general and delegate assemblies, participation in workshops, and community visits. It is worth mentioning that *Unión Majomut* has 978 members, organized in five municipalities and more than 100 communities. Due to the large number of members and communities, the short period of time I had to spend in the field, and the violence within the region, I was directed by the Operational Coordinator to the municipality of Chenalhó, as an acceptable and valid sample for the interviewing process and visits. Chenalhó represents 76%¹² of the organization's membership. Included in the criteria for the selection of this municipality was the producers' willingness to participate and the relatively easy access to the community, as well as the possibility of using Spanish as

¹² Data adapted from the information provided by *Unión Majomut*.

the principal means to communicate with most of the participants (a limited group of the producer organization members speak Spanish, or understand it).

In this sense, a snowball sampling process was chosen because of the particularities of the region and the lack of individuals able to communicate in Spanish; therefore, it was necessary to ask interviewees to refer me to other people who were able to communicate in Spanish and then follow up with these new people. It is worth pointing out that all the individuals fit the requirements for the purposes of this research project (all of them were small-scale coffee producers), whose main criteria for selection was the ability to communicate in Spanish. As for the interviewees that were not small-scale coffee producers a similar logic was used to select them; this logic was that of asking for references from experts in the coffee sector or indigenous/rural studies.

1.2.2 Research techniques for data collection in the case study approach.

Sáez (2008) enlists, as fieldwork tools, the following research techniques: questionnaires, a research journal, interviews, direct observation, focus groups, personal documents from the unit of analysis (if access is granted), pictures, public documents and official records (pp. 258-271). Along similar lines, Taylor & Bogdan (1996) suggest the use of pictures, films, diagrams, research journals and participant-observation for data collection. They also suggest *discovering methods*, in which the innovation and creativity of the researcher is expressed. These elements, creativity and innovation, make possible the insertion of new methods and techniques for data collection, within the qualitative research approach (pp. 133-151).

Regarding my fieldwork, another element that can be associated with creativity and innovation is the *casualty of circumstances*, an element that promotes the insertion of new techniques for data collection within the qualitative research. Besides the use of interviews, direct observation, picture collection and a research journal, I had the opportunity to attend workshops (where the target audience was small-scale coffee producers), general assemblies and meetings. I even fulfilled a request by the organization to give a workshop to the women's group¹³. Not only did this interaction facilitate and enrich the data collecting process in the field, it created an opportunity to foster a positive alliance with these stakeholders. Therefore, all of these *circumstances* were part of the “new techniques” used for the data collection of this research.

1.2.2.1 Direct observation.

A case study ideally takes place in the natural setting of the *case*. Assuming that the phenomena of interest, as Yin (2009) argues, are not purely historical, some relevant behaviours or environmental conditions will be available for direct observation (p.109). This technique requires the engagement in relevant activities so as to obtain significant results.

This technique was applied during the duration of the fieldwork, namely: within the offices of the producer organization, *Unión Majomut*; with visits to communities of coffee producers and to coffee plantations; during the time to get to the communities and the periods of time spent there; in meetings, side-walk activities and other interactions

¹³ The workshop took place on January 22, 2016, by request of Mr. Cota. The topic addressed in this workshop was the difference between the *food security approach* and *food sovereignty approach* and the importance of the correct use of food within the communities. The workshop was in Spanish; however, I had a translator for those women who did not speak and/or understand Spanish. This was an invaluable and insightful experience for the development of this case study.

such as interviews. On some occasions the observations were so valuable that I took photographs at the case study site, for further analysis.

1.2.2.2 Interviews.

Yin (2009) states that one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview. The interviews that I carried out were guided conversations rather than structured and rigid queries, in accordance with Yin's advice (p. 196). I applied a *focused interview* type where key informants were interviewed for a short period of time—an hour for example. The interviews were open-ended assuming a conversational manner, but following a certain set of questions that were elaborated beforehand.

This technique was used to provide insight into what is currently happening in the community of Chenalhó and at the various levels within the coffee sector, as well as to provide an intimate view of the producer organization. Interviews were cross-referenced with other sources of evidence such as news articles, journal articles, other published works, and the observations performed in order to further highlight and confirm their contribution.

In all, 16 people were interviewed from January 18 to February 7, 2016, in the Highlands of Chiapas, in the communities of Chenalhó and San Cristóbal de las Casas. The communities of San Juan Chamula and Polhó were also visited but no interviews were conducted. Of those interviewed, 14 were male and 2 were female, while one interviewee wished to remain anonymous and unidentified. In any case, the real names of all interviewees were changed for pseudonyms so as to protect their identities. Ages ranged from early-20s to mid-70s. It is worth noting that age was not considered to be of

particular importance in this study, although it was observed that both members and technical team of the organization were not from a particular age group. It was also observed that those in a leadership role tended to be older, as the members of the organization perceived age as a synonym of experience, although this was not a general feature because there were younger members that also had a leadership position commensurate with their skills and willingness to serve.

It is important to comment on the overwhelming male to female ratio, which is not related to the actual involvement of women in the producer organization, but rather to the fact that either they were not able to communicate in Spanish, or the ones who could speak the language were shy when approached for an interview. However, it is worth mentioning that the participation of women within the producer organization is of great value. Moreover, *Unión Majomut* promotes this participation within the decision-making process and the formation of women groups to address specific concerns of the female population.

The region visited is the host to some of the largest and oldest primary agricultural small-scale producer organizations. This region is also home to the country's major investigations regarding the coffee and agricultural sector, the Zapatista movement, and developmental projects within the national and international sphere. This allowed for access to fellow academics working and analyzing the agricultural sector, coffee sector, producer organizations, participation, and civil society action.

The study involved interviews with small-scale coffee producers— i.e. members of the producer organization *Unión Majomut* –, leaders of the *Unión Majomut*, and the technical team. In addition, I interviewed social scientists, activists, international coffee

buyers, and professors who focus on the coffee sector and on development issues concerning indigenous peasants.

Outside of the small-scale coffee producer organization environment—members and technical team, but directly linked to coffee activity and/or indigenous communities' activities, key informants were selected such as: PhD. María Elena Martínez-Torres, researcher and professor of the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS)* in San Cristóbal, Chiapas; PhD. Peter Rosset, researcher, activist, professor of *El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR)* in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, and Coordinator of the North America Region of La Vía Campesina; and Mr. Nicolas Eberhart, Latin America Coordinator of Ethiquable, France, and founding partner of the *Símbolo del Pequeño Productor (SPP)*.

The three last informants gave valuable information related to the struggle of the indigenous groups towards the modernization of agriculture, they reinforced the literature reviewed regarding the neoliberal transition of Mexico and most importantly of Chiapas, and the foundation of commercial alternatives, such as in the case of Mr. Eberhart and the SPP. The experience of Dr. Rosset in regard to peasants' struggle, and Dr. Martínez-Torres' experience within the coffee sector and the role of the small-scale coffee producer organizations, make their comments extremely valuable.

Each interview took approximately one hour and was conducted in an open-ended format, as described in the beginning of this section. Questions were prepared prior to each interview in order to maintain some structure. The format, however, was flexible to allow one question to lead to another one, yet allowing me to return to the questions on my list. All interviews were recorded in separate files, made specifically for each

informant, except for Dr. Rosset, Dr. Martínez-Torres, and Mr. Eberhart, where the interviews were informal and conversational; notes were taken, with their approval, during the interview.

Most interviews were conducted in an informal, one-on-one style within a private or semi-private setting. Exceptions to this were interviews done with the majority of members of the producer organization, for they were either conducted in the community or on the coffee plantations. Similarly, the interviews conducted with the members and the technical team of *Unión Majomut* had related questions, however, these questions changed patterns when specific issues were to be addressed (see annex A).

1.2.2.3 Research journal.

According to Sáez (2008) a research journal is a set of notes that the researcher takes to make reference to various and specific happenings in the course of their work. The research journal may contain data on interviewing people, the environment observed, and different conditions that the researcher may notice aside from the environment. In the research journal the researcher can express emotions, unforeseen problems, people dynamics, and self-reflections of the researcher, in other words, whatever the researcher deems significant. Furthermore, the most important part of this technique of data collection is the possibility to develop a systematization of ideas.

Since the first stage of this research process, in April 2015, and throughout the fieldwork, January-February 2016, this technique has been used to gather the perceptions derived from direct and participant observation during the activities that took place within these periods. The notes in my research journal contain information about the regions that

were visited, the travel itinerary, the environmental characteristics of the region, the peculiarities of the situations experienced and, in some cases, images that describe the overall landscape being observed (see annex B).

1.2.2.4 Participant-observation.

Yin (2009) defines participant observation as a special mode of observation in which the researcher is not merely a passive observer. Instead, the researcher may assume a variety of roles within the case study, and even participate in the events being studied. Even though participant-observation may provide unusual opportunities for collecting data, it is important to not overlook the problems that this technique may represent because of the direct involvement of the researcher with the participants, such as anxiety, bias and interference or influence over the subject being researched (pp. 111-112).

The use of the interview technique promoted a close interaction with members leaders, and the technical team of the organization and this relationship led to my being invited to the Annual General Assembly, a Delegates Assembly, commercial meetings, to participate in the selection of coffee berries, to help in the packing of coffee, to go with the operational coordinator when showing the area to two potential buyers, and two filmmakers that were recording for a documentary on coffee plantations in the Highlands of Chiapas. Furthermore, I was able to help in the translation of some documents—from English to Spanish, as well as to help in the process of filling and completing the application of the American Visa for one of the members¹⁴.

¹⁴ This application was for the President of the Executive Committee of the organization, and also producer member of the community of Chenalhó. The process was in English, a language which most of them do not speak or write. This Visa was denied in the

In addition, I was able to participate in two workshops: 1) The first workshop was on women's participation and food security issues; I prepared and delivered the workshop on January 22, 2016, to the women's group of the organization. 2) The second workshop focused on organic farming and the practices associated with this way of production. This second workshop took place on January 29, 2016. Overall, the positive impact of participant-observation leads to the discovery of important data to support the arguments of this thesis.

By compiling information through these research methods, this thesis seeks to better explain, in accordance with collective-action theories, why small-scale producer organizations, as part of civil society, form a key component in the improvement of the living conditions of its members.

It is worth mentioning that my research adheres to the guidelines of the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Saint Mary's University in Halifax. Participants were free to decline any proposed interview or question without penalty and allowed to remain anonymous, if desired. As a gift for their participation, the producer organization will receive a copy of the final version of this thesis, or at the very least a condensed version of the document.

Generally speaking, this research followed a deductive path, from theory to practice, and from general to particular. In first place, theoretical issues were studied; then, the structural forces acting on the coffee sector were investigated; and lastly, the

past due to a misunderstanding of some of the questions, yet it was needed to visit some buyers in the U.S., as well as to assist at the Annual Meeting for the Organic Coffee Producers. I received news about the process in March 2016, and the Visa was granted to Mr. Juan López (pseudonym), which makes me feel happy for the organization and mainly for Mr. Juan López. It is worth noting that *Unión Majomut* covered the cost of the process.

experience of *Unión Majomut* was examined. This thesis is organized in the same deductive line; the following section describes its layout in more detail.

1.3 Chapter Outline

This thesis is organized in four main chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. The introduction, chapter 1, includes an explanation of the context of this case study, a description of the methodology, a chapter outline, and a section on the limitations of the research project.

Chapter 2 is a literature review that frames the analysis of the main theoretical lenses of this research, which includes civil society participation, collective action, and *comunalidad*, a community-ethos. All of these concepts are explored in relation to the processes of neoliberal globalization, with special emphasis on small-scale producer organizations. As well, this chapter reviews theories concerning civil society and collective action, to further support the analysis of the dynamics existing within small-scale producer organizations. Based on these theories, this chapter seeks to explain the importance of producer organizations in supporting activities that promote development of indigenous communities participating in small-scale coffee production. The topic of producer organizations, specifically small-scale producer organizations, will be further examined through connections with organic farming and fair trade in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 explores the practices of organic farming and fair trade. The objective is to present the general features of each system so as to contextualize their relationship with small-scale producer organizations. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section addresses aspects related to organic farming. Section two deals with fair

trade. Finally, the concluding section scrutinises the connection between organic farming, fair trade and small-scale producer organizations. It also comments on how these connections provide opportunities for small-scale producers to reach their productive, social, and economic objectives, which can be translated into better living conditions.

Chapter 4 examines the regional context of the small-scale producers organization *Unión Majomut*. It begins with a description of the geographical, social, economic and cultural characteristics of the region of the Highlands, Chiapas, going from general characteristics to the specifics of the community of Chenalhó, where fieldwork was carried out. Then, this chapter explains the historical background of the coffee sector by exploring the economic, political and social changes in Mexico. These changes, as we will see, took place as part of a broader neoliberal transition that shaped the pathway of small-scale coffee producer organizations, like *Unión Majomut*.

Chapter 5 examines the experience of *Unión Majomut*, in the Highlands of Chiapas. The main objective is to present the results of my field research and to analyze the extent to which *Unión Majomut* encourages the practice of organic farming and facilitates market access through fair trade for its members. This chapter examines the case of *Unión Majomut* and tries to answer one of the research questions, that is, whether the Union's role has been key to improving the quality of life for its members and developing their communities. It first outlines the organization's characteristics, its background, its decision-making process and the actors that constitute it, as well as the organization's internal functioning. The last part of this chapter analyzes the Union's efforts to provide economic and social benefits for its members. The analysis in this chapter is carried out using the theoretical lenses discussed in Chapter 2.

The final chapter of this thesis is the conclusion. The findings of this thesis generally support the thesis statement; they suggest that *Unión Majomut* plays a central role in encouraging the practice of organic farming and facilitating market access within the context of fair trade, where principles of collectivity, cooperativism, solidarity and unity are applied. They also suggest that the economic and social benefits that *Unión Majomut* provides to its members in Chenalhó sometimes are not enough to enhance their quality of life and improve the overall development of their communities.

1.4 Limitations of the Research

The main limitation of my research project stems from a combination of two factors. First, the short period of time to conduct fieldwork and the violence within the region prevented more in-depth interviews, which in turn has resulted in gaps of information that I tried to fill through documentary research. The second limitation was language: communication between the interviewer and the interviewees was restricted because only a few of the participants speak Spanish. Therefore, in order to make the most of the time I spent in the field, it was necessary to choose participants who speak Spanish or to employ a translator from Tzeltal to Spanish and vice versa. Since my time in the field was limited, it was difficult to triangulate sources of information in order to validate what interviewees told me; I had to take what was said at face value.

My findings suggest that, in the coffee sector, small-scale producer organizations have provided a viable alternative to overcome some of the negative effects of the globalization process. These negative effects have impacted the economic, social and cultural well-being of small-scale producers and posed challenges for the local

development of their communities. However, it is within the process of globalization that small-scale producers have created their organizations, and by taking advantage of this platform that has no geographical borders, small-scale producer organizations have been able to partnership with other civil society organizations and reach results that in isolation would have been impossible to do. Although definitive conclusions are yet to be drawn, there is a strong case to suggest that the participation of individuals in civil society organizations and the interaction of these organizations beyond geographical borders can be an effective means to overcome challenges and, through collective action, to seek the best way to meet their common needs.

Chapter 2

The Peasant's Struggle to Survive: Coffee Production and Trade in Times of 'Globalization'

“The myth of ‘free choice’ begins with ‘free market’ and ‘free trade’. When five transnational corporations control the seed market, it is not a free market, it is a cartel.”

Vandana Shiva

This chapter is a literature review that frames the analysis of the main theoretical lenses this research aims to highlight, which include the following: 1) civil society participation through producer organizations (cooperatives); 2) collective action; and 3) *comunalidad*, which is an ethnic community-ethos that lends itself to local development. These concepts are broached by numerous scholars, such as Melucci, Bartholomew and Meyer (1992), Baker (1998), and Martínez-Torres (2006), who see them as alternatives for survival and to face developmental problems that arise in a number of small communities in countries of the global South.

This chapter is divided into three sections, with special emphasis on small-scale producer organizations. Theories of civil society and collective action, subsections 1 and 3, are used to support the analysis of the dynamics existing within small-scale producer organizations. Based on these theories, section 2 and the concluding part of this chapter seek to explain the importance of small-scale producer organizations in supporting activities that promote development in indigenous communities participating in small-scale coffee production.

It is worth noting that the activity of small-scale producer organizations will be further examined through connections with organic farming and fair trade in chapter 3.

2.1 Neoliberalism, Globalization, Civil Society and Collective Action: The Analysis for Producer Organizations

Since the 1970s, the capitalist world economy has been in a process of deep change, commonly called *globalization* (Bernstein, 2010, p. 111). *Globalization*, a term coined in obscurity in France, then coming into American literature in 1960s, is now a commonly used term, lacking a precise definition. However, globalization reflects a widespread perception that the world is being shaped as a shared social space by economic and technological forces, and, more importantly to the discussion of this research, is the fact that developments in one part of the world can have profound repercussions in the life of individuals or communities in another (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999, p. 1-2). Therefore, the importance of globalization, and its origins and effects, are still controversial. And, in a broader sense, the term *globalization* refers to transformations and restructuring of *capital*¹⁵ on a global scale.

Kuri (2003) and Teeple (2000) agree that the origins and transformations of this process were caused by global economic changes during the postwar period, when import-substituting industrialization policies were pursued in Mexico and elsewhere, along with the construction of an universal welfare state for workers with formal-sector jobs and their families. When economic growth began to stagnate in the late 1960s and early 1970s, all of this was put into question, and then jettisoned in the 1980s in the

¹⁵ Capital is an accumulation of money and does not make an appearance in history until the circulation of commodities gave rise to money relation. See <https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/c/a.htm>

context of the debt crisis. The neoliberal changes that were introduced from then onward include a reduction of state intervention in the economy and the emergence of the market as moderator of the economic activities between countries. Similarly, Bernstein (2010) argues that the 1970s were an unquestionable mark of the subsequent structural changes in the world's economy. The expression, *neoliberal globalization*, suggests that current changes and dynamics are not only the 'automatic' effect of capitalist's cyclical nature and contradictions, but also represent a particular ideological and political program (neoliberalism) in order to solve the problems of capital (Harvey, 2005, Chapter 2).

As an ideology and political program, neoliberalism is the expression of the interests of a transnational capitalist class, revolving around the principles of a market-led development strategy: the free flow of capital across national boundaries (free markets), private sector and foreign ownership of productive resources and infrastructure (privatization), and the need to 'free' capital from the constraints of the developmentalist and universal-welfare State, by giving it greater legal advantages to gain access to land and natural resources and to negotiate with organized labour. This strategy rests on classical and neo-classical economic theory as formulated by Adam Smith, and David Ricardo, and taken up in the 1980s by Milton Friedman and others who argued for neoliberal reforms. In this theory, the self-interested business initiatives of 'the butcher, the baker and the brewer' bring benefits to all, such that the 'magic hand of the market' leads to 'the wealth of nations' (Adam Smith). Countries and regions that specialize in the products with which they have a comparative advantage reap greater economic reward (David Ricardo). The main premise of neoclassical economics is that human

behaviour can be modeled and predicted by homo economicus, who makes decisions based on rational self-interested cost-benefit analysis.

Tetreault (2013, p. 90) explains how this theory was brought to bear on development thinking in the lead up to neoliberal reforms in the 1970s and 1980s:

Milton Friedman and his colleagues at the Chicago School had been building an arsenal of criticisms of State-led development and protectionism, pointing towards inefficiencies, price distortions and rent seeking. The solution, according to these ideologues, was a return to laissez-faire economics. By rolling back the State and freeing the forces of the market, the economy would grow in leaps and bounds, creating wealth and prosperity for all, including the poor, who would not only benefit from job creation, but also no longer be seduced by the negative work incentives created by the Welfare State.

Thus, the neoliberal program focuses on promoting the free movement of capital and on reforming the state accordingly; nevertheless, this action is extremely selective in practice (Bernstein, 2010, p. 113). Firstly, neoliberal globalization translates into the reduction, or even the abolishment, of the gains of the working classes that were regulated by the state. Secondly, global capital markets¹⁶ diminish the possibility of the state applying macroeconomic policies within an effective autonomy (national policies), whence the popular phrase “to be competitive” within the global market. And finally, in terms of economic development, neoliberalism includes the structural adjustment

¹⁶ These global markets of capital have no market regulation restrictions, allowing for large sums of money to be moved at unprecedented speed, promoted by an ambition of short-term profit. See Bernstein, H. (2010). *The class dynamics of agrarian change*. Halifax, CA: Fernwood Publishing.

programs, economic liberalization of the markets, privatization and the agenda of the *state's reform* imposed on countries of the global South (Bernstein, 2010; Harvey, 2005).

Neoliberal policies have produced political, cultural, and environmental changes in countries drawn into the global dynamic¹⁷ of capital accumulation (Keohane & Nye Jr., 2000). Social organization within the productive sectors of each country involved in the new global dynamic was modified, as well as international relationships between them. These modifications took place so as to achieve the goal of *freeing* capital from the constraints of the developmentalist state. Nonetheless, these changes occurred within an extensive regulatory framework, which allows for an increased flow of goods, services and financial capital between nations (Bernstein, 2010, p. 117).

The adjustments that globalization demand in a country's internal organization to achieve its economic objectives have produced negative effects on income distribution, quality of life, social security, human rights, and the practice of democracy (Frankel, 2000). In a similar line, the effects on income distribution and quality of life are discouraging, and these demonstrate disarticulations in the process of globalization, especially for developing countries. Paradoxically, in areas such as human rights and the practice of democracy, there 'seem' to be 'good' developments in the process of neoliberal globalization, insofar as it promotes more awareness of such negative aspects.

Stiglitz (2002) argues that the negative effects of globalization, specifically income distribution, have a direct impact on individual quality of life. Stiglitz also suggests that the main mistake has been the way in which policies have been

¹⁷ Changes in the mechanisms of capital accumulation, formation of trading blocs, international division of labour, adoption of a modern trans-territorial, environment concern due to the constant carbon emissions from the industry, the emergence of governance as a form of political organization, among others.

implemented and the flaws in their design. Additionally, Stiglitz states that the implementation of incomplete reforms left aside fiscal considerations, education, and employment. He claims that income inequality has not only prevented the achievement of price stability, but has also impeded economic growth and social development. Omissions identified by Stiglitz (2002) are more evident within the countries of the Global South. Examples of these are manifested in the productive sectors of developing countries, where there are individuals experiencing labour exclusion due to a ‘lack of capabilities’ to meet the demands of employers. Consequently, this situation accentuates the polarization of income and it worsens social conditions.

Moreover, the political, economic and social public policies of the countries of the Global South, as Stiglitz (2002) points out, need an accurate design to respond to the needs and requirements of the new global dynamic. These countries, thus, lacked an adequate platform to adopt the measures of the Washington Consensus¹⁸. They were not the best to promote their development, particularly in its social part.

In the same line of argumentation, Altvater (2007) states that the gap between rich and poor countries widened and inequality became the ‘name of the game.’ The increase of countries’ wealth is remarkable, but it failed to reduce the inequalities between people and regions in a market-oriented world; on the contrary, inequalities increased (Altvater, 2007, p. 43). Indeed, neoliberal measures indicate some positive effects on the states, but the real winners of the neoliberal project are transnational corporations, whose growth

¹⁸ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the Washington Consensus refers to the set of 10 policies that the US government and international financial institutions based in the US capital believed were necessary elements of “first stage policy reform” that all countries should adopt to increase the rate of economic growth. At its heart is an emphasis on the importance of macroeconomic stability and integration into the international economy—in other words a neo-liberal view of globalization. See <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story094/en/>

has widened the inequality between the private sector and the most vulnerable sectors of the economy, including smallholder farmers.

The strength and role of the market is favoured by neoliberal policies, implemented since the early 1970s. In another reading, it should be considered that the process of globalization is by no means homogeneous, which brings advantages and disadvantages to different areas and regions. The situation is worse in countries like Mexico, where government authorities claim that 'land reform' was the product of a 'peasant' revolution that did justice to the rural masses.

In contrast to this view, Otero (2004) argues that land redistribution was the path chosen to develop and to consolidate capitalism, and, furthermore, to integrate the neoliberal proposal in Mexico. The end result of the Mexican agrarian reform is the impoverishment of rural people, which has led to the crisis of both peasants and capitalist agriculture (Otero, 2004, p. 59).

The neoliberal project promoted deregulation, privatization and free trade, in an effort to improve indicators of macroeconomic stability, such as inflation and currency exchange rates. Nevertheless, these policies have made unemployment, underemployment and labour conditions a constant source of concern, while apologists claim that unemployment rate increases are natural and necessary for the effective functioning of any market economy (Anderson, 2000, p. 25).

Harvey (2007) argues that the creation of this neoliberal system entailed destruction in developing countries, not only of institutional frameworks and some power holders, but also because of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, ways of life, and attachments to the land and social thinking (Harvey, 2007, p. 23).

In the 1980s, social spending by governments decreased and unemployment increased. In the 1990s, another deep recession occurred, which included an increase of private company debt. Likewise, economic indicators became less favourable and unemployment increased. Still, the neoliberal policies continued, with governments led by members of the right, committed to the principles of neoliberalism (Anderson, 2003).

Several factors defined the acceleration of the liberalization process, such as increases in international negotiations to liberalize trade and services: these negotiations materialized with the creation of the *World Trade Organization* (WTO) in 1994; the conclusion of the negotiations of the ‘Uruguay Round’ under the *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade* (GATT); and the collapse of the communist system in Eastern Europe and their subsequent insertion in the market economy, as well as the creation of large, regional markets, like the European Union, the *Southern Common Market* (MERCOSUR), and the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) (Doppler, 2006).

Therefore, Latin American countries did not seem to have any other option other than to adopt the neoliberal principles imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As creditor, the IMF forced indebted countries to take out more loans to alleviate their economic crises and monetary problems.

Sen’s book, *Development as Freedom* (1999), represents an original and realistic critique of mainstream conceptions of development, dominated by an emphasis on economic growth (Selwyn, 2011, p. 68). Sen stresses the importance of poor countries pursuing rapid economic growth to *catch-up* to developed countries, enabling them to take their rightful place alongside wealthy countries. By giving primacy to economic

growth and assuming benefits would increase developing country's populations through various *trickle-down*¹⁹ mechanisms, such perspectives often disregard the living conditions of poor people during the attempted *catch-up* (Selwyn, 2011, p. 69).

Sen argues that freedom is both the goal and means of development (Sen, 1999, p. 3), and further claims that through states enhancing poor people's capabilities, the poor can, in turn, participate more fully in the process of development. For example, a state could enhance capabilities by providing higher levels of education and access to public services aimed at satisfying basic needs.

By analyzing Sen's argument from a dependency point of view, it is clear that the impersonal mechanisms of the market maintain the dependence of some countries on others, without the need to use state power overtly (Brewer, 1990, p.197). Moreover, the incorporation into the world capitalist system, leads to positive development in some areas, but to the 'development of underdevelopment' elsewhere (Brewer, 1990, p. 164).

Consequently, ruling classes are strengthened or created, replacing the idea of "choice" and "freedom" because, once more, decisions are made by and in favour of a few. Moreover, Kapoor argues that Latin America may have been *undeveloped* in pre-colonial times, but it became *underdeveloped* once capitalism arrived on its shores (Kapoor, 2002, p. 648). Barton also argues that Latin America's underdevelopment arises from external development, and continues to feed it, a system made impotent by its function of international "servitude" (Galeano as cited in Barton, 1996, p.147).

¹⁹Trickle-down economics, or "trickle-down theory," argues for income and capital gains tax breaks or other financial benefits to large businesses, investors and entrepreneurs in order to stimulate economic growth. The argument hinges on two assumptions: all members of society benefit from growth; and growth is most likely to come from those with the resources and skills to increase productive output (Investopedia, 2016).

Latin American and African²⁰ states that followed the precepts of the Washington Consensus verbatim have had a discouraging experience. These precepts include: the avoidance of large fiscal deficits relative to GDP, redirection of public expenditure, tax reform, interest rates that are market determined, competitive exchange rates, trade liberalization, liberalization of foreign direct investment (FDI), privatization of state enterprises, deregulation, abolition of regulations that impede the entry of new firms or restrict competition (except in the areas of safety, environment and finance); and legal security for property rights (Moreno-Brid, Pérez Caldentey, & Ruiz Nápoles, 2004).. Despite of the fact that these measures have proven to be very controversial, they were implemented through conditionality under International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) guidance. They are now being replaced by a post-Washington consensus (WHO, 2016), which seeks to “bring the state back in” to promote social policies and anti-poverty programs aimed at building “human capital” among the poor and excluded segments of the population.

Likewise, international organizations, like the United Nations (UN), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Health Organization (WHO), have incorporated into their agendas special attention to social demands relating to their particular scope; for example, democratic governance, women’s empowerment, food security, modernization of agriculture, forestry and fishing activities, strengthened health systems and health security promotion.

The application of these new measures adopted by international organizations sought to provide viable alternatives to counter the tendency of globalized capital to

²⁰ See chapter 2 about the “promise of development”, with reference to Stiglitz (2006).

exclude large segments of the population (working in the informal sector) and to degrade labour conditions in favour of greater ‘flexibility’. Furthermore, the inclusion of most of these measures within the objectives of international organizations has led to social conflicts. Therefore, different dynamics are generated and alternatives arise, some opposed to the system, other’s seeking to reform it. Given all this, alternatives are created by agents who see that the neoliberal market economy militates against an equitable form of development.

The experience of the small-scale producers organization, *Unión Majomut*, is not an alternative to neoliberalism insofar as it seeks to adapt to a situation whereby: state agencies have been dismantled that formerly controlled and exploited small-scale coffee producers, and free-trade agreements have allowed small-scale producers to organize so as to have access to alternative niche markets. However, it does serve as an example of an alternative developmental tool to the conventional large-scale production model of *industrial* coffee production, which hires peons to work the fields, pays them a pittance, and concentrates profits in the hands of large-scale private landowners, and transnational corporations that control commodity chains and retailing.

2.1.1 Civil society.

Bunge (2009) considers the democratic participation of society in its different roles as one of the viable alternatives to counter the negative effects of globalization. According to him, the joining of forces, resources, and production capacities and compromises are instruments to address and negotiate measures imposed by economic powers. Moreover, he argues that these instruments allow for the creation of a

comprehensive democracy that results in the care of the real needs of people.

Using this argument as a point of departure, this section presents the concept of civil society as the ‘third sector,’ distinct from public and private spheres. By introducing theories of civil society and social capital, this next section attempts to provide the building blocks for the framework of this thesis, and, by addressing the theory of collective action; it seeks to explain the reality within the region being studied.

Bunge’s (2009) argument shows the importance of participative democracy as a way of integration for individuals. Individuals coexist within a context of a society, which is shaped by financial, productive, and technological relationships. Conversely there are some scholars—Chatterjee (2004) and Sen (2005), for example—who argue against civil society as a legitimate concept for analyzing democratic participation, as it is biased towards the Global North. On one hand, Chatterjee (2004) argues that in most parts of the world “civil society is demographically limited.” Nonetheless Chatterjee also argues that the rise of mass politics globally in the twentieth century led to the development of new techniques of governing population groups—particularly in the postcolonial world. Many of these operate outside of traditionally, well-defined arenas of civil society and the formal, legal institutions of the state.

In this regard, Baker (1998) argues that the idea of civil society is now central to most explanations of democracy. Baker continues by saying that an autonomous civil society is a necessary defence against undemocratic state power, whether potential or actual (Baker, 1998, p. 81). Hence, his thesis sees the importance of civil society as a tool for the legitimate participation of individuals integrated within it.

In recent decades, an accelerated process of political interdependence and economic globalization exists, resulting in a kind of global community where cultural, social, political, and economic-financial aspects are interlaced. Consequently, the time for integration, along with changes overall, seems to have come, and these aspects are promoting the rise of a ‘transnational civil society,’ with specific demands and different strategies of demonstration and public participation (Serbin, 1997, p. 44-48).

Therefore, *transnational civil society* is understood as the new component of globalization, also called *the third sector*, whose emergence reflects the integration process that society experiences and which manifests itself through networks of activities organized by groups of individuals or by social movements that transcend boundaries and the traditional dynamic of the domestic civil society. Economic globalization and political interdependence derives a global community where cultural, social, political, economic, and financial aspects are plotted, and the management of this community is through demonstration strategies and public participation (Serbin, 2007).

The demonstration and public participation of global civil society includes specific and differentiated demands that emerged, according to Serbin (2007), through gaps that nation-states left in their domestic economy. In this regard, as these gaps are corrected, nation-states are expected to perform new roles governed by new regulations, internal reorganization, and political regimes that, in most cases, are challenged by social actors and networks of a transnational character. These social actors and networks have acquired an important role in global dynamics for their potential to promote safety, fairness, and democracy (Baker, 1998, p. 82-84).

In a global context, *civil society* is considered to be comprised of collective actors, which in turn are formed by individuals with similar interests and a common identity. Through massive mobilizations and other forms of protest and demand, these collective actors put pressure on governments and international development organizations. Along these lines, civil-society organizations must be distinguished from other collective actors: political parties, volunteer organizations and pressure groups (Serbin, 1997, p. 5-7).

Thus, the third sector of the economy—also known as the *solidarity sector* or the *non-profit sector*—includes organizations concerned with improving the quality of life of marginalized sectors of the population, building democracy, as well as organizations involved in the economic management of resources. These organizations promote projects and initiatives that acquire forms of self-employment, micro-enterprises, and even informal activity to serve real social needs that conventional private companies or the public sector do not address (Baker, 1998). Likewise, from a reformist perspective, one can consider that the function of a global civil society is to focus on gaps in the market and those state actions that leave behind excluded and marginalized segments of the population.

Ideally, the relationship between civil society, the market and the state is complementary, in such a way as to integrate each one's capacity of mobilizing, monitoring, and decision-making. However, ambivalent situations arise which lead some actors to identify the needs of a population, to help obtain government support, and to eliminate tensions, but at the same time these or other actors can serve to motivate political conflicts and to focus on private interests, thereby ignoring the communities that collective actors in the third sector seek to represent (Gudynas, 2005).

Edwards (2009) states that civil society has three main roles: economic, political, and social. In this scheme, the economic role focuses on the gaps that are either unaddressed or never intended to be addressed by the state and the market. These gaps are more notorious in a population's needs regarding the support and provision of basic services. Therefore, civil society organizations playing this role take action with special emphasis on the importance of social values, networks and institutions, confidence, and cooperation—all of these intended to “humanize capitalism” by combining the efficiency of the market and the values of cooperation.

The political role seeks to counter corporate and state power, and to promote aspects of good governance, such as transparency and accountability. Finally, the social role, according to Edwards (2009), sees civil society as a source of solidarity, cultural life, and intellectual innovation. With these actions, civil society demonstrates the capacity to unite people in search of reaching collective objectives. However, these objectives cannot be reached without the promotion of social norms that provide stability and order to the relationships between the groups that comprise civil society. As Putnam (1993) states, even non-political organizations in civil society are vital for democracy, due to the promotion of social relations, called *social capital*. For the purpose of this research project, Civil Society will be seen as individuals and organizations in a society, which are independent of the government and seek for means to fill the gaps left by State inefficiencies.

2.1.2 Social capital.

The concept of social capital has been studied from different perspectives. Some of the most important points of reference include Jacobs (as cited in Meadowcroft & Pennington, 2007), Bourdieu (1992), Coleman (1988), Durston (2003), and Putnam (1995). Meadowcroft and Pennington (2007) consider Jacobs to be the concept's creator. Bourdieu (1992) defines *social capital* as

[t]he sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrues to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119)

This definition is similar to definitions we will see below. While some see social capital as essentially encouraging the formation of networks of social connections, Bourdieu employs the concept with an eye on social inequality. His concept of social capital reflects the very worst side: "It's not what you know, it's whom you know" (Gaunlett, 2011). Nonetheless, Coleman (1988) also argues that,

[Social capital] is an important resource for individuals and may affect greatly their ability to act and their perceived quality of life. They have the capability of bringing it into being. Yet, because persons other than the actor largely experience the benefits of actions that bring social capital into being, it is often not in his interest to bring it into being. (Coleman, 1988, p. 118)

In this sense, Coleman's contribution offers a broader view of social capital. Contrasting Bourdieu's pessimistic description of the elite's self-reproduction, Coleman emphasizes

the utility of social capital as part of a potential solution for marginalized individuals, and its importance in parenting, for people of any social class.

Finally, Durston (2003) considers social capital to be the content of certain social relationships that combine attitudes of trust with behaviours of reciprocity and cooperation, which provide greater benefits to those who possess it, in comparison to what could be achieved without it (Durston, 2003, pp. 146-147). Therefore, both privileged and non-privileged groups can possess social capital. Social capital can be inclusive and can be used to limit or weaken the social capital of other groups. Thus, it can be understood that social capital implies a common bond that holds the participation of individuals to a group.

Additionally, Putnam (1995) highlights two types of social capital: *bonding* and *bridging*. A mixture of both is beneficial, due to the results obtained from the actions of individuals. Thus, it can be considered that social capital is also a tool to promote development, as it enables individuals to establish relationships that go beyond their individual limits, and it makes it possible for individuals to come to new forms of cooperation and give them greater support for their activities, whether economic, social, cultural, or environmental.

Following the same line of argument, social capital is formed in any circle of activity (as stated above): economic, social, cultural, or environmental. Therefore, social capital has the potential to serve as an incentive for development. In this sense, development is conceived as an improvement in the material and living conditions of individuals and families.

In order to see how social capital facilitates access to resources to improve an

individual's quality of life, it is necessary to know the ways in which social capital can act. Bebbington (2005)²¹ breaks down social capital into three categories:

1. Social capital of union: considers the closest links between the actions of individuals. This usually refers to family bounds, close relationships, and, in certain way, links within a community.

2. Bridging social capital: provides weaker links between groups who are in different geographic locations. These links are usually seen as groups forming associations of neighborhoods, peasant communities, single mothers, and the like. These relationships are less reliable in terms of the commitments established, but they are effective in applying pressure and in achieving changes in the policies or the rules that determine the distribution of resources.

3. Laddering social capital: refers to linkages between people with different levels of socio-political identity and power. These linkages exist, for example, between individuals/communities and public agencies or non-governmental organizations. The main objective is to facilitate access to political spheres, to resources managed by these agencies, and also to obtain support in case of crisis or threat.

According to Bebbington, the existence of these three forms of social capital should be seen as complementary to one another, because one form is not enough to make progress in overcoming poverty. Moreover, the combination and transformation of different types of assets—to which each type of social capital gives access—can make for new situations involving the improvement of an individual's or a community's quality of life.

²¹ Bebbington makes reference to Woolcock and Narayan (2000).

Therefore, one can understand social capital as an attribute created by interrelationships between individuals who belong to a group, which is reinforced by the identity and intrinsic characteristics of the group. These identity characteristics shared by individuals who compose the group, and the struggle to conserve shared collective identity, are what leads to social organization.

Likewise, Martínez-Torres (2006) argues that the construction or accumulation of social capital can combine with strategies based on investments in other forms of capital, such as natural capital,²² to produce positive outcomes in terms of broad-based, sustainable, and consistent development, and also to offer progressive synergisms between them (p. 70). Therefore, if broad-based development is taken to mean improvements in the quality of life for the poorest sectors of society (indigenous people and poor, small-scale farmers in Chiapas, Mexico's poorest state, for example), then real and consistent development means to do so in all aspects and in ways that conserve not only their integrity as an individual but also in improving productive resources, like soil and biodiversity.

Additionally, Charry (2007) proposes that the characteristics of these groups may be formed by norms, values, relationships, traditions, knowledge, practices, customs, institutions, and organizations and should be seen as an element of cohesion to strengthen actions towards groups in order to maintain or transform the conditions of life of the community. Moreover, social capital inherent in peasant organizations evolves over time,

²² Natural capital is a complex category that performs three distinct environmental functions: provision of resources for production, absorption of wastes from production, and environmental services, e.g., tree-cover that moderates climate or watersheds that provide drinking water (Pearce & Turner, 1990). The concept of natural capital can be attributed to these authors.

meaning that they do not stop moving as history moves through cycles of struggle²³ (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 71). Thus, in this conception of social capital, the relationships and linkages between individuals in a group, give rise to and sustain collective action.

The next part of this section addresses the concept of collective action and how it links to the struggles of vulnerable sectors, such as indigenous communities and small-scale farmers, which are of interest for this research. Not only the importance of collective action is presented, but also its role in changing social systems, and how collective action is achieved through the construction of social capital.

2.1.3 Collective action.

According to Olson (1971), it is often taken for granted that groups of individuals with common interests frequently try to further their common interests. “Groups of individuals with common interests are expected to act on behalf of their common interests much as single individuals are often expected to act on behalf of their personal interests” (Olson, 1971, p. 1). Therefore, two positions are expressed within the interpretation of collective action: individualistic and collectivistic. For the purposes of this research, the elements of the collective position are considered in order to frame the origin and function of collective action in actuality; moreover, the ideas of *Alberto Melucci* are addressed to further explain these concepts.

In *Nomads of the Present* (1989), Melucci explains that collective action occurs as a reaction to a crisis or social system disorder caused by structural contradictions, as well as motivations of individuals in their quest to achieve a specific goal. For the emergence

²³ For further information, see chapter 5 in Martínez-Torres (2006).

of collective action, it is necessary to have common objectives and characteristics that enable actors to transcend the results of their actions. Moreover, Melucci argues that social movements appeared as mechanisms of self-production when a fragmentation in the identity of the groups have occurred (Melucci, 1989, p. 15-16).

Bartholomew and Mayer (1992) also posit that while traditional collective behaviour approaches emphasize collective action as a response to disorder, and while Marxist approaches emphasize the objective conditions of collective action (p. 1), Melucci argues that both positions share a problematic epistemological assumption: that the collective phenomenon is treated as a “unified empirical datum” (Melucci, 1989, p. 18), such that collective action is reified into a “given,” the production of which does not merit specific investigation. The outcome is an assessment of social movements marching through history “toward a destiny of liberation, or as crowds in the grip of suggestion” (Melucci, 1989, p. 19).

In an effort to locate the emergence of collective action in response to a crisis of a social system, Melucci considers that the phase of industrial capitalism best expresses action taken by the working class to meet their labour demands, to defend their political rights, and to build a new industrial system based on class relations. Relating group action to social movements is not unique to this period of industrial development, as a sign of the contradictions of the capitalist system. Therefore, these initial manifestations of collective action have been changing at the same pace as changes within the social system and the emergence of new contradictions, consequently leading to new forms of collective action with new behaviours linked to processes, such as democratization, crisis or state reinforcement; adjustment processes and economic restructuring; decomposition

and social segmentation; as well as the production of new cultural values and identities (Bartholomew & Mayer, 1992; Jiménez, 2007).

In this sense, collective action, as argued above, is a reaction to structural contradictions that the social system presents over time, and, at the same time, builds an alternative for economic, political, social, and cultural projects addressing changes in modern life. Since daily life originates in everyday social life, networks, community, and organizational associative chains, collective action gives a greater understanding of problems that arise in a certain place, and it allows objectivity in the design of strategies meant to fit into the global dynamics of capital accumulation (Jiménez, 2007). It is important to note that within this changing environment, collective action arises from the existence of goals and objectives that are common to a group of people.

Therefore, as Bartholomew and Mayer brilliantly point out about Melucci's contribution, expectations are dependent upon a conceptualization of the role of collective identity (Bartholomew & Mayer, 1992, p. 4). Melucci argues that actors who formulate expectations "are capable of defining themselves and the field of their action. The result of this process of constructing is an action system I call collective identity" (Melucci, 1989, p. 34). Until the limitations and full significance of the 'we'—and the 'them'—is known, expectations cannot be fully established. As a process, the formation of collective identity within collective action involves the construction of a 'we' by developing common cognitive frameworks concerning orientations, entering into relationships through which individuals can recognize themselves as part of a collective (Melucci, 1989, p. 35; Bartholomew & Meyer, 1992, p. 4). According to Melucci, the initiative of an individual and her ability to perceive and assess chances of success in a

given endeavor, motivates the search for others who pursue the same goal and who lack the same or different elements needed to achieve such a goal; therefore, they join together in order to strengthen their collective action through the exchange and complementarity of their own potential, which leads to a reduction of their own limitations and the beginning of collective action.

Similarly, Melucci states that the actions of individuals, when undertaken collectively, should at least consider three elements: goals of their action, meaning of those goals, and the environment within which their actions take place. Although collective action is built by individuals, it is never the simple expression of the intent of these individuals; different aspects are taken in consideration, such as availability of the resources needed, possibilities, and obstacles.

These aspects continuously generate tension in the action itself because the ends, the means, and the environment do not always complement each other. It is in these situations when negotiations take place and leadership appears; therefore, it will be through the bargaining power of leaders that the scope of action is determined.

Melucci also considers that collective action is presented in a plural environment to the extent that it is created by the intervention of several individuals, and, although they express common patterns of behaviour within the same spatial and temporal framework, they also express a behaviour that tends to satisfy individual needs and could be a cause of community tension. So, this plurality implies the existence of both solidarity and conflict among participants of an action, and, in a reactionary sense, the ability to break the group-order while glimpsing the need for change.

It is possible, then, to consider that collective action becomes a necessary weapon

for achieving these goals, which, as an individual, would not be possible to accomplish. Advantages of acting together are given by the coexistence and cohesion that groups reach in time and the links that are created within: these aspects are what give rise to the existence of social capital. Therefore, there exists between social capital and collective action an agreement (the reason for the existence of both categories within a social system) in which civil society is a means to express the importance and strength of both—social capital and collective action—in order to promote the desired adjustments and changes.

Finally, by applying this theoretical perspective to the objectives of this research, we can see producer organizations as agents capable of directing their own arrangements for members to be inserted into the challenges of modernity, and to seek the best alternatives for remaining in this current reality, since its formation is strongly linked with elements of social capital and collective action. As Martínez-Torres states:

One key attribute that organizations of indigenous [vulnerable sectors] often use to promote their local development initiatives and/or larger societal reforms is their ethnic identity [collective identity], which can act as a social glue that strengthens their social capital. (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 76).

Therefore, the concepts presented in this theoretical framework: civil society, social capital, and collective action, within the ongoing small-scale organic coffee production in Chiapas, are interconnected with the case study of this thesis due to the importance that the small-scale coffee producers organization of *Unión Majomut* posits on the principles of association, cooperativism, collectivity and social identity as a way to define the set of ideological and practical foundations of *Unión Majomut*. Therefore, the principles that

founded *Unión Majomut* align with the concepts laid out in this theoretical framework.

In this sense, the connection between the concepts of civil society, social capital and collective action and this case study, is based on the premise that a group of individuals sharing not only a common objective but also a number of limitations is able to overcome these limitations by civil society participation and collective action, thus producing an axis for alternative farming strategies that open a different field of action from the hegemonic model emanating from the capitalist economic rationale (Fuente, 2013, p. 2).

The last part of this section discusses the concept of *comunalidad*—the community-ethos— as being the axis for alternative farming strategies that complements the theoretical framework so far presented by showing the rationale through which the indigenous groups have tried to overcome the capitalist economic *raison d'être*. Specifically, the stress that these indigenous groups place on a high level of community partnership is key to not only resist such economic dynamics but also to overcome its processes with meaningful lessons in building an alternative path for action.

2.1.4 *Comunalidad*: A community-ethos

The financial crisis of 2008 represents one of the many contradictions within the capitalist economy in its neoliberal phase; however, palliatives from the neoliberal perspective still are prescribed for the alleviation of developmental problems in the countries of the global South. It is within this context that some authors like Fuente (2013) state that our generation is at the edge of the second and last crisis of capitalism, while other scholars like Esteva (2012) argue that we are already in this crisis.

Therefore, it is in the middle of this economic environment that a number of explanations have been put forth to understand the levels of flexibility that civil society has to face the disturbing factors of economic and social backwardness. A key element in this matter is the creation of spaces where civil society actors can come up with positive answers to face such disturbances.

In countries like Mexico, where the precepts of the Washington Consensus have been applied with vigor, the disturbing impact is higher. An example of these neoliberal measures is the Foreign Investment Law, which is linked with the growth of the extractive industry in Mexico; the recent reforms regarding the labour sector; and the opening of the state-owned company *Petróleos Mexicanos* (PEMEX). In this context of ‘orthodox neoliberalism’, social resilience (found in the pluricultural societies of the indigenous groups of Mexico) offers a number of meaningful lessons for the construction of alternative responses, which will try to address the roots of the problem.

By the same token Bonfil (1989) underlines the ability that indigenous groups have to reshape their strategies to face external cultural elements. It is worth noting that Bonfil’s argument is clearly linked to what Stavenhagen (2010) describes as *ethnic identity*²⁴. In a similar line, Villoro (2003) considers that a society that posits its social values on individualism neglects the collective ones; therefore, it is important to consider “the danger of the disintegration of community ties based on the common awareness of belonging to the same social identity ... it seems that individual freedom required an absence, the absence of community” (Ibid, p. 24).

²⁴ This concept will be addressed in section 1.2 on this chapter.

Thus, Villoro (2003) and Bonfil (1989) highlight the contributions of indigenous groups in the construction of alternative rationalities to that of the neoliberal economy. In this regard Villoro (2003) states:

The lifestyles of traditional [indigenous] communities cannot be exported to modern society. However, they testify that other social values are possible to overcome the flaws of modern individualism. They reveal the possibility of another way to make sense of our collective lives... They are an example, a warning: Careful—they seem to say—the end of history is not yet here. There are alternatives to [a] selfish and exclusive society (Villoro, 2003, p. 32).

Hence, the central feature that several indigenous groups have for the survival of their identities and self-governed societies is the implementation and constant innovation of community organization (Fuente, 2013, p. 9).

In this sense, Díaz (2004) explains that it is the concept of *comunalidad* that defines the immanence of a community, to the extent that *comunalidad* defines other essential concepts to understand an indigenous reality, which is not to be understood as something against Western civilization, but rather as something different from it. Therefore, in order to understand each of the elements shaping *comunalidad*, it is important to consider some concepts such as: communal, collectivity, complementarity and integrality. These four concepts are ingrained in the community attributes discussed below. Moreover, Díaz (2004) argues that if we are not able to consider the communal and integral sense of anything that we are trying to understand, our knowledge will always be limited.

According to Fuente (2013), the concept of *comunalidad* brings together a set of community attributes, which may not necessarily be homogeneous, but in general terms these attributes show the following characteristics:

- *Comunalicracia*. It is a form of direct democracy that in many indigenous groups is expressed by constant participation in ‘general assemblies’ to inform, make decisions and show results of their activities. Therefore, *comunalicracia* is based on the daily exercise of the communal and civil society assemblies as well as on their monitoring councils²⁵.
- *Community work*, known as *tequio*²⁶, is carried out without payment but it is linked to other kinds of rewards, such as community membership rights, local prestige or pride for accomplishing the commitments stated by the community.
- *Communal land*, which is not only a factor of social cohesion, based on a commonwealth defined by cultural and historical heritage, but is also vital for the preservation of the living space and productive activities. Communal land is the territorial basis for transformation and expression of specific knowledge about the use of natural resources, as well as the physical basis for productive autonomy.
- *Cultural identity* is an element that is shaped by various aspects, including the territorial sustenance, religious beliefs, the ritualization of the past in the present, cosmovision, music and the appreciation of land.

²⁵ As part of the internal organization of *Unión Majomut*, each of these assemblies and councils will be explained in-depth in Chapter 4.

²⁶ Tequio is an important social institution. It is unpaid, obligatory work for collective benefit and, in the absence of government provision, the source of labour for community projects (Mountain Voices, 2016).

- *Cosmovision* brings together and explores all those manifestations regarding the cultural perception that indigenous groups have about nature and social reality.

In this regard, *comunalidad* does not give precedence to individual interests over collective ones; quite the contrary. It is the cultural basis of autonomy, which plays a key role in defining the direction of indigenous groups and their possibility of preventing social exclusion (Villoro, 2003). Therefore, one can find among the main processes and movements that comprise *comunalidad* for Fuente (2013) the following:

- *Political and cultural processes*, from which the relationship between indigenous communities and the government is defined. It is within these processes that relationships of subordination are expressed or, inversely, relationships of resistance and political autonomy.
- *The development of local-level productive forces*, in which technological advances, the level of technological appropriation and productive diversification are expressed. This process is also related to the development of more efficient productive processes and the creation of value added products; for example, the process of producing organic coffee and the ability to export it, by small-scale coffee producing organizations like *Unión Majomut*.
- *Market diversification*. This process is based on the premise that a search for alternative markets is needed to face the disadvantages that the process of globalization brought to indigenous communities. This includes gaining access to fair trade markets, which are based on an economy of solidarity (Cadena as cited in Fuente, 2013).

- *Networking with various civil society groups.* In this process, diverse methodological proposals for alternative valuations gain currency. For example, the proposals used within the field of ecological economics, post-normal science or the multi-criteria social evaluation (Fuente, 2013).
- *Food sovereignty,* which points to greater local control over the way food is produced, traded and consumed. The food sovereignty movement is a global alliance of farmers, producers, consumers and activists (La Vía Campesina, 2007).

By exploring the concept of *comunalidad* one can notice the interconnection that it has with collective action and civil society participation, and this interconnection shapes a strategy to not only resist the individual profit-maximizing rationale of the capitalist economy, but also to create and offer alternative and creative responses to face the process of globalization (see figure 2.1).

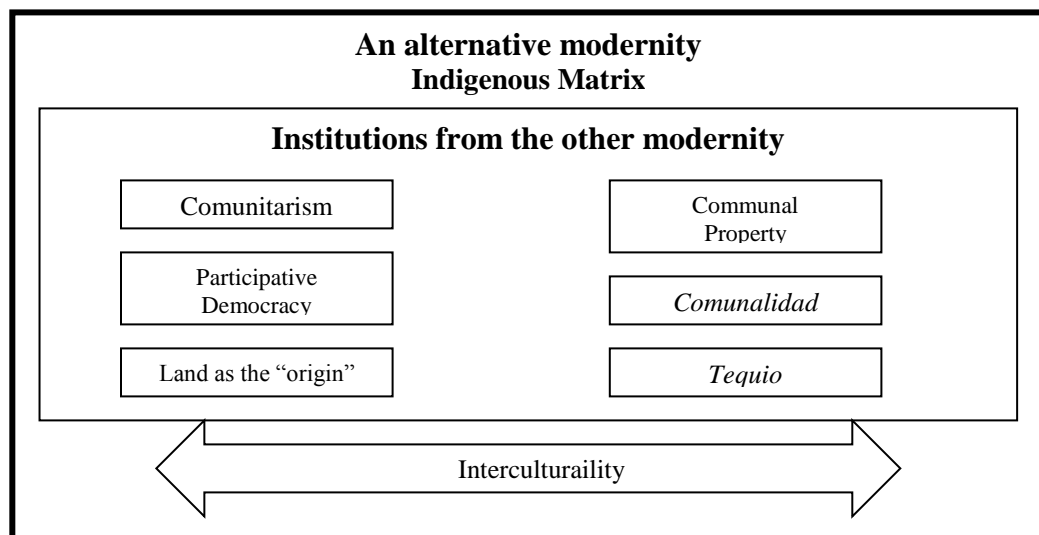


Figure 2.1 Indigenous matrix within the perspective of an alternative modernity. *Note.* Adapted from “La comunalidad como base para la construcción de resiliencia social ante la crisis civilizatoria,” by Fuente, C.M.E. (2013). La comunalidad como base para la construcción de resiliencia social ante la crisis

civilizatoria. Polis, Revista Latinoamericana, 30(), 2-16. Consulted in June 10, 2016 from <http://polis.revues.org/8495>

The survival strategies that indigenous groups have constructed in order to resist the disintegrating effects that stem from the process of globalization, revolve around the concept of *comunalidad*. In this regard, Klein (2007) points out that some of the characteristics that make these strategies more effective are: 1) The existence of a profound historical memory; 2) a permanent suspicion towards the actions of the government, which prevents the state from assuming a paternalist role; and, 3) the existence of a strong ideology of how the world should be.

Various civil society groups (including small-scale producer organizations like *Unión Majomut*) are reshaping their strategies not only to resist, but also to build alternatives to enhance their living conditions. In this context, *comunalidad* reflects an alternative value system and institutional arrangement for practicing direct democracy and for giving precedence to the common good of indigenous communities over the private interests of individuals and/or those of capital. It is a key factor in the task of reshaping and building positive and creative alternatives to face the process of globalization.

Part of the strategies that the indigenous communities are implementing to face external cultural challenges is to strengthen their ethnic identity. Therefore, the next section of this thesis presents the relation that exists between small-scale indigenous producer organizations and their ethnic identity.

2.2 Producer Organizations and their Ethnic Identity

After the neoliberal assault of the 1980s, global markets demanded transformations in production, marketing, and organizational processes. These transformations have occurred differentially across space and time, in accordance with political struggles. The agricultural sector is one of the most affected sectors within this new global era. The farmers that have been most adversely affected are those in the Global South, because of the way in which agricultural policies have been adjusted to the new requirements of the current economic environment.

According to Bernstein (2010), a country's successful participation in the global market implies trade liberalization, the 'modernization' of the national productive apparatus (i.e. a euphemism to denote privatization), greater flexibility of labour markets, and an overall reduction of a state's role in 'intervening' in the economy. In other words, economic growth and its social impacts are left to the market. Moreover, as Martínez-Torres observes, market forces have been given a central role in development, and the state's role has been modified to minimize its market intervention (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 62).

Equally, the market imposes cost-cutting and profit-maximizing competitiveness by determining the costs of raw materials, productive infrastructure availability, and increased economies of scale, as well as by defining new technological standards, product differentiation, strategic alliances, and marketing channels. Thus, in the agricultural sector and elsewhere, producers are forced by the market imperative to become more competitive,²⁷ putting a squeeze on small-scale producers that seek to implement

²⁷ Competitiveness would refer to the ability of farmers to acquire higher profits in the process of marketing

ecologically and socially sustainable practices (Bernstein, 2010, p. 115-118).

Hence, the agricultural sector in developing countries faces a difficult task, since most producers have only small areas of land, which does not allow them to make the investments necessary to undertake competitive projects. Resources are limited. Capital has little interest in stimulating the reproduction of the small-scale farming and there is resistance by the small-scale farmers to dispossession and proletarianization (Bernstein, 2010, p. 125).

These shortcomings in the sector (Garcia, 2000; Torres-Martínez, 2006; and Coscione, 2014), become more bearable when small and medium-scale producers organize and act collectively to address the challenges of globalization. By organizing, small and medium-scale producers are better able to combine their productive factors; to be more rational in the use of inputs; and to work together in order to increase productivity and quality. Besides these achievements, organizing also allows for planning, management, and to reach objectives by following the principles of cooperation and sharing responsibility. Thus, producer organizations are defined as a mechanism of action that allows for combined efforts in terms of managing collective interests, which, individually, would be difficult to achieve (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 84-85).

Accordingly, producer organizations have many different forms and are characterized by two principles: *utility* and *identity*. The principle of *utility* gives benefit to members, who are committed to achieve common goals. Similarly, the principle of *identity* is the mechanism of social cohesion that supports interactions between members (Harnecker, 2011). Organizations formed by small-scale coffee producers, for example,

their products (Garcia, 2000, p. 481).

are a typical case of alliance motivated by these two principles, and they are part of the strategies that *campesinos* and indigenous groups have “used to negotiate their economic, political, and social position in the changing terrain of this period of neoliberal reforms” (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 84). Organizing brings economic benefits, but it requires social cohesion, which often stems from a shared culture and collective identity²⁸—an ethnic identity in the case study of this research.

Since the members of the producers’ organization studied in this research belong to the *Tzoltzil* and *Tzeltal* ethnic groups, these groups’ identities can be referred to as *ethnic identity*. It is this identity that represents and encourages their active participation as part of the group. According to Stavenhagen (2010), *ethnic identity* implies an affirmation of ‘us’ against the ‘other’, i.e., “when a group or a person is defined as such, it is a means of differentiation in relation to any group or person which they face. It is an identity that arises in opposition, which cannot be affirmed in isolation” (Stavenhagen, 2010, p. 75-76). This conception of ethnic identity can be interpreted in the context of this research as one of the cohesive factors that keep members of the organization in the struggle for a better quality life. Since their identity “cannot be affirmed in isolation” (p. 75), producers are inserted in a new dynamic of production with a conviction of achieving their goal because this achievement would allow them to reassert themselves as members of a group, thereby creating a sense of obligation.

According to Coleman (1988), this sense of obligation functions as a form of insurance and is a social asset of the group or, what was referred to above as ‘social

²⁸ Social identity is a person’s sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). In this way, the world is divided into “them” (outgroups) and “us” (ingroups) (Tajfel, 1974).

capital'. Thus, a small-scale producers organization becomes an actor with the capacity to manage processes linked to the collective interests of a group and to promote actions to enable an organization to conduct its activities efficiently, in some cases appropriating for itself the entire production process, while decreasing its structural disadvantages by networking with solidarity groups in this time of globalization.

In this sense, land and ethnicity are entrenched in the identity of the producers' organizations. The ancestral knowledge and techniques that these organizations employ to cultivate the land can build bridges towards a new modernity, where indigenous forms of self-government and community work institutions (*tequio*) result in the improvement of their quality of life and the development of their communities without losing their ethnic identity. Even though the reproductive strategies of indigenous communities are still linked to the dynamics imposed by market institutions and the State, these communities have found ways to differentiate themselves and coexist within and outside of the logic of neoliberal economic rationality. Thus, community ethos (*comunalidad*) and the construction of local and regional autonomy are essentials for building productive alternatives. As we will see, this is the case for small-scale coffee producing organizations within the context of organic and fair-trade markets.

However, conventional agricultural science would not hesitate to describe the experience of producer organizations as a new "anti-modern paradigm" of rural development. Such experiences are spread across the globe and offer a cast of productive strategies, such as those associated with agro-ecology, organic agriculture, food sovereignty, fair trade, and other alternatives, through theory and practice (Sevilla, 2006, p.16-17). Places where such dissent in the modernization of productive agricultural are

found mainly in what, according to Toledo (2000), is perceived as the two social areas that seem to remain as civilizing resistance.

The *polychrome range of social and countercultural movements* composes the first area, which Toledo qualifies as ‘post-modern.’ The second social area, in which collective action is characterized as civilizing resistance, is placed in certain spaces of ‘pre-modernity or pre-industriality’, and it is usually in those regions of the world where Western civilization has been unable to impose and extend its values, business practices, and modernity (Toledo, 2000, p. 53).

Moreover, these regions are predominantly, though not exclusively, rural areas in countries like Mexico, where the presence of various indigenous groups confirms the presence of civilizational models other than those that originated in Europe. These are not anachronisms, rather they constitute a contemporary synthesis or forms of resistance that have taken place in recent centuries between the expansive force of the West and the still existing force of the *people without history* (Wolf, 2010).

Furthermore, civil society becomes an important category for collective actors in the global context; it constitutes an alternative means of expression and resistance in order to achieve specific objectives. These objectives form part of a more ambitious goal, which is the development of an entire territory. In this context, the participation of collective actors can theoretically lead to economic, political, social, and cultural achievements that have no limit.

The participation of groups within civil society has been consistent in present times. Moreover, diverse kinds of organizations, from religious to peasant organizations, have participated in the promotion of activities among the most vulnerable sectors of

developing countries. Likewise, and with the absence of geographical borders to act, civil society has woven networks of collaboration between developed and developing countries.

2.3 Conclusions

This research analyzes the role of civil society in the form of producers' organizations, where links are created from consumer to supplier, with an alternative view of practice in which new ways of production and marketing are possible. Consequently, it is concerned with examining a more comprehensive development, defined as an improvement in the living conditions and quality of life of organization members and their communities.

Henceforth, the axis of analysis of this research is presented by an interrelationship of local development as an articulated process of cooperative activities and negotiation through collective participation (in the case of this thesis, the participation of producers affiliated with *Unión Majomut*) within its territory and outside of it. Subsequently, it is possible to promote changes that affect social order and to transform productive relationships intended only to compete and to exclude the less capable, into productive relationships based on trust and reciprocity.

In this way, the analysis is contextualized by considering a development strategy that is not only limited to the pure implementation of internal actions, but rather is extended to other parts of the world, thus enabling the generalization of the findings of this case study, which ideally will contribute to fostering relationships with other members of civil society who may have different features and may supplement the

actions of domestic civil society with a new development vision.

Additionally, this theoretical framework is complemented by an exploration of organic farming and fair-trade markets—so-called alternative markets—and the interconnection that these markets have within the dynamics of the small-scale producer organizations. In this sense, the next chapter addresses organic farming and fair trade with the objective of presenting their main features and their role within the small-scale producer organizations.

Chapter 3

Building an Alternative: Organic Farming and Fair Trade Market

“Quality is decided by the depth at which
the work incorporates the alternatives
within itself, and so masters them”.
Theodor Adorno

This chapter addresses the practices of organic farming and fair trade. The objective is to present the general features of each system so as to contextualize their relationship with small-scale producer organizations. This chapter, also suggests that these alternative markets—organic and fair trade—have given an opportunity to ameliorate the living conditions of small-scale producers, by taking advantage of the platform that the process of globalization has already set up and combining it with the precepts of civil society participation, collectivity and cooperativism.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section addresses aspects related to organic farming: the way it is performed, its main actors, as well as the certification process involving organic production. Section two focus on the issues and characteristics of fair trade, its main actors, dilemmas in the ‘fair model’ as well as the certification process involving fair trade.

Finally, the concluding section scrutinises the connection between organic farming, fair trade and small-scale producer organizations. It also comments on how these connections provide a framework where small-scale producers can participate so as to reach their productive, social, and economic objectives, which can be translated into a better quality of life.

3.1 Building an Alternative to Agro-chemicals and Large-scale Farming: The Birth of Organic Farming.

3.1.1 Organic farming.

FAO (1999) states that *organic* indicates that a product was produced using certain production methods. In other words, organic is a ‘process’ claim rather than a product claim. Similarly, The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM) defines organic farming as

[a] production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people; relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than use of inputs with adverse effects; and combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and good quality of life for all involved (IFOAM, 2016)²⁹

According to IFOAM, organic farming is also a combination of tradition, innovation, and science in order to benefit an environment, as well as to promote fair relationships and a better quality of life. IFOAM establishes four principles as roots from which organic farming grows and develops. These principles express the positive, global contribution of organic farming and a vision to improve all agriculture in a global context³⁰:

1) Health. “Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible.” This principle emphasizes the interrelation of the health of individuals, their communities, and the health of the environment. For example, if the soil is healthy, it produces healthy food, and, therefore,

²⁹ The information used in this section is from IFOAM, and, although was published in previous years, it was retrieved in 2016, and it continues to be accurate and reliable.

³⁰ All the principles quoted in this section are adapted from the website of IFOAM, retrieved in March 17, 2016 from <http://www.ifoam.bio/en/organic-landmarks/principles-organic-agriculture>.

there is a greater possibility for healthier individuals.

2) Ecology. “Organic Agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them”. This principle relies on the premise that organic farming is based on ecological processes and recycling in order to have a better understanding of the environment. Similarly, it should take into consideration the particularities of each region, its climatic conditions, and the natural and original state of vegetation, which is part of the living soil in a farm ecosystem; or fish and marine organisms in an aquatic ecosystem.

3) Fairness. “Organic Agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities. Fairness is characterized by equity, respect, justice and stewardship of the shared world, both among people and in their relations to other living beings.” This principal puts emphasis on the premise that fair relationships are not just between human beings but also in relation to all forms of life.

Moreover, organic farming should provide everyone involved with an improved quality of life, a contribution to food sovereignty, and a reduction of poverty. It aims to produce a sufficient supply of good, quality food and other products. Additionally, all resources implemented in the production and consumption of organic products should be managed fairly, both socially and ecologically. Likewise, equity implies open and fair production, distribution and exchange systems, and takes into consideration the real environmental and social costs of production.

4) Carefulness. “Organic Agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations

and the environment.” In a broader sense, organic farming responds to a greater process where internal and external factors of life (animal, natural, human) are taken into account, transforming the orientation of agriculture away from producing exchange value (i.e. as a means of profit) and towards producing use values (i.e. as a means of sustaining life).

It seems that, as Stavenhagen (2010) states, it is through the recuperation of the ancient knowledge of indigenous groups that organic farming is returning. By combining indigenous groups’ processes of production with developments in science and technology, the outcome has proven to be remarkable in terms of productivity and efficiency. This is the essence of agro-ecology. What is more, it is accompanied with a process of taking back a lost identity: ‘the capacity to be in control of our own safety.’ Indigenous knowledge has offered viable solutions over time, such that the contribution of all individuals involved in production and decision-making processes must reflect on the values and needs of everyone, through a participatory process.

This participatory process can be better understood as part of the *comunalidad* of the indigenous groups in Mexico, where some of these groups, specifically those comprising *Unión Majomut*, reflect *comunalidad* in decision-making processes, as explained in Chapter 4.

On a more general level, the IFOAM principles presented above express a normative commitment of all the individuals involved in organic farming. Ideally, this commitment is not taken solely in regard to environmental concerns, but rather it is a larger commitment with every life form within the context of agriculture. In terms of equity and sustainability, the *organic* label should go beyond technical considerations and focus instead on organizational processes; in other words, it is a joint commitment

oriented by the principles that govern organic farming activity.

This utopian scenario describing organic farming can transform producers when put into practice; it is transformative when it guides social movement formation, which is the real meaning of organic production (Coscione, 2014). In materialist terms, the adoption of organic agriculture can be explained as a consequence of market dynamics, including the opportunity to participate in the niche markets that provide these small-scale producer organizations with economic benefits.³¹

3.1.2 The main actors in organic farming.

ASOCAM (5th Seminar) groups the main actors involved in the market of organic production into three categories (ASOCAM, 2002, p. 14-15):

1. *Small-scale producers* are the first actors in organic agriculture. This sector is formed when a group of small-scale farmers organize with a vision and an ability to guide their productive process towards a specific demand. It is in this sector where producers are more likely to make an autonomous decision to choose a new productive process (organic over conventional process). Autonomy in decision-making is important in that it is only by this determination that initiatives are sustainable. The challenge for this sector is to focus on developing and strengthening organic production, ensuring quantity and quality of products in order to meet the organic qualifying requirements. Moreover, it needs a group of producers with a goal-oriented vision.

2. *The public sector*, as an actor in the organic farming system, is formed by

³¹ An extra premium or percentage is paid for organic production according to Fair Trade International. The minimum price for 1 pound of conventional, unwashed coffee is \$1.35; organic Premium or differential is +0.30 of the minimum price (Fair Trade International, 2016).

government organizations that promote policies meant to provide access to supplies and markets, and to include organic production in national and international negotiations. The public sector can serve as a backup for producers and as a legal framework to access certifications. Similarly, it can promote research and campaigns oriented to consumers, regarding awareness of organic products.

3. *Civil society organizations* are increasingly influential actors on the local, national and international level because of their commitment to contribute to the improvement of small-scale producers. These organizations include fair trade organizations and unions. Although not all civil society organizations help directly with the commercialization of small-scale producers' organic products, these organizations serve as promoters to raise awareness of organic farming and products using communication channels, to bring together actors of organic agriculture, and to lobby for policies that are favourable for small-scale producers.

Examples of these kinds of organizations include fair trade and organic labelling organizations such as: Fairtrade Labelling Organizations (FLO), Mexican Certifier for Organic Products (CERTIMEX), Fair Trade Mexico, Max Havelaar, Naturland, and Ten Thousand Villages. The retailer organizations, which aim to commercialize organic and fair trade products from small-scale producers, such as: Just US! Coop, in Canada; Etiquable in France; and Equal Exchange in USA are part of these civil society organizations as well.

Even though the articulation and interrelation of the functions of these three actors is key to the success of the activities within the system, in this study, I focus on small-scale producer organizations as the main actor in the organic production system, since it

is these organizations that take the initiative to begin organic farming practices. From there, networking ensues. In the case of some small-scale coffee producing cooperatives in Chiapas, such as *Unión Majomut*, *Unión La Selva*, ISMAM, MutVitz, and others, new organizations are created to perform actions conventionally left up to the private sector (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 96-109).

3.1.3 Producing organic coffee.

Organic cultivation in Chiapas is an intensive form of traditional farming, based on a detailed knowledge of plant growth patterns in particular environments. Organic cultivation also resembles technified production in that there is more intensive use of inputs, although organic inputs and human labour are substituted for the agrochemicals used in conventional methods (Martínez-Torres, 2006; Sánchez, 1990). The main feature of this farming is the intensive use of labour for the care of plants.

I don't care how difficult they say it is, and that I need to go from here to there or that I need to walk a lot, because it is just like that and that is what we do because our little plants are worth it, yes they are (organic farmer, J. López, interview, January 19, 2016).³²

Hence, in organic farming, soil fertility management is an important factor for productivity and the mechanisms to promote it are also key to preserving the ecological balance between all the species, flora and fauna. Its implementation is a kind of link between trade and ecological demands, which gives to organic activity a value that is reflected in the product's quality and price.

³² All responses collected in the interviews were translated from Spanish to English by the author.

Organic coffee cultivation begins with the selection of the coffee seeds and finishes with the transportation of the coffee to a storage facility. Sánchez (1990) mentions that organic production is based on four principles: human, ecological, economical, and social, which seek equilibrium between human activity and the natural environment.

In the same vein Martínez-Torres (2006) offers an overview of the work of coffee producers in Chiapas, specifically mentioning the family involvement in the work that organic cultivation requires. “Cultivation on the steeply sloped terrain of Chiapas involves clearing, burning, plowing, and hole digging before planting” (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p.14). As a result, Martínez-Torres argues that cultivation production costs here are higher than for conventional cultivation, since organic farming work is more labour intensive. Additionally, Martínez-Torres states that the number of family members involved in such tasks is a key factor for determining production cost.

The organic coffee production process is divided into three phases: cultivation, processing, and roasting. Cultivation begins with coffee-seed selection³³. Organic producers have a nursery for seedling production from which coffee plants are transplanted to square holes 40-cm wide and equally deep. The seedling takes for about 3 or 4 months to be ready. (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p.20; G. Meza, interview, February 5, 2016). The soil is prepared with enriched compost, which is a mixture of organic waste, green plant trimmings, manure, waste pulp yielded by coffee processing, and any other organic matter at hand. The compost represents the only fertilizer used, though worm-

³³ According to Carvajal (1984), *coffea* contains about eighty different species; nonetheless, only two are planted and cultivated around the world: *C. arabica* and *C. canephora*, and these are also the two main species grown in Chiapas. Moreover, coffee producers prefer *c. arabica* because of its self-fertilization (with pollen from the same flower) and for its flavour (Carvajal, 1984, p. 13-14; J. Díaz, field work, January, 2016).

compost and/or bio-ferments are also used. Once the compost is ready, the grain is sown, as stated before, in a nursery. After three months, the plants are transplanted. Trees are planted surrounding the land to provide shade for the coffee plant, to protect it from the sun. Planting is between 700 and 1600 meters above the sea level, although there may be plantations located at higher altitudes. This is important for determining the quality of the coffee, as the higher it is grown, the better the flavour. Up to two years later it will bear fruit (G. Meza, interview, February 5, 2016).

Plant care involves very specific pruning of the coffee plant, as Mr. Génaro Meza, a coffee producer as well as the Organic Production Coordinator in *Union Majomut*, states, “it is needed to make sure the plant gets what it is asking for, to know if the plant is young or if it is old” (G. Meza, interview, February 5, 2016). The technique, of selecting branches to be cut twice—a first and a second thinning—is unique to organic farming, and it is also critical to exercise the correct amount of shade; too much shade can cause humidity problems and coffee rust fungus (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 21; J. Díaz, field work, January 2010).

The use of *living barriers*, as the producers called them, is another characteristic of organic production—tall, strong grasses or bushes planted in contour lines, whose function is to reduce erosion, requiring little or no extra labour to produce. Producers prefer this method over the terraced method, which requires more labour (G. Meza, interview, February 5, 2016; Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 21).

The next step, pest control, is done through cultivation and sanitation practices along with mechanical traps. Biological methods, such as the introduction of predators and development of habitat for natural enemies of the pest, are also used. Pest control is

carried out for preventive or corrective purposes by hand (G. Meza, interview, February 5, 2016). When these methods are not effective, non-synthetic substances are used, and when these are not available, producers may consult a national list of allowed synthetic substances.

Harvesting, the final part of the cultivation phase, plays a critical role in determining the quality of the green coffee beans. The coffee berries are harvested by hand from October to March. Only ripe coffee berries are picked, since each branch has berries in different stages of ripeness at any given period.

Family labour is essential for producers to save money, that otherwise would be used in the payment of day labourers. The harvest period could take from two to three months, as berries ripen over differing time spans, and harvesting rounds depend on the capacity of the producer, the climate, and the acreage of land planted (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 23; G. Meza, interview, February 5, 2016).

Depulping, fermentation, washing, and drying of the coffee bean are part of second phase in organic cultivation. Weather conditions are a factor, as well as and social and technical conditions. Environmental conditions affect the drying process. So do social conditions, organization of activities among family members or employees, and technical conditions. The depulping machine and the drying yard also affect the speed and quality with which the coffee bean is presented for exchange.

Once the artisanal labour is finished and the coffee bean is produced, it must be roasted. This is the third and last phase before the coffee is ready to be sold. The coffee is bagged to be transported to a storage facility. Some producers have a small storage room in their homes. However, it is absolutely necessary to take coffee into the central storage

facility of the organization to start the roasting, packaging and marketing process (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p.23; G. Meza, interview, February 5, 2016; J. Díaz, field work, January 2016).

Coffee marketing channels depend on the situation of the producer. They can be part of an organization with a fair trade certification. Non-associated producers sell their coffee to intermediaries known as *coyotes*,³⁴ sometimes a part of the produce is channeled through an organization and another part sold to a *coyote*. However, this depends on the way an organization is managed. In the case of *Unión Majomut*, most of its members refuse to deal with *coyotes* because of the business arrangement the organization has with them, which is to make sure that any *remnant*³⁵ on the product will go to improve the first price that was established within the assemblies.

Really, I don't know why we even need to think about going with the *coyote*, it is because of that situation that we formed our organization. Besides the *coyotes* only pay you once and poorly. Our organization pays you once and if at the end there is a remnant it pays us a little bit more. We always ended up earning, even if it is a little, but a little bit more (M. González, interview, January 29, 2016).

³⁴ A *coyote* is a person or organization that acts as an intermediary to accelerate procedures or circumvent legal obstacles. Most of the time producers refer to this person or organization as something negative, seeking to obtain a benefit at their expense.

³⁵ *Remnant* refers to what is left and distributed to organization members after a price adjustment, i.e., one payment is given at the beginning of the season and at the end after the market prices are established and adjusted worldwide; in case, there is a differential in prices. This differential is distributed to the members as an additional payment.

3.1.4 Getting certified.

The IOAS Organization³⁶ argues that today, “because the trade in eco-labelled goods is amongst the fastest growing sectors and is taking place on an international level, many private schemes and regulators are turning to accreditation as a way of bringing order to what could be a chaotic scene” (IOAS, 2016). Therefore, companies that certify the authenticity of their organic products are identified among the actors involved in organic production. Since the organic coffee market demands a specific quality of the goods sold, the inspection processes become necessary. Thus, a certificate is issued to the organization whose processes haven been audited by these companies in recognition of this certification quality.

In the case of organic coffee, several organizations certify the product. Some of the most important are Naturland, Certimex, and *IMO Control Latinoamérica Lda*. These organizations, through a predefined procedure, perform land inspections to determine whether the techniques and practices implemented in coffee cultivation meet the standards of organic agriculture.

Naturland is an international organic agriculture organization founded in 1982, based on the principles of democracy and is recognized as an organization with public benefits.³⁷ Additionally, the Naturland certification system meets the international standards and is accredited by IFOAM (Naturland, 2015).³⁸

Similarly, Certimex is a civil society organization founded in 1997, formed to develop production through an inspection and certification process for agricultural,

³⁶ IOAS is a non-profit organization dedicated to the integrity of ecolabel claims in the field of organic and sustainable agriculture, environmental management, social justice, and fair trade. It was founded by IFOAM in 1997 (see <http://www.ioas.org>).

³⁷ See <http://www.naturland.de>

³⁸ For IFOAM Standards, see <http://infohub.ifoam.bio/en/what-organic/family-standards>.

ranching and forestry industries, assuring that products are suitable for national and international markets. Certimex also provides training for technicians, project owners, and professionals, as well as other services related to the quality assurance of organic products (Certimex, 2015).³⁹

Included among the certifications that Certimex manages are: DAKKS, accepted in the Europe Union; USDA-NOP, accepted in North America (United States, Canada and Mexico), LOOAA from SAGARPA Mexico; and JAS (Japan). Additionally this institution is part of the process and accreditation for the *Símbolo de Pequeño Productor*⁴⁰ (Small Producers' Symbol-SPP), and the Bird Friendly certification (Certimex, 2015).

IMOCert Latinoamérica Ltda (IMO-LA) is a certification entity of ecological processes, whose main objective is to ensure the quality of the products sold in organic markets. IMO-LA has international accreditation for the inspection and certification of small-scale producers' organizations, farms, processing, and marketing organizations⁴¹ (IMO-LA, 2015). Equally, IMO-LA has diverse certifications, including: DAKKS, JAS, BioSuisse, Naturland, Soil Association, Krav, Canadian Organic Régime, Demeter International Bird Friendly, Utz certified, BioComercio Ético, among others (IMO-LA, 2011).

These certification organizations have established cooperative agreements with

³⁹ For Certimex and its certifications, see <http://www.certimexsc.com/about.php>

⁴⁰ *Símbolo de Pequeño Productor* (SPP). "It is a distinction that identifies organized small producers in Latin America and the Caribbean, and permits consumers to recognize their products on the market...Represents the high quality of products from organized small producers, based on their work to promote dignified living in their communities, local economies, and the health and environment of producers and consumers." See Coscione, 2014, specifically chapter 8 in *In defense of small producers: The story of CLAC*.

⁴¹ For more information on *IMOCert Latinoamérica Ltda*, see <http://imocert.bio>

each other to promote their services and to provide their customers with dual certification, meaning greater confidence for buyers. However, the costs of services provided by these certifiers are high, which cannot be covered by small-scale farmers/producers acting individually—a main reason for producers to organize, while, at the same time, attaining certification that is a requirement to be part of this market.

3.1.5 Beyond organic coffee production.

After the breakup of the International Agreement in 1989, the international price of coffee fell below the high cost of production, leading many coffee producers to bankruptcy; only those with access to outside resources of capital survived (Torres-Martínez, 2006, pp. 65-55). Although the situation was difficult, organic farmers subsisted during this crisis, as the price of their product did not lose as much real value. Consequently, the coffee sector started to look for alternatives in order to prevent this kind of crisis again. As a result, organic coffee, eco-friendly, the *common code*, and those within fair trade were some of the production and marketing alternatives that producers turned to (Coscione, 2014).

Only a small industry, organic agriculture is becoming one of growing importance in the agriculture sector of a number of countries, irrespective of their stage of development (FAO, 2009). In Mexico, the most common criterion for producing coffee, in its new production alternative, is ‘organic farming,’ which is ruled by the principles defined by IFOAM.

Marketing criterion corresponds to the alternative fair trade coffee market, which aims to ensure long-term business relationships and greater equity for all participants

within this market by improving access to markets and strengthening collective organization (Bacon, 2008). Bacon states that small, specialty-roasting companies pioneered the introduction of organic and fair-trade coffees in some countries (p. 158). However, these new markets allow producers to insert themselves in a new commercial dynamic that, if it is true, is not far from the dynamics of the market liberalization paradigm. It is also true that it is a more favourable way of entering the market and ensuring the purchase of their products with a price above the one offered by the conventional market (Fridell, 2007). In this sense, not only the dynamic of the organic agriculture production but also the dynamic of the fair trade market are based on the collective action of producers and their collaborators.

Martínez-Torres (2006) argues that, there are not only economic benefits for producers within organic agriculture and fair trade markets, but there are also social and environmental benefits stemming from these practices. This translates into an improvement in the producers' quality of life in a more integral way, i.e., by farming organically, they protect themselves from the negative effects of using chemical fertilizers. Organic farming also allows producers to consume locally grown foods and to feed themselves with chemical-free products.

Bray, Plaza, and Contreras (2008) argue that the organic production system promotes the use of natural inputs, such as composted, nonchemical fertilizers, bio-control, natural repellents and crop rotation. Moreover, this system encourages small producers to organize. The members may experience improvements in their quality of life, according to the organization's philosophy, which tends to promote integral economic, social and ecological sustainability (p. 237-244).

After the coffee crisis in 1989 and with the dismantling of the Mexican Coffee Institute⁴² (INMECAFE), as part of the spread of neoliberal policies on the international and national levels, it was within the organic coffee production schema that organizations developed the important ability to lead and decide on all steps of the coffee value chain. Within this plan, they could concentrate the economic gains that the ownership of the whole process was generating (Fridell, 2007; Martínez-Torres, 2006).

Organic coffee was only one component that strengthened small-scale producers' capacity to bear the challenges of the newly enacted trade policies. Organic production has proved to be a partial solution to the producers' economic problems, and it also has inserted them into schemes that seek a more integral development.

Fridell (2007), in *Fair trade coffee: The prospects and pitfalls of market-driven social justice*, addresses the fair trade issue relayed in the experience of *Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Región del Istmo* (UCIRI). Fridell shows the advantages, in social and environmental terms, that organic agriculture and fair trade provide to producers and their communities, including healthier lifestyles, protecting biodiversity, and decommodifying goods (Fridell, 2007, pp. 276-289).

In the same vein, Coscione (2014), as part of research within the Latin American and *Caribbean Network of Small Fair Trade Producers* (CLAC), mentions that the adoption of organic agriculture by small scale producers brought positive health benefits for producers and their families, and for the natural environment, due to soil conservation and productive diversification.

⁴² INMECAFE was founded in 1958, replacing the National Coffee Council, "with the mission of regulating coffee prices, providing technical assistance, and conducting research on improving coffee production and controlling pest infestation" (Fridell, 2007, p. 176).

Organic coffee production has exceeded production goals. Further, there are numerous additional benefits that, taken together, create an overall context of wellbeing that touches consumers and producers, as well as their families. Organic farming is a productive alternative that promotes the development of communities where it is practiced.

3.2 Fair Trade

3.2.1 What is fair trade? The face of a new business model.

It is unquestionable that the exchange of goods has been a constant in human history, from barter to the established relationships between trading blocks, which have been formalized through trade agreements. Likewise, exchange mechanisms have been transformed over time and, with them, the role of market participants. In this sense, one can say that today exchange can take two perspectives: unfair markets and fair markets.

On one hand, unfair markets involve relationships based on the pursuit of profit without taking into account consequences for labour, the environment, or society. On the other hand, fair markets are the antithesis to the first, not in opposition to the pursuit of profits but because its actions are based on the awareness of the effects that the exchange of goods has on its participants. In this sense, fair trade markets become an alternative to counteract the effects that *unfair* markets, better termed *conventional*, have on workers, consumers, and the natural environment, which frames all productive activities.

Fair trade, as a movement, was conceived in Europe in the 1980s, and is defined as a set of socio-economic practices, which establish relations between producers and consumers, based on equity, partnership, trust, and shared interests. By obeying precise

criteria and pursuing objectives in different spheres, such as obtaining fairer conditions for marginalized producer groups and progress within the practices and rules of international trade, with the support of consumers (Johnson, 2011; Coscione, 2014; Bacon, Méndez, & Fox, 2008).

The marginalized producer groups that fair trade considers are mainly peasants or small-scale farmers in developing countries; while the consumers, with purchase or choice power, are from developed countries. In official fair trade terms, these two actors are called southern producers and northern consumers, respectively, and it is between these actors that solidarity relations for sustainable development and trade are grown (Fridell, 2007).

The objectives of fair trade are exercised in a context of genuine partnership, based on transparency, access to information, exchange, and regional alliances between the global North and the global South, as well as in innovations within the areas of certification and distribution. The ultimate goal is to promote synergies along with other practices of the solidarity-based economy, strengthening the producers' capacities to inform and communicate among themselves and to have the ability to define the legal status for fair trade (Johnson, 2001). Fair trade, then, goes beyond a commercial and economic scope; it touches aspects of human development as well as legislative and productive frameworks. The relationships established among its participants are designed not only for the long-term economic success, but also as a means to build within the business process a humanitarian aspect. Thus, the fair trade movement is inseparable from consumer awareness about the social and environmental costs of production.

3.2.2 Who is who in fair trade⁴³

Coscione (2014) states that “for some people, the fair trade movement is growing; for others, it is stuck and deeply divided; for some, it is just a market niche; for others, it is a viable alternative to the exclusionary [rationale] of the traditional market ...I do not know what the truth is” (p. 14).

Fair trade markets articulate their functions through complex framework of actors and institutions that give life to the strategies adopted by producers and certification agencies. All those who – through their work, their social practices or their action – contribute to the promotion of fairer economic exchange, are actors in the fair trade movement.

According to Johnson (2001), these actors include: 1) groups of producers, 2) consumers—organized or not—who consume fair trade goods; 3) citizens who advocate fairer economic relations to their governments; 4) private companies, which are conscious about the work of fair trade and are ready to work with it; 5) all organizations who bring an economic, technical, or any other support to the structuring and promotion of the fair trade movement; and 6) national governments, regional or local administrations that support the movement (p. 38-39). With an eye on the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA), Johnson distinguishes two types of organizations: direct partners within a framework of fair trade and those linked to it (p. 38-40). Within the partners of fair trade, he includes the following actors:

- Organizations of producers: cooperatives, trade unions, etc.
- Fair Trade certification agencies, usually grouped at the national level.

⁴³ This section draws heavily from Johnson, 2001.

- Cooperatives or consumer associations, which help to create consumer awareness.
- Purchasing centers/ fair trade importers, which are essential economic links for South-North fair trade partners.
- Fair trade retail outlets, that is, shops that correspond to possible forms of fair trade distribution.
- Distributors of fair trade products.

There are also international groupings of fair trade organizations, and in this category, four main organizations can be identified (Johnson, 2001, pp. 39-40):

- International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT). Created in 1989, it supports both developing-nation producer organizations and northern-nation fair trade-support organizations.
- European Fair Trade Association (EFTA). Established in 1990, it is a group of twelve fair trade importing purchasing centers, representing nine European countries.
- Network of European World Shops (NEWS!). Operating since 1994 as a network for national associations of 'World Shops,' it is currently has over 2700 outlets in 13 countries.
- Fairtrade Labeling Organizations (FLO). Founded in 1997, this organization serves as a network of 17 national labeling-initiatives, representing 14 European nations, countries in North America, as well as Japan. FLO coordinates the work of labeling organizations, and, in particular, monitors the harmonization and application of labeling criteria. In 2001, for the first time, members of the

producer organizations were allowed to vote to be on the board of directors (Coscione, 2014, p. 34).

- FINE. Created in 1988 to coordinate and embody the four organizations above.

Additionally, other organizations are linked to fair trade, such as organizations that fulfill a role of technical support; financial organizations that enable the establishment of favourable synergies between ethical finance and fair trade; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), whose programs are aimed at promoting responsible consumption and a more ethical trade between North and South countries and; national, regional, or local governments (Johnson, 2001, p. 40).

3.2.3 Fair trade certification.

To be part of the fair trade system, Fair Trade Certification is required, monitored by FLO-CERT Organization, the “global certification and verification body, with the main role of independently certifying fair trade products.” FLO-CERT remains the only international, fair-trade certification body. For certification, applicants first apply to FLO-CERT, followed by audits, analyses, and evaluations, according to Fairtrade International standards. These standards are based on a number of social, economic, and environmental considerations. Certification is granted, but not without asking the applicant for changes and a follow up of activities (FLO-CERT, 2016).

For producer organizations, a fair-trade label makes possible a better and more stable sale price. The cost of the certification is paid by the producer organizations, so as to use the label in their packaging. In cases where producer organizations only have capacity to sell raw material, certification is paid by the buyers who use the label in their

packaging (G. Meza, interview, February 5, 2015).

3.2.4 Fairness in fair trade? Getting there.

Fair trade, like many other movements, campaigns, and recent initiatives are part of what is called in the literature ‘new globalization’ (See, for example, Reynolds, Murray, & Wilkinson, 2007), which refers to a movement that seeks to reorganize the patterns of international trade and the processes of corporate expansion that have left aside the importance of environment, social, and ecological conditions.

Strategies that fair trade has implemented for this reorganization have to do with trade patterns that interconnect consumers and producers, but in a less aggressive context than that which was conceived at the time of trade liberalization in the twentieth century. The difference between the strategies of the ‘new globalization’ movement and those implemented in the previous periods of the global process, are based on the way of conceiving the exchange of goods within the new market.

In the same line of argumentation, Johnson (2001) states that in “Mexico, as in other developing countries, low prices on the home market mean that the largest part of production is exported. Fair trade to the North is only a partial answer to this problem” (p. 31). Therefore, “organisations of small-scale producers came together with the intention of obtaining the establishment of fairer commercial relations in the home market as well, and to make their products better known among consumers, at prices that were accessible” (p. 32).

Nonetheless, one can say that the benefits that industrialization and technology have brought over time are remarkable, but so are the disadvantages, which include not

only the employment status of workers or the position of the countries within the global market, but also in terms of the environment, health, and general welfare of the world's population.

Hence, these circumstances have given rise to movements like fair trade that seek to mitigate these inconveniences by setting goals beyond the pursuit of increased production-levels, such as better working conditions and improvement of the environment in which the productive activities are carried out, rather than only seeking to improve the quality of goods.

Since the problem was greater in those sectors and countries that did not have a well-developed productive base to adopt the strategies being demanded by the industrialization and trade liberalization processes, the fair trade movement was born within the agricultural sector, managing crops with greater price volatility and connecting an agricultural production base in developing countries to consumers in developed countries.

It is in this arena that concepts and ideas of fair trade were applied within the coffee sector, and then extended to other crops, like banana, tea, cocoa, sugar, honey, rice, and wine, among others. In this sense, fair trade was created by organizations promoting activities for consumption in developed countries and from groups or producer associations in developing countries (Coscione, 2014). In the words of the Fair Trade International:

Fairtrade is an alternative approach to conventional trade and is based on a partnership between producers and consumers. When farmers can sell on Fairtrade terms, it provides them with a better deal and improved terms of trade.

This allows them the opportunity to improve their lives and plan for their future. Fairtrade offers consumers a powerful way to reduce poverty through their everyday shopping (Fair Trade International, 2016).

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the fair trade movement has had its own pitfalls and an apparent loss of direction regarding the main objectives stated by Fair Trade International, previously presented as paramount, and this is why the struggle continues, and also why new alternatives within the system have been raised.

In this regard, it is remarkable to note the appearance of the *Small Producers' Symbol* as a sustainable label of the organized, small producer: "It's more than a fair trade label. It's an independent, affordable certification system of origin, in favor of sustainable production, democratic organization, fair trade and self-management....It's an initiative created and owned by small producers from the South (FUNDEPPO as cited in Coscione, 2014, p. 199).

One need not romanticize fair trade. As Fridell (2007) wisely points out, "the fair trade network as originally conceived was significantly different than its current form and placed far greater emphasis on the role of the state and on creating a distinctly alternative market" (p. 50). He continues by saying that

[w]hile frequently depicted as being in direct opposition of neoliberal globalization, the fair trade in its current form in fact represents a 'neoliberal version' of its earlier model, and has been adopted by many international organizations and conventional corporations as a 'neoliberal alternative' to the other, statist projects of the fair trade movement. (p. 51)

Whereas it seems that the current fair trade model as Fridell (2007) comments is not

challenging neoliberalism but working in parallel with it, it is also true that it is within the fair trade model that small-scale producers have an alternative to keep producing and working for the revenues that are so necessary for subsistence. It is worth pointing out that although the fair trade model has shown some deficiencies in recent years, small-scale producers from different organizations and backgrounds have gathered together so as to come up with new ideas to challenge the deficiencies that fair trade was showing in addressing their situation. Among these strategies is the formation of CLAC or the creation of SPP. Nonetheless, it is clear that by participating in the same platform that neoliberalism sets for large transnational companies, small-scale organizations still have a greater task, which is that of actually challenging the neoliberal model in which fair trade is in.

By acknowledging that fair trade is not necessarily the ‘best and only alternative’ to the problems faced by small-scale producers, it has given them the opportunity to be recognized and accepted. As Van Der Hoff claims “this new market model has given dignity to small-scale producers in indigenous regions where they have rejected the Western model of development assistance and cooperation, which according to them has not treated people with dignity, but as objects of charity” (Van Der Hoff, as cited in Coscione, 2014, p. 30).

Moreover, it is within these initiatives that change can be achieved by moving forward and fighting for a more sustainable form of development in a global system that, if fair has not been the best word for it, it has given a survival alternative for the small-scale producer to not disappear, and who daily dreams of a better tomorrow, as documented in the field work carried out in association with this thesis.

3.3 Conclusions

The negative effects of globalization on the agricultural sectors of developing countries, and in particular on small-scale producers in the coffee sector in Mexico, have been partly overcome by their insertion in alternative production and marketing schemes like organic production and fair trade. Authors like Martínez-Torres (2006), Coscione (2014), Fridell (2007) and Bacon et al. (2008) discuss the benefits of these alternatives. Martínez-Torres (2006), for example, states that the benefits are not just monetary; they include improvements for the social and ecological environment as well as with the producer's self-esteem.

Peter Rosset analyzes in a brilliant and schematic way the results of this first 'globalization' of natural resources (Green Revolution) as follows: "In first place, a process of private appropriation of arable land begins, starting with the buying and selling of it, as if it were a consumer good; furthermore, allowing its accumulation by a few; secondly, the small-scale farmers' lack of bargaining power vis-à-vis large-scale agribusinesses and intermediaries; and finally, the prevailing technologies that have brought negative effects such as soil degradation, generation of new pests, weeds and diseases, destroying the foundations for future production and making it almost impossible for the small-scale farmer to afford future production due to the costly maintenance of production" (Rosset 1998 as cited in Sevilla, 2006, p. 8).

Thus, as González and Doppler (2007) argue, even though 'fair prices' do not induce a crucial change in the small-scale producers' quality of life, access to alternative systems, certainly does. This dual situation shows the diversity of advantages and disadvantages that the producers face within the global context; it has led to a search for

alternatives to prevail within these global dynamics. Hence, the organizational, productive and commercial alternatives analyzed in this thesis are considered to be an option for producers to survive and to be in the market but not for it.

According to Rosset (2003), “the only lasting way to [enhance a better quality of life] and to reduce poverty is through local economic development” (p. 1). In this sense, the impact that organic production and fair trade can have within the community has to do with the characteristics of the producers that are part of the organization and/or local community, especially the leaders and supervisors of the small-scale producers organization. This is because according to their cosmovision, educational level, long-term goals will be the way in which they are going to direct the efforts of the organization; therefore, all come into play, as well as the environmental conditions of a given territory and its effects on coffee production.

Consequently, producer organizations can be seen as a means to promote the development of individuals, families, and local communities. In this same perspective, Mazzoti (2008) also considers that organized citizen participation is a means to recover the local sector as the space within which the main demands of the people should arise, seeing it as civil society in theoretical terms, and as a producers organization in empirical terms, it is, according to Mazzoti “an agent of change that will enable access for development and the improvement [in their quality of life]” (pp. 28-30).

These relationships, generated among groups of local and global civil society⁴⁴ to boost local development, give rise to new forms of social organization that become complex, dynamic and multidimensional, while involving aspects that are psycho-socio-

⁴⁴ Coscione (2014) refers to this as ‘glocal.’

cultural, political, environmental and even productive-economic. Thus, social capital and collective action are manifested respectively in the formation and action of the groups within civil society and therefore, become essential elements to promote development.

The reflection made here can be further complemented by Sen's vision of development, which is based on the enhancement of certain *freedoms*, giving primary importance to the capacity of an individual to express those freedoms, within the environment in which he/she lives, in order to secure access to the resources required to overcome poverty (Sen, 1999). Therefore, for the objectives of this research, development is defined as the improvement of a community quality of life according to what the individuals of the community call improvements, whereby the means to reach such improvement do not go against their identity and the members of the community have control over the developmental process. According to "Your Better Life Index" by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) some of the elements that are used as indicators of such improvements are: housing, income, jobs, community, education, environment, civic engagement, health, life, safety and work-life balance (OECD, 2016). However, as indicated in Chapter 1, this research suggests to view quality of life in a way that goes beyond income, and that focuses on the particularities of a given community and its members such as: cultural beliefs, cosmovision and historical heritage.

Along these lines, this thesis offers an analysis of the geographical, cultural, economic, and social context in which the case study unfolds. The next chapter examines the relationships developed within the regional context of Chiapas and the challenges faced by *Unión Majomut* and its members.

Chapter 4

The Regional Context of the Case Study of *Unión Majomut* and the community of Chenalhó

“If you don't stand for something
you will fall for anything”
Gordon A. Eadie

This chapter contextualizes the local-level case study of this research: The regional context of the small-scale coffee producers organization of *Unión Majomut*. The objective is to sketch out the geographical, social, cultural and economic characteristics of the region where this case study takes place. The chapter is divided into two sections, not including the concluding section.

The first section describes the geographical, social, economic and cultural characteristics of the Highlands of Chiapas, beginning with general characteristics and followed by the specifics of the community of Chenalhó, where fieldwork was carried out. Section two explains the historical background of the coffee sector. In addition, it explores the economic, political and social changes in Mexico after the neoliberal transition that helped to shape the pathway of small-scale coffee producer organizations, like *Unión Majomut*, which would eventually find their way into the neoliberal capitalist economy.

Finally, the concluding section addresses the relationship between the region's characteristics and the historical context of the coffee sector in Chiapas to better define this case study.

4.1 Regional overview of the Highlands region of Chiapas, Mexico⁴⁵

4.1.1 Geographical characteristics.

The area that this case study covers is part of the region called ‘Los Altos’ (Highlands) in the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico⁴⁶. “This region covers an area of 3770 km² and it is composed of sixteen municipalities⁴⁷. The population living in this region is equal to 187,292 inhabitants, of whom 67% are indigenous and 33% *mestizos*⁴⁸.”

The area is characterized by mountainous and rugged terrains ranging from 700 meters above sea level, north of Pantelhó and at 2,784 meters above sea level, east of Zinacantan. Communities have been isolated due to the precarious roads. Three-quarters of the surface of the Highlands region is farmed; 60% of which is dedicated to the cultivation of corn, beans and other crops for auto-consumption; 39.4% of the land, equivalent to 20,300 hectares, is used for coffee plantations; and only 0.6% of the land is used to cultivate vegetables, fruits and flowers” (Cobo & Paredes, 2009, p. 15).

⁴⁵ The data presented in this section has been adapted from Cobo & Paredes (2009), INAFED (2010) and CEIEG Chiapas (2014).

⁴⁶ The State of Chiapas is divided into 16 municipalities and at the same time these municipalities compose nine regions: Centro (center), Altos (highlands), Fronteriza (border area), Frailesca, Norte (North), Selva (jungle), Sierra (mountains), Soconusco e Istmo – Costa (coastal area).

⁴⁷ San Cristobal de las Casas, Altamirano, Amatenango del Valle, Chalchihuitán, Chamula, Chanal, Chenalhó, Huixtan, Larráinzar, Mitontic, Oxchuc, Pantelhó, Tenejapa, Teopisca, Las Rosas and Zinacantan (Cobo & Paredes, 2009).

⁴⁸ In more recent definitions than those from the colonial times, the term *mestizo* has been and is now frequently used to refer to large numbers of people who are either of mixed European and Indigenous descent or who have a so-called mixed culture. It should be kept in mind that there are several distinct ways in which the term *mestizo* is used: “1) As a simple description- a person, or a group, who possesses a recent mixed background; 2) As a kind permanent ethnic or caste categorization- a person, or a group, who is not only of mixed background but whose ethnic nature, or social status, is also mixed; 3) As a strictly biological concept, referring only to mixture through sexual reproduction; and 4) As a cultural concept, referring to a mixture of customs, ways of behaving, and so on” (Forbes, 2013). Here it is used to refer to the population in Chiapas that is not indigenous, which bridges the four ways the term is used, according to Forbes (2013).

“In the Highlands region there are around 5,000 coffee producers in an area of 8,300 hectares. The plantations are concentrated in the sub-region comprising the municipalities of Chenalhó, Chalchihuitán, Pantelhó, Cancúc, Tenejapa, Larráinzar and Oxchuc; this research will focus on the municipality of Chenalhó” (Ibid, 2009).

Chenalhó has borders to north with Pantelhó and Chalchihuitán, to the east with San Juan Cancúc, to the south with Tenejapa, Mitontic and Chamula, and to the west with Aldama and Larráinzar. The coordinates from the main town are: 16 ° 53'37" north latitude and 92°37'33" west longitude, at an altitude of 1,500 meters above sea level. Chenalhó has a land area of 245.94 km², it occupies 2.98% of the region's territory and 0.15% of the state's territory. The climate ranges in Chenalhó from warm and humid, having an average annual temperature of 18.4°C, with abundant summer rains (9.54%), to semi-warm and humid with abundant summer rains (83.81%), and to mid-humid with rain all year (6.65%).

An important consideration is the use of the land, which is distributed as follows: agriculture (57.14%), cloud forest (secondary) (29.04%), pine forest (secondary) (11.49%), forest pine-oak (secondary) (1.56%), other (0.43%), pine-oak forest (0.3%), and cultivated grassland (0.03%). Additionally, Chenalhó is located within the sub-watershed of Chacté River and Bananas River, which are part of the watershed of Grijalva River - Tuxtla Gutierrez. The main rivers in the municipality are: Los Chorros, San Pedro, Xpotol, Shunúch Arroyo, Colorado, Yaxgemel, Jolchupactic, Mashilo and San Pablo. There are also intermittent streams and creeks, including Los Ángeles, Joshóm Equél, Laja, La Marrana and Ichilhó.

Thus, one can notice the importance of agriculture within the region and how the geographical characteristics promote coffee cultivation within the area of the Highlands region and its municipalities. Chenalhó has ideal climatic conditions and altitude for coffee production, since, according to the *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration* (NORA), “the optimal temperature range for growing Arabica coffee is 18°C–21°C. It can tolerate average annual temperatures of up to roughly 24°C” (NORA, 2016) and its optimal altitude range is 900 to 1,700 meters above sea level (NORA, 2016; Anacafé, 2016).

4.1.2 Social characteristics⁴⁹.

According to INEGI⁵⁰ the total number of inhabitants in Chenalhó in 2010 were 36,111, 91.3% of whom live in rural areas, with only 8.7% in urban spaces. What is more, 82.44% are indigenous, mainly from the Tzeltal and Tzotzil ethnic groups. In 2010, Chenalhó ranked in 9th place of the poorest municipalities in the state, having 95.5% of its population living in poverty and 72.3% in extreme poverty (CONEVAL, 2011; SEDESOL, 2013).

The population of Chenalhó is distributed in 119 communities, ranging from 2 individuals, the smallest one, up to 2,068 individuals, the biggest one. The situation in these communities, in terms of social welfare, is exposed in the levels of marginalization,

⁴⁹ The data presented in this section is retrieved from ‘Catalógo de Localidades’ published by SEDESOL (Secretariat of Social Development), CONEVAL (National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy), and ‘Perfiles Municipales 2014’ published by Secretaría de Hacienda del Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas (Secretariat of Finance of the State of Chiapas).

⁵⁰ INEGI - Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía- (The National Institute of Statistics and Geography) is an autonomous agency of the Mexican government dedicated to managing the national system of statistical and geographical information of the country (INEGI, 2016).

social backwardness and in the human development index, registered in the municipality. These data were gathered using the census performed in 2010, according to the criteria established by the *Secretariat of Social Development* (SEDESOL), the *National Population Council* (CONAPO), the *National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy* (CONEVAL) and the *United Nations Organization* (UN) respectively; they pointed out to significant shortcomings in education, health, food and housing (see table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Poverty Indicators , Chenalhó

Concept	Index	Level
Marginalization	1.8	Very high
Social backwardness	2.16	Very high
HDI	0.595	Medium

Note: Prepared by the author based on the data presented in the 'Resumen Municipal' of the 'Catalógo de localidades' by SEDESOL, 2013; CONAPO, 2010; INEGI, 2016.

In this regard, CONEVAL (2012) observes that there is no identified legal instrument guarantying social rights for the population or to allocate resources for social development. The National Development Plan 2013-2018 mentions that there are obstacles in Mexico in achieving social and economic development, such as high rates of marginalization, social backwardness and inequality. This set of obstacles is generally found in rural areas located in the mountainous regions (because of the difficult access to them), as is the case of many communities in the municipality of Chenalhó.

These communities lack infrastructure, equipment and adequate services due to the high costs that they represent to the national budget⁵¹. Thus, this situation inhibits the opportunity of investment and the possibility of a diversified economy for the population

⁵¹ <http://pnd.gob.mx/>, consulted in April 5, 2016.

living in these communities. The only available working alternatives still lie in the agricultural and commercial sectors; and in some micro-regions, eco-tourism. Taking into consideration the high levels of poverty in the Chenalhó, it seems obvious that these activities are not in themselves enough to secure a high quality of life, or even to meet basic needs.

4.1.3 Economic characteristics.

The geographical characteristics of the region make it difficult to provide services and attract private investment. Therefore, poverty indicators have not significantly improved for the past six years; moreover, those characteristics are also the ones that define the productive activities within the region, and they are closely related to the distribution and the characteristics of the inhabitants.

As a result of the predominant indigenous and rural population in the region, the productive activities performed within the municipality of Chenalhó are linked to the use and exploitation of natural resources. However, some activity between Chenalhó's rural areas and the city can also be found combined with the offering of services and market oriented activities (see table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Productive Activities, Chenalhó

Activity	Characteristics
Farming	The main cash crop produces in Chenalhó is coffee, followed by fruits and vegetables
Cattle industry	The region produces bovine cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry
Industry	The main activity in this sector is the production of clothing out of wool
Trade	Within the municipality basic products such as: staple food, clothing, and footwear among others basic products are sold.
Tourism	The main attraction is the river Osocuchum and sometimes the municipality has visitors in its traditional celebrations

Note: Prepared by the author based on the data presented in *Enciclopedia de los municipios de Mexico: Estado de Chiapas, Chenalhó* (2003).

According to this information, one can notice that the local population is economically active in: farming, cattle industry, industry, trade and tourism. In 2000 the number of people economically active and occupied were 6,961. Of these people, 87.09% is active in the primary sector and more specifically, the agricultural sector. By 2010, this figure increased to 10,926 and although there is no specific data available for a sectorial breakdown for that year, one can appreciate the continued importance of the primary sector in terms of economic production (see table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Importance of the economic sectors in 1000/pesos, 2011, Chenalhó

Sector		1000/pesos
Primary	\$	107,370.00
Secondary	\$	1,349.00
Tertiary	\$	29,385.00*

* 2008

Note: Prepared by the author, based on the data presented by INEGI, México en cifras consulted in April 05, 2016 from <http://www3.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/mexicocifras/?e=07&mun=026>

Regarding the data presented in table 4.3 it is important to distinguish the prevalence of the primary sector, and despite the poverty that characterizes the region, it

is the richness in its natural resources that has allowed its inhabitants to create ways to acquire the necessary means to subsist. The climatic conditions and the soil features, among other favourable characteristics within the geographic space of the municipality of Chenalhó, have been key for shaping local farming practices, which is the main economic activity in the region. Coffee in particular is the main product within the region and it has also provided the most palpable benefits for the population of Chenalhó. What is more, as we will see, coffee cultivation has been at the center of a paradigm shift towards agroecology and fair trade, which has helped local producers survive and face a host of challenges.

4.1.4 Cultural characteristics.

The predominance of the agricultural sector in the municipality of Chenalhó has to do, not only with the physical characteristics of the region, but also with its inhabitants' cultural heritage. The majority of Chenalhó's population forms part of the *Tzeltal* and *Tzotzil* indigenous groups, which developed out of the old Mayan culture. It is worth noting that culture is a broad term that is influenced by and influences diverse elements: a territory and the natural resources that it has; public spaces and buildings; productive and religious places; the areas considered holy and sacred; the tools used in daily life; and finally, all the physical repertoire that has been invented or adopted throughout the years, and now is part of a specific group like the Maya, Tarahumara or Mixteca culture (Bonfil, 1989, p. 47). Similarly, different ways of social organization are also transmitted through culture such as: the rights and obligations within the household and the community; the way to ask for other group members' collaboration and how to

reciprocate; the way to establish leadership, and the way to ask for guidance, advice and answers. All of these elements take us to another aspect within culture: the knowledge passed down from generation to generation (Ibid, 1989, pp. 48-49).

The Tzeltal and Tzotzil indigenous groups have their own particular cultural heritage, in which each group, although very similar, sets limits and rules to be accepted as part of the group. This is called *identity*. According to Bonfil (1989), indigenous groups are not defined by external cultural aspects that make them different in the eyes of outsiders. Rather, these groups are defined by their belonging to an organized collectivity (p.48). In this sense, the Tzeltal society is organized today much as it has always been. Nowadays, almost a third of a million people speak Tzeltal as their first or second language. Bilingualism in Spanish is common among the Tzeltal. Cultural variation is evident among communities in their dialect, dress, religious and social rituals. Yet, the Tzeltal have many things in common with their Mayan ancestors. Houses are simple, mainly containing nuclear families whose life revolves around agriculture, the commercial trade of livestock and crafts. The agriculture production includes maize, beans and squash; the commercial trade of livestock includes chickens, pigs and sheep; and the crafts include weaving, sewing, embroidery and pottery (Waddington, 2008). However, for the Tzotzil indigenous group things have not remained the same. Although over a quarter of a million individuals from the Tzotzil group live in the Highlands of central Chiapas, they are now abandoning their land (The Peoples of the World Foundation, 2016). According to Waddington (2008), this is the same global trend among rural peoples in every part of the world and it is driven mainly by economic necessity. Nevertheless, in the case of the Tzotzil group this response is not always voluntary.

Indigenous groups in the Highlands of Chiapas are being dispossessed of their land by force, and with the consent and active participation of the Mexican government. It is ironic that this process is driven by present-day occupation and possession of the very land that was first stolen from them in Colonial times, then returned to them through the Agrarian Reform of the mid-20th century (Waddington, 2008). It is within this context, that for the Tzeltal and Tzotzil groups, land cannot be seen as a commodity or an object of private property. A sense of belonging to the land and the responsibility for its care is understood as a collective value within these groups. In the same fashion, their collective sense, which arose from the shared ownership of one territory, goes beyond the common activities performed by a single family, and rather is defined by the activities of the group as a whole. Consequently, the group exhibits an intricate web of generalized knowledge, diversified activities and essential specializations in order to carry life out with a sense of autonomy.

Since part of the land tenure is communal, the traditional social organization of the Tzeltal and Tzotzil groups is marked by alliances that result in rights and obligations within their communities; for example, the caring of vegetable gardens by women while men farm the land. In addition, there is *tequio*, which includes: the naming of communal representatives (officials responsible for community property) or municipal (community) secretaries, to assign and organize duties like repairing roads, building houses, schools, organizing a traditional ceremony or anything that the community may need. These rights and obligations are governed by principles of solidarity, harmony, awareness, respect, assembly and unity, which are expressed in institutions such as the family and the community board. Even though, there are members of the group with private land, the

sense of community within the Tzeltal and Tzotzil groups creates opportunities for collaboration in the communal land. Therefore, the interrelationships between the members of these groups, within their family, their social and natural environments are a means by which the identity of their group is strengthened. All of this translates in to *comunalidad*, as outlined in Chapter 2.

According to Gossen (1999), identity is understood for the Tzotzil group as a relational phenomenon, which does not limit relationships among members of the same group, but rather coexists with individuals of different groups and external entities. In this sense, not only is the formation of social capital given within the household, but it is also through the relationships with other cultures and groups that these groups are able to develop a social network that is strengthened over time. For the Tzeltal group, this relational phenomenon is what gives meaning to their identity because it is through the interaction with other groups that they are able to differentiate themselves in ways that make them unique. Furthermore, the Tzeltal group, as stated by Gómez Muñoz (2004), shows that in this interaction there is an “us” that, without the “other”, makes no sense to act as a collective body. Along similar lines, Nash (2001) comments on the position of indigenous groups towards globalization, as they consider it as a new version of a dominant system they need to counterattack with their own cultural resources and cleverness, creating alternatives within the process of globalization and adapting to external culture and conditions, rather than further isolating themselves.

Indigenous peoples have responded to the challenges of globalization by seizing their cultural precepts of caring for the land, their ethnic forms of social organization, division of labour and the skills they have acquired in their daily lives. It is worth

commenting that their lives take place in two parallel worlds that complement each other so as to strengthen their identity; the inner place within their communities and the external space within the global process of which they are now part of.

This response, however, may not be the only one for all indigenous groups. For some, the insertion in the global process, or simply the adaptation to new organizational forms that are promoted by the government, have meant lethargy for those groups that can be expressed as *dependency* on public welfare provided by the State. This situation of dependency may create, although unconsciously, an idea that their living conditions should be improved by state intervention, and not by their own effort.

Mr. Miguel Osuna, a member of *Unión Majomut*, and also a member of the Tzeltal indigenous group, surprised me while I was interviewing him about the conditions of welfare and government assistance in his community. He comments:

I do not receive any help from the government, and this is not because I can't but because I don't want to. I don't like to depend on the government and its silly program 'Oportunidades', or God knows what it is called now. They don't give the people what they really need or what is fair, neither do they see us as equals but rather they give us whatever they want, and that is undignified and disrespectful to us. We, the people, don't deserve that (M. Osuna, interview, January 29, 2016)

There are some situations within the current role of global dynamics that correlate with the ontology and ideology of these indigenous groups, but there are some other situations that make them struggle with their own perspective of how life is supposed to be. For example, the idea of always seeking a reward, and when that reward is not received then

they perceived it as not worth the effort. By contrast, for Mr. Osuna, government aid is equivalent to ‘charity’ or the receiving of money that they have not worked to earn; it represents an offense to their integrity. Furthermore, alongside the paternalistic role of the state, the idea of seeing themselves as needy and even as being materialistic consumers has been posited in the mind of the indigenous groups, and, at the same time, this situation has represented a humiliation and an offense to their collective identity.

While carrying-out the field work for this research, I noticed that some members of the community were suspicious about sharing personal information; their answers were short and without much detail regarding some of the dynamics within their communities. However, when I asked about the deficiencies regarding coffee production, personal needs or their economic situation, they answered with detailed responses and sometimes contradicted some of their previous statements. It is worth mentioning that not all interviews followed this pattern. By no means has this statement tended to demonstrate that coffee producers or small-scale peasants do not have needs or difficulties that must be covered. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that some of them seem to reflect values that are far from the original precepts of the Tzeltal groups, including with respect to work, identity and self-motivation.

4.2 Introduction: From Auto-Consumption to Accessing Global Markets

For decades, Chiapas has been the poorest state in Mexico with the highest rates of poverty, extreme poverty and marginalization (CONEVAL, 2011, 2012). Furthermore, this region, according to its inhabitants, has had numerous political, social and economic problems due to constant injustice, misery, inequality and discrimination.

In January 2015, the former Governor of Chiapas, Manuel Velasco Coello, stated that the government of Chiapas was carrying out policies regarding social and human development to effectively tackle extreme poverty, marginalization and social inequality. According to Governor Velasco these policies have contributed to protecting and promoting the quality of life within the households of Chiapas (Martínez, 2015). Despite this statement made by the Governor, the data presented by SEDESOL (2013) and CONEVAL (2011) regarding the social and economic situation of Chiapas, shows that this situation has not improved significantly since 2010. In 2015, Chiapas was still the poorest state in Mexico with the highest rate of people living in extreme poverty, reaching up to 629,200 individuals living in this condition, 37% of the total population, and in communities like Chenalhó, for instance, this percentage goes up to 72.3% of its total population (CONEVAL, 2011; SEDESOL, 2013).

The situation described above allows searching for new paradigms within indigenous groups, leading to productive and commercial alternatives such as organic farming and fair trade, using self-determination and proactivity as their main weapons. The activities performed within the indigenous communities and the value posited on their land are some of the determining factors for the process of reconfiguration of their agricultural production system, thus generating an alternative trade mechanism.

Organic farming and fair trade maintain their success based on the differentiation of the goods produced under these production and trade schemes and on the value of the labour behind these goods that the market assign to them. It is within this context that the next section presents an overview of the neoliberal transition in Mexico to further

contextualize the situation of the coffee sector and its impact on the life of small-scale producers that currently find themselves within the global dynamics.

4.2.1 The neoliberal transformation.

In the case of Mexico, neoliberalism begins with the breaking of the prevailing model for more than 50 years: a model of economic growth, import substituting industrialization, inward development and mixed economy. From the 1930s until the late 1980s, import substituting industrialization (ISI)⁵² policies were adopted by most nations in Latin America, including Mexico. It was argued that this model would reduce vulnerability in the periphery to international economic crises, lead to greater increases in productivity and incomes, and reduce unemployment, thereby removing one of the causes of low wages in the periphery, and avoid further deterioration in its commodity terms of trade (Kay, 1991, p.38). Nevertheless, something that was not taken into consideration was the inherent inability of the ISI model to sustain itself, and by the end of the 1960s, “the global capital system was falling into disarray” (Harvey, 2007, p. 27), especially after the capital accumulation crisis of the 1970s, which resulted in dramatic unemployment and inflation. Consequently, Mexico’s embracing of neoliberalism ended

⁵² ISI was an attempt by countries of the global South to break out of the world division of labour, which had emerged in the 19th century, and the early part of the 20th century. Division, in which Latin America and most countries of Asia and Africa, specialized in the export of food and raw materials, while importing manufactured goods from Europe and the United States. Therefore, the model of Import substitution consisted of establishing domestic production facilities to manufacture goods, which were formerly imported. It follows that all countries which industrialized after Great Britain, went through a stage of ISI; that is, all passed through a stage where the larger part of investment in industries was undertaken to replace imports. ISI would come to a close when most investment was channeled towards the construction of capacity to produce for new incremental demand (Baer, 1972, pp. 95-96). For further reading in this topic please see *Import Substitution and Industrialization in Latin America: Experiences and Interpretations* by Werner Baer.

a fifty-year experience with State-directed industrialization.

In the early 1980s a new model emerged as an opportunistic response to the failure of ISI in México. Neoliberalism aimed to reorder the global economy in favour of the capitalist class (Veltmeyer, 2011; Harvey, 2007). Hence, for the past three decades, neoliberal promoters defended their policies by arguing that neoliberalism was the reason for East Asia's rapid and persistent economic development (Hart-Landsberg, 2002). They did so even though most East Asian countries followed policies drastically different from those promoted by the IMF and the WB (Harvey, 2007, p. 33). Conversely, when the crisis of 1997 and 1998 shook East Asian countries' economies, neoliberal advocates disowned their 'star actors', attributing their economic problems to the fact that their economies were distorted by favouritism and the lack of an accurate application of neoliberalism (Hart-Landsberg, 2002). While the supporters of neoliberalism were avoiding a critical self-evaluation, they also started to search for new 'success' stories.

In 1990 Mexico consolidated neoliberalism as its strategy to overcome its economic instability, and became neoliberalism's new 'darling'. Additionally, the Mexican political class has fervently embraced globalization and the Free Trade Area of the Americas initiative, and from 1996 to 2000 Mexico enjoyed five successive years of 'growth', a period when most third world countries suffered from stagnation or outright recession (Veltmeyer, 2011). As a consequence, Mexico's exports as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose from 15 percent in 1993 to 33.5 percent in 1999, and the share of manufactures in total exports soared from 28 percent to 85 percent over the same period (Hart-Landsberg, 2002).

Enough time has passed to attempt a preliminary assessment of the successes and

failures of market reforms, and to look at likely sources of new ideas in the future. However, the Mexican government's first step in the process of neo-liberalization was to reduce public spending, which drove the economy into recession from 1982 to 1986. The economic contraction succeeded in generating the large trade surpluses needed to make debt payments (Otero, 2006). The following step that the government took was the launch of a major privatization program, going from 1,212 firms and entities controlled by the state in 1984, to 448 by December of 1988 (Hart-Landsberg, 2002).

During the late 1980s the government started to reduce trade restrictions in order to decrease the cost of imported inputs and promote export-oriented growth. Mexico joined the GATT, and as tariffs were reduced and import licenses were eliminated, many manufacturing firms fell into bankruptcy. In 1989 Mexico was still in need of foreign exchange, consequently the government initiated a sweeping liberalization of its foreign investment regulations, by annulling measures that had prevented majority foreign ownership, and these opened areas that had previously been closed to foreign investors (Gwynne & Kay, 2000).

In the early 1990s the Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari made sweeping changes to the economy, by implementing reforms around the principles of privatization, free trade and deregulation. Most importantly for the purposes of this research were the changes made to Article 27 of the Constitution and corresponding changes to the Agrarian Law which were meant to open the door to the privatization of the *ejido*⁵³. This culminated in NAFTA (Bradford, 2006), which came into effect on

⁵³ An *ejido* is a land-tenure institution, designed after the Mexican Revolution so as to redistribute lands to mestizo peasants (Otero & Bartra, 2008). Indigenous Communities are another institutional form of land

January 1, 1994, the same day that the Zapatistas made their appearance on the international stage, as a response to these changes.

Although the promoters of neoliberal reforms promised progress and economic benefits for all, what we have seen is high and stagnating levels of inequality and poverty. In this regard, institutions like the WB, the IMF and the WTO, the principal promoters of the neoliberal model, like to be seen as neutral development agencies that facilitate, with a set of policies, the development process (Veltmeyer, 2011). However, through funding projects and regulating trade, they help to create structural conditions to control the dynamics of the world economy in such a way as to serve the long term interests of a particular class: the capitalist class (Veltmeyer, 2011, p. 94).

The implementation of the neoliberal model pushed Mexico in a different direction far from the one it had expected; for example the GDP only grew 1.7% on average from 1983 to 1997, and at the same time the population grew 2.2% on average, which means that the GDP did not grow enough to meet the population's needs (Morales, 1998). Agricultural production only grew 1% in the same period of time (Ibid, 1998). Subsequently, the country has had to import growing quantities of agricultural products, mainly food, which translates into growing food dependency, the opposite of food sovereignty.

As a result of the decrease in support for small scale farming, growing numbers of people left the countryside, reflecting an almost inexistent growth in the agriculture sector, which was only 0.8% in the same period of time (1993-1999) (Morales, 1998). Thus, all the organizations that were working closely with governmental institutions in

tenure in Mexico, similar to ejidos. The former was created via the process of "restitution" in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution; the latter, via "dotation" to landless peasants.

productive projects had to restructure their efforts in accordance with the new conditions or take the risk of disappearing. It is within this reality that by the end of the 1980s, most of the state agricultural agencies, including INMECAFE (being of particular interest for the focus of this thesis), were dismantled or cut back sharply as part of the new neoliberal policies. These actions had serious consequences for small-scale farmers, especially for those in remote areas like the Highlands and *La Selva Lacandona* in Chiapas, where small-scale coffee producers had depended on INMECAFE for technical assistance, credit, transport and processing (Collier as cited in Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 63).

Neoliberal policies have had adverse consequences for small-scale producers, and benefitted only a reduced number of people, mainly large producers immersed in export activities. On the one hand, there are urban centers like Monterrey, Guadalajara and the Federal District that act as economic centers of “development”; on the other hand, there are states such as Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero that act as the “periphery” of this neoliberal model, where more than 75 percent of its inhabitants live in poverty (Morales, 1998). Consequently, the withdrawal of government support, the privatization of institutions and the increase in poverty and inequality characterize the context in which small-scale farmers throughout Mexico have been forced to reshape their activities. The next section analyzes the changes faced by the coffee sector, in Chiapas, since the neoliberal transition in México.

4.2.2 The historical background of the coffee sector in Chiapas: Before and after the neoliberal transformation.

The neoliberal structural adjustments applied to Mexico required several adjustments in the living conditions of people, prompting different responses from peasants, including autonomous development, organic farming and fair trade (Tetreault, 2011). The rise of coffee production in Chiapas, particularly in the Highlands region, is an example of this kind of adaptation.

Originating in the province of Kaffa in Ethiopia, coffee cultivation has spread all over the world, including Chiapas. Here the coffee sector starts with the story of land ownership, and it was at the end of the 19th century that former Governor Emilio Rabasa Estebanell approved a law to transform all communal lands into private property. The lands that once were communal now were sold at a very low price to foreign investors and landlords; for speculation and for extending the frontier of commercial cattle ranching. By 1908 there were sixty-six coffee farms in Chiapas. It is worth noting that the labour they hired, for working on these new coffee farms, were indigenous peasants that were expelled from those lands (Martínez-Torrez, 2006, p. 51).

The appropriation of coffee cultivation by the indigenous farmers is associated with the social transformations that stemmed from the 1910 revolutionary movement, as well as their liberation from the coffee farms and the land reform process. Because of their crucial role in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), peasants and indigenous farmers were rewarded with new land deeds. Indeed, it was with the take-over by peasants of the Veracruz and Oaxaca coffee plantations that small-scale coffee production began in Mexico (Hernández, 1996). The post-revolutionary land reform was based on a concept of social property, distinct both from private property and public lands and after

the Mexican Revolution and the agrarian reform in 1914, a partial restitution of lands was carried out for indigenous communities through the creation of ejidos.

It is worth pointing out that it was not until Lázaro Cárdenas's Government (1934-1940) that land reform really got underway. Around that time, the workers liberated from the coffee farms in the *Soconusco* region returned to their indigenous communities in the Highlands, bringing the agronomic practices of the coffee farms with them (Martínez-Torres, 2006, pp. 51-53). The Tzeltal and Tzotzil indigenous people who worked on the coffee farms took coffee seedlings with them and planted them on their new land.

The members of *Unión Majomut* tell that their parents brought the coffee seeds to the region by hiding them, and that it was not an easy thing to do. They say that “the owners of the coffee farms did not want to share the seeds because in that way they would make sure that they were the only ones able to cultivate them, but we wanted to try to free ourselves from them, and maybe we could have a better life too, based on the cultivation of that *golden seed*” (Unión Majomut, 2013, p. 12). As indigenous peasants began to produce coffee for the market, intermediaries appeared, known in Mexico as “*coyotes*”, to buy their coffee and to commercialize it. It was from that moment on (1960s-1970s) that the indigenous peasants began to seriously produce coffee (Alejos & Martínez, 2007; Martínez-Torres, 2006).

Thus, once the appropriation of coffee cultivation was complete in the Highland region of Chiapas, the National Indigenous Institute (INI), which advocates for the development of the indigenous groups and improvements in their living conditions, became the main governmental agency promoting the adoption of coffee as a possible

way out of extreme poverty. INMECAFE was one of the most successful state-run agricultural initiatives during this period (1970s–1980s). It played a key role in the development of the coffee sector in Chiapas. By offering plants and providing financing, technical assistance, and a guaranteed market, INMECAFE promoted very strong peasant entry into the coffee sector, especially for the indigenous farmers that inhabited zones with favourable geographical characteristics (Martínez-Torres, 2006; Fridell, 2007).

It is worth pointing out that until 1990, coffee exports were the third greatest source of foreign trade for Mexico; representing 3% of total exports, and 42% of total agricultural exports (Pérezgrovas, Cervantes & Bernstein, 2001, p. 2). This “golden era” of coffee was because of the favourable conditions that characterized international markets, supported by producer and buying countries and administered by the *International Coffee Organisation* (ICO)⁵⁴.

During 1962 and 1989 INMECAFE was by far the principal buyer and exporter in Mexico (Renard, 1999). However, the ICO agreements broke down in 1989, when a glut on the world market caused coffee prices to fall to less than half of their previous value (Pérezgrovas, Cervantes & Burstein, 2001, p.3). The international price of coffee fell from US\$1.10/lb. in June 1989 to \$0.70 in October 1989; the price continued to fall to \$0.48/lb. in September 1992 (Ibid, 2001, p.34).

In the meantime, the Mexican government, consistent with its own neoliberal economic policy, was determined to cut back state intervention in the sector. Hence, as

⁵⁴ The International Coffee Organization (ICO) was established in 1963 when the first International Coffee Agreement (ICA) entered into force in 1962 for a period of five years, and it has continued to operate under successive Agreements negotiated since then (ICO, 2016). For further information, see: http://www.ico.org/icohistory_e.asp?section=About_Us#sthash.zg1cGEQh.dpuf

part of the liberalization of the Mexican economy⁵⁵, in 1989 INMECAFE was disbanded and the expenditures intended to support the coffee sector were drastically reduced. Soon after, in 1990, the *Aseguradora Nacional Agrícola y Ganadera* (ANAGSA), which offered insurance against natural disasters, was closed and the *Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural* (BANRURAL), which offered credits, was cut back (Pérezgrovas, 1998).

Therefore, structural adjustments and the liberalization process produced the following changes within the global dynamics of the coffee sector: the international market started to sell coffee for less than 80% of its production costs; the market was in the hands of the buyers; many brokers and exporters fell into bankruptcy (from 1,100 exporters registered in 1985, only 103 remained in 1995); public programmes offering credit, training, technical assistance, and research and development were cut; internationally, Mexico lost market share to other coffee-producer countries; between 1989 and 1995 coffee production declined by 6.6%; and the social impacts of this became evident; for example, migration increased from coffee-producing areas to urban or non-agricultural-producing areas, and school-aged children had to look for work, to help households meet their needs (Pérezgrovas, Cervantes, & Burstein, 2001; Celis et al, 1991; Renard 1999).

In the same fashion, after the coffee crisis of 1989-1992, the adoption of coffee cultivation by indigenous people, as members of producer organizations, is a sign of the adaptations that they had to make, in an effort to face the challenges brought on by structural adjustments. In contrast to the large-scale producers that currently compete for

⁵⁵ A further explanation of this economic liberalization is presented in Section 2.2.1.

a place in the market, small-scale indigenous producers fight to achieve a better quality of life and meet their basic needs such as food, clothing and housing.

Cobo and Paredes (2009) claim that the peasant teleology (mainly the indigenous teleology) is presided by their *well-being* and not only by their monetary profit. Hence, the prototypical coffee producer does not seek to maximize his or her profits but to improve his or her quality of life, and these are not the same thing, even though they may partially coincide (Cobo & Paredes, 2009, p.7). In this sense, coffee production has been the means that the Tzeltal and Tzotzil indigenous groups of Chenalhó, through *Unión Majomut*, have adopted to be able to fulfill their basic needs and improve their quality of life.

By adapting to changes within the global dynamics, particularly those affecting the coffee sector, indigenous groups have diversified their productive activities in farming and ranching; without abandoning production of traditional crops (maize, beans and squash) for auto-consumption; they now produce cash crops for global markets.

4.2.3 The beginning of a new dynamic between the *people of the land*⁵⁶ and the coffee cultivation process.

Before the establishment of coffee cultivation in the indigenous communities of Chiapas, the family economy was supported by the agricultural system known as *milpa*⁵⁷ and periodic entry into the workforce, principally in the *Soconusco* coffee area. The

⁵⁶ This term is used by Desmarais (2002), who refers to ‘capital’s other’, that is, actors who are opposed to capitalism and/or fight to reaffirm their own identity and determination.

⁵⁷ The milpa is an integrated multi-crop plot, dominated by corn, and including beans, squash, peppers, and various vegetable greens and medicinal plants. The milpa is designed to provide food for the family; it is not normally a productive system intended for a market outlet (Pérezgrovas, Cervantes, Burstein, 2001, p. 44)

migration to the *Soconusco* coffee area was carried out during the harvest season and by the time the indigenous peasants that worked in the coffee farms returned to their communities, it was time to plant the milpa.

According to Celis (2001), coffee cultivation is distinguished from the other farming sectors because small-scale producer organizations have a larger presence; a relative autonomy and plurality as well as a constant interaction with the State in the establishment of public policies for its sector; and a major presence of indigenous people composing the producer organizations. These characteristics have allowed coffee producers to explore new markets so as to compensate for the volatility of coffee prices and to secure their permanence within the coffee sector as well as to secure their families' well-being.

Emphasizing the need for adaptation, Celis (2001) observes that the way in which coffee producers come together has been transformed, from those organizations with an intense institutional base to more autonomous organizations. Therefore, Celis (2001) identifies, within the coffee sector, three forms of association: national, regional and local organizations.

The first form of association is the national association. In this case, Fridell (2007) describes that the sector, at a national level, was managed by the State; thus, spreading coffee cultivation as far as it could be cultivated within the country. The motivation for the State to do this was, in the first place, to keep control and power and, secondly, to promote coffee cultivation because of the great financial gains that this sector represented to the Mexican economy.

Moreover, under the presidency of Luis Echeverria (1970-1976), INMECAFE and the *Nationals Peasant's Confederation* (CNC) organized small coffee producers into small cells called *Economic Units for Production and Marketing* (UEPCs). These units were designed, without a recognized legal figure, to distribute state-provided credit and technical assistance, and to organize marketing and processing (Fridell, 2007, pp.176-177). Subsequently, through the UEPCs, a technological package was promoted, based on the Green Revolution, and oriented to monoculture production that requires the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

The second form of association, the regional organizations, appeared in Chiapas in the 1980s when the *Committees of Community Planning* (CoCoPla) were established with the collaboration of the INI, which became the main agency promoting the adoption of coffee within indigenous communities as a possible way out of extreme poverty. These two institutions had three main objectives: to give technical assistance to coffee producing indigenous communities; to improve their productive infrastructure; and to evaluate their social conditions and promote development projects within them (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p.53).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, INMECAFE was disbanded. This was not due to the protests of small-scale producers, but rather because of the spread of neoliberal reforms at the international and national levels. Through the years that President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) was in power, the implementation of neoliberal reforms was spread throughout the productive sectors in the country, including the agricultural sector. These neoliberal reforms put an end to the government's constitutional commitment to land reform, paved the way to the privatization of the *ejido*, curtailed

credit to small farmers, eliminated agricultural subsidies, and led to NAFTA (Fridell, 2007, p. 179). As the State withdrew, small-scale producers were left in a vulnerable and weak negotiating position. On the one hand this new situation represented an opportunity for the local intermediaries, the *coyotes*, to take advantage of the vulnerability of small producers. On the other hand, as Fridell states

[The] decline of the PRI's authoritarian, corrupt, clientelist, one-party state opened up new space for small producers to organize free from direct corporatist rule (Fridell, 2007, p. 180).

In this regard, Fox (2007, pp. 73-75) argues that this freedom granted to small producers provided local communities more space to enhance their "associational autonomy", where individuals are able to organize so as to defend their own interests and identities without fear of external intervention or punishment.

In this vein, while the State withdrew from all the productive processes of coffee cultivation, it continued to provide a certain degree of credit and technical support to small producers through a number of state agencies, such as the INI, the *Direct Rural Support Program* (PROCAMPO), the *National Solidarity Program* (PRONASOL) and state and national coffee councils. While it is true that these agencies did not provide the same support that was given before by the State, they represented a concession to independent producers' groups that continued to pressure for support (Fridell, 2007, p.181).

In order to describe the third form of association, local organizations, Fridell (2007) sets out to demonstrate that the appearance of such organizations in the state of Chiapas was possible through the CNC, particularly with the use of credits for expanding

agricultural activity and its marketing. Similarly, the consolidation of a corporative structure within the small-scale producer organizations played a key role in the organizational structure of the coffee sector in Chiapas (Fridell, 2007, 179).

These interventionist actions made possible the creation of the State Coffee Council founded in October of 1992. Within this Council, the main representatives of the coffee sector were the Municipal Presidents of the productive regions. There was only one representative from the peasantry. It is worth noting that this additional member was elected by the Municipal President and not by the small-scale producer organizations.

The differences in power amongst them led to a predominance of large-scale producers, thereby motivating small-scale producers to join an alternative organization, the *National Council of Coffee Organizations* (CNOOC). The CNOOC was founded in the late 1980s with the aim of being an independent organization apart from the regional organizations and the government. After the government disbanded INMECAFE, the CNOOC took over the role of commercializing coffee produced by its members. Small-scale producers created a CNOOC chapter in the state of Chiapas (Martínez-Torrez, 2006, p. 66).

It was not until the late 1980s, when Gustavo Gordillo, Minister of agriculture, advocated for a peasant-managed production. Coffee producer organizations were part of this group of organizations, and they became for the most part a dynamic, and important sector among peasant organizations (Fox, 1994). As Martínez-Torres (2006) argues, the coffee sector was one of the most successful examples of production managed by peasant or small-scale producer organizations. In the same vein, the coffee crisis of 1989-1992, facilitated the emergence of the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, since a portion of the

Zapatista social base was integrated by these same indigenous coffee farmers, who were left out of the reconfiguration of the coffee market, due to the privatization of INMECAFE, before it was dismantled (Collier, 1994 as cited in Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 66).

It was within this context that there were a number of organizations emerging within Chiapas in the 1980s-1990s; some of them are: the organization of *Indígenas de la Sierra Madre de Motozintla* (ISMAM), founded in 1987, which is a society of social solidarity that works with an integral development model; The Unión de Ejidos Lázaro Cárdenas in the Soconusco region, founded when INMECAFE was the main buyer and when the CNC the main peasant organization; Unión de Ejidos de la Selva, formed by Tojolabal and Tzeltal indigenous groups; the Sociedad Cooperativa Tzotzilotic Tzobolotic, formed when fifteen communities quit the Unión Pajal Yakaltik, created in the 1970s, and divided in 1994 by the Zapatistas rebellion; and MutVitz, formed after the Zapatista uprising in 1994 (Martínez-Torres, 2006, pp. 95-109). It is worth mentioning that these organizations are the major indigenous producer organizations in Chiapas, alongside the organization which forms the core of the case study for this research: *Unión Majomut*.

4.3 Conclusions

In summary, over the past 70 years, and especially over the past 30 years, the Mexican Government has given priority to the needs of capital, theoretically justified by the premise that economic growth would overcome the developmental problems of Mexico (Tetreault, 2001, p. 84). Following this line of argumentation Tetreault states that

there are six trends of the past 30 years that have resulted from this focus on capital: for the economy to grow slowly in the long run, interrupted by periodic crises; for an ever larger part of the economy to be controlled by foreign investors; for the number of Mexican billionaires to increase; for income disparity to gradually worsen over time; for poverty and extreme poverty to worsen during and prior to times of economic crisis, resulting in a gradual worsening over time; and for the environment to continue to deteriorate (Ibid, 2001, pp. 84-85).

In this regard, Bonfil (1989) argues that there is a generalized sense of frustration by the Mexican people, and moreover, by its indigenous groups that results from the betrayal of illusions to live in a better off country, and the discontent of the people is more visible than ever before (p. 222). This is the current reality of the indigenous groups in the Highlands of Chiapas.

It is within this context that the interaction that indigenous communities have promoted with other cultures and organizations has become a strategy to strengthen their economy and improve their quality of life and to not isolate themselves. In this way, the task of seeking alternatives and solutions is performed from the inside of their communities and not from the outside. This is done without neglecting what the problems are, but rather by taking them as the starting points to be transformed and developed. While the results may not be the best in all situations, this kind of interaction is worth trying because it can result in successful experiences. This is suggested in the case of the producers' organization, *Unión Majomut* that will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

A case study of *Unión de Productores Orgánicos Beneficio Majomut, S.P.R. de R.L.*: Development by the People and for the People.

“Those who have a 'why' to live,
can bear with almost any 'how'.”

Viktor E. Frankl

This chapter describes the experience of *Unión Majomut*, in the Highlands of Chiapas. Its main objective is to present the results of my field research and to analyze the extent to which *Unión Majomut* plays a central role in encouraging the practice of organic farming and facilitating market access through fair trade for its members. It also attempts to answer one of the research questions, that is, whether this role has been key to improving the quality of life of its members in aspects such as housing, food self-sufficiency, better incomes or some sort of financial security and self-determination. Because of the relatively short time that I had in the field and due to other restrictions mentioned in the Methodology section of the Introduction to this thesis, the empirical evidence that is brought together in this chapter to answer this question is mostly qualitative, based on a review of the organization's documents, interviews and direct observation.

The field research was carried out by adhering to three principles of data collection, outlined by Yin (2009): 1) the use of multiple sources of evidence, as described in the methodology section of Chapter 1, by the use of triangulation between different sources of evidence in order to make a stronger case study and more reliable conclusions; 2) the creation of a case study database, which consists of fieldwork notes as

well as documents and narratives stemming from the interviews; and 3) the use of a *chain of evidence* in order to maintain consistency in the findings as well as in the analysis of the overall goal of the research. Similarly, as a general analytic strategy, the theoretical lenses discussed in Chapter 2 were considered—mainly with regard to civil-society and collective-action theories—and contrasted with a descriptive regional framework where the case study took place.

This chapter is divided into three main sections, apart from the introduction and the concluding sections. The first section outlines *Unión Majomut's* characteristics, its background, its decision-making process and the actors that constitute it, as well as the organization's internal functioning. Sections two and three present the synthesis of the findings and the analysis of the data gathered. In this regard, section two focuses on the research question regarding the role of the small-scale coffee producers organization, *Unión Majomut*, as a promoter of organic farming and market access through fair trade, and section three addresses whether there have been improvements in the quality of life of the members of the organization. It bears repeating that all of the names for people used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

5.1 *Unión Majomut*: A Story of 33 years of Survival and Struggle

5.1.1 *Unión Majomut*.

In the Highlands region in Chiapas, many producer organizations were formed. In 1980 and 1981 a number of local groups and coffee producers came together to demand that all project resources be given directly to the communities. Apparently, INMECAFE had a secret agreement with the intermediaries or *coyotes* in the town of Pantelhó, under which INMECAFE would suspiciously be closed on certain days so the *coyotes* could

buy all the coffee at a lower price than would have been offered to the producers (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 98).

This situation created a need for producers to build a storage shed to store members' produce. This new storage shed would provide a place for producers to leave their coffee cargo until the INMECAFE store "reopened", mainly for those producers that came from distant towns, to then be sold at a better price and not to the *coyotes*. Eighteen communities from two municipalities were selected to begin the negotiations with regional representatives, and in 1982 they agreed to build a storage shed in the town of Majomut, in Polhó, Chiapas (Martínez-Torres, 2006). A recognized legal incorporation was needed to receive the facility, so the Ministry of Agrarian Reform and Indigenous Affairs approved the creation of the *Union de Ejidos and of the Comunidades de Cafeicultores del Beneficio Majomut S. de R.I.* (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 99; Unión Majomut, 2013, pp.14 - 15). The main objectives of the organization were and still are:

1. To pursue the cultivation and commercialization of coffee and its derivatives on an international and national level.
2. To build, acquire, and establish industries and services, use renewable and non-renewable resources, distribute and commercialize its products, manage credits, and in general engage in all classes of industries, services, and rural activities.
3. To promote the economic improvement and material progress of its members, as well as the capitalization of the ejido and the community.

4. To carry out all economic or material transactions to improve the collective organization of work, as well as to increase crop productivity and use of available resources⁵⁸.

Mr. Miguel Osuna, one of the founding members of *Unión Majomut*, commented:

Our grandparents, fathers and mothers suffered a lot on the coffee farms. When they finally could bring coffee to our communities, they planted it and wished to be able to sell it, so as to have a little money, but it was difficult because in our communities nobody wanted to buy it, so they needed to carry it and go to other communities and municipalities to sell it. The *coyotes* visited every house, they weighed the coffee by litre or *almud*⁵⁹ and then they paid little to nothing for it. This was one of the main reasons for deciding to get together and build our organization, our *Unión Majomut* (Unión Majomut, 2013, p. 14; M. Osuna, interviewed, January 29, 2016).

Hence, in March 9, 1983, *Unión Majomut* was legally formed, and in 2011 it changed its name to *Unión de Productores Orgánicos Beneficio Majomut de S.P.R. de R.L.* The name of *Unión Majomut* came from the community Majomut, which means *place of birds* in Tzeltal and Tzotzil languages⁶⁰, and it is in Majomut where the storage shed and the Peasant Training Center are located.

Unión Majomut is comprised of 978 coffee growing members⁶¹, whom in average possess between 1 and 1½ hectares of land. These members are distributed in 35

⁵⁸ Data extracted from interviews, documents and flyers within *Unión Majomut* (J. Díaz, field work, January, 2016) and Martínez-Torres, 2006, specifically chapter 7: Majomut.

⁵⁹ Almud is a unit of volume, roughly equivalent to 4.63 litres (Collins Dictionary, 2016).

⁶⁰ Although the Tzotzil and Tzeltal are different languages, they share a number of linguistic similarities that make possible that *Majomut* has the same meaning in both languages.

⁶¹ Data retrieved from *Unión Majomut* records. On January 2016.

indigenous communities in the Highlands of Chiapas, which coincide with five municipalities (see figure 5.1):

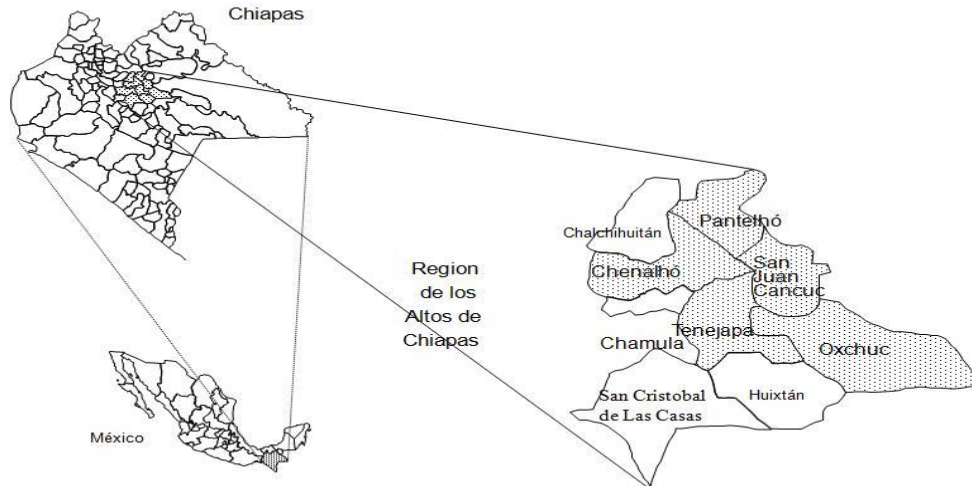


Figure 5.1. Zone of influence of Unión Majomut
Note: Reproduced from Unión Majomut. (2013). *30 aniversario de organización, trabajo, esfuerzo y calidad*. Chiapas, México: Unión Majomut.

Since 1993, *Unión Majomut* is a strictly organic coffee producer organization, where all its members are coffee producers for marketing purposes. Chenalhó is the municipality with the most members and Oxchuc is the municipality with the least (See table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Current membership of *Unión Majomut*

Municipality	No. of Producers	Percentage
Chenalhó	748	76.48%
San Juan Cancuc	157	16.05%
Tenejapa	37	3.78%
Pantheló	20	2.04%
Oxhuc	16	1.64%
Total	978	100%

Note: Prepared by the author, based on the data provided by La Unión Majomut's Administrator Mr. Federico García, February 4, 2016.

Membership is first given on a conditional basis to *transitional* members, on their way to becoming organic, since all coffee that is sold internationally and, part of what is

locally sold is organic. This fact is of common knowledge for all small-coffee producers in the region. So, although the coffee new members produce is not organic, these small-scale producers are allowed to enter *Unión Majomut* and gradually become organic coffee producers. *Unión Majomut* also has a small local and national market for coffee in transition. In this way, producers are not discouraged while waiting for their coffee to become organic, moreover they feel confident because they know their coffee will be sold for fairer prices. Then, after three seasons, and if the member has followed the proper measures to become organic and passed all its tests, the title of organic coffee producer is granted; the producer's coffee is then sold as organic, which permits a better income for his/her household. Mr. García, the Administrator of *Unión Majomut*, states that approximately 97% of the *Union's* members have an organic certificate, with only 3% in transition to become organic (F. García, interviewed, January 21, 2016).

It is worth noting that through the years *Unión Majomut* has faced tremendous setbacks. For example, in 1989, *Unión Majomut* went through a profound institutional crisis, mainly related with the coffee crisis provoked by plummeting international prices in the same year. With the dramatic fall in international coffee prices, some buyers that had purchased coffee from the cooperative went bankrupt and were not able to pay for the coffee already purchased (Pérezgrovas & Cervantes, 2002). At that time, the administration and the Executive Committee of *Unión Majomut* were forced to use the entire contingency fund that had been reserved for a crisis such as this: a total of 80 million pesos. The fund was distributed among all of the members, yet it was not enough. The situation was made even worse when there were members who received no payments at all despite the fact that they had delivered coffee to the organization. The communities

in all of the municipalities withdrew from the organization and demanded that the president of the Executive Committee be incarcerated, thinking that he had caused the crisis through fraud and embezzlement.

As a consequence, between 1989 and 1991 *Unión Majomut* had to start over. Some of the problems during these years included: the membership of the organization was greatly reduced; confidence was lost in the members who remained, resulting in disinterest in the organizational structures; the clients, who traditionally were buyers in the international market, no longer existed; and the remaining members decided that payments at the regional price should be received upon delivery of coffee. Initially, there was no fund to cover harvest costs, nor was there financing available from banks, the costs of inputs (fertilizer, insecticide, fungicide and herbicide) were higher than the profits—at this point of time *Unión Majomut* was not a strictly organic coffee producer organization—, and the infrastructure of the organization, machinery and vehicles were between bad and non-existent.

Faced with these difficulties, *Unión Majomut* began to improve services in the following ways: it developed relationships with other small-scale coffee producer organizations in the early 1990s; the internal mechanisms of discussion and democratic decision-making were strengthened to prevent the types of problems that had plagued the organization in the past; and the processes of commercial consulting, technical assistance and accounting were reinforced under two guiding principles: the formation of an autonomous technical team and the search for assistance from other like-minded small-scale coffee producer organizations (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 102; Pérezgrovas & Cervantes, 2002, p. 4).

The small-scale coffee producer organizations with which *Unión Majomut* had the most interaction at this time were La Unión de Ejidos de la Selva and UCIRI. Both of these small-scale coffee producer organizations were working in the fair trade market through Max Havelaar-Holland⁶² and had begun to participate in the organic market as well.

In 1990 and 1991, *Unión Majomut* worked with other small-scale coffee producer organizations at a regional level to form the Regional Coffee Development Program, sponsored by government agencies, including the Department of Agriculture and the INI.

Through this experience, *Unión Majomut* began to see the possibility of becoming part of the Max Havelaar system and of forming organic production work groups. In the visits that the representatives of *Unión Majomut* had made to other small-scale coffee producer organizations they had seen how these organizations had achieved higher prices and a better and more environmentally friendly production (Pérezgrovas & Cervantes, 2002; Unión Majomut, 2013).

In 1992, *Unión Majomut* suffered another setback when some organizations tried to divide the organization again. Nonetheless, it was in this year when the organization also focused on seeking new alternatives to face the crisis brought on by divisiveness and the disappearance of INMECAFE. One of the alternatives that *Unión Majomut* considered at the time was to promote the conversion from conventional farming technology to organic farming technology, on the communal lands of the *Unión Majomut* members (Martínez-Torres, 2006, p. 100).

⁶² Max Havelaar (Max Havelaar/FLO) was the first global Fair Trade label (Pérezgrovas & Cervantes, 2002).

It is worth mentioning that the transition to organic farming took less time than it did for other organizations, due to the generalized lack of economic resources among the members of *Unión Majomut*, which had prevented most of the producers from applying excessive amount of agrochemicals to their lands (Pérezgrovas, Marvey, Walter, Rodríguez, & Gómez, 1997). Currently *Unión Majomut* has the Mexican organic certificate CERTIMEX, the NOP for United States, BioSuisse for Suisse and UE for the rest of the European Union. Additionally, *Unión Majomut* has a fair trade certificate from FLO International, the Mexican Fair Trade symbol and the SPP label.

Throughout the years, *Unión Majomut* has been able to prevail. In 2016 it celebrated 33 years of organized work, survival and struggle for the permanency of its organization and its members. Since its foundation, the organization, through the work of the Technical Team and the Executive Committee, has actively promoted home improvement and community house building programs by seeking federal, local and international projects, which fit with the organization's values and capacity. It has promoted the production of basic grains for auto consumption by encouraging its members not to plant all their land with coffee, but rather to diversify; therefore, if profits from coffee sales are not sufficient to meet some of their basic needs, food will still be available. In this sense, they encourage self-sufficiency. Additionally, the organization has fostered women producers' organizations and has established a *Microbanco Campesino* (peasant micro-bank), responding to a petition of some of *Unión Majomut's* members.

Moreover, the set of struggles that *Unión Majomut* faced was what opened the organization to a range of political, ideological and cultural affiliations within its

membership. Its relationship with the Zapatista leadership is cordial; this is mentioned due to the fact that according to the organization's official documents all *Unión Majomut* members have no particular political affiliation, since economic and social interests are put ahead of politics (Majomut, 2013). Thus, there are members from all political parties, ideological and cultural affiliations who were not afraid to admit so when interviewing them.

This priority is further represented after the formation of the Zapatista autonomous community of Polhó, which is located in the municipality of Chenalhó. Furthermore, in the 1990s, 65% of *Unión Majomut's* member communities were part of the Zapatista movement, which has never prevented the organization to fulfill the main objectives of it being a pluricultural and integrative organization for everyone that wants to work (Martínez-Torres, interview, February 5, 2016).

Additionally, because the organization is relatively strong and has been encouraged and supported by other small-scale coffee producer organizations, *Unión Majomut* has a general policy of helping other, smaller and newer organizations to enter the market (this point will be further discussed below). The following sub-sections explore the decision-making process and the internal structure of *Unión Majomut*.

5.1.2 The Decision-making Process of *Unión Majomut*.

Unión Majomut is an indigenous organization, which employs a democratic decision-making process. Some members of the organization state that they are proud of being part of an inclusive organization where all kind of ideologies, backgrounds and traditions enrich the quality of the decision-making process. In this regard, Mr. Juan

López commented: “We don’t care about politics or religion, at the end we all are part of the same family, we care about working together” (J. López, interview, January 29, 2016).

Thus, for *Unión Majomut*, the social participation of all members is very important when decisions are made. Mr. Jorge Cota, the Operational Coordinator of the technical team, comments:

To be able to keep going, our decisions are based on the organization and transparency of the use and management of the resources in our work, on cooperation, mutual help and solidarity (J. Cota, interview, February 3, 2016).

The actors in the decision-making process are the General Members Assembly, the Community Assemblies, the Delegates Assembly, and the Administrative and Monitoring Council (see figure 5.2).

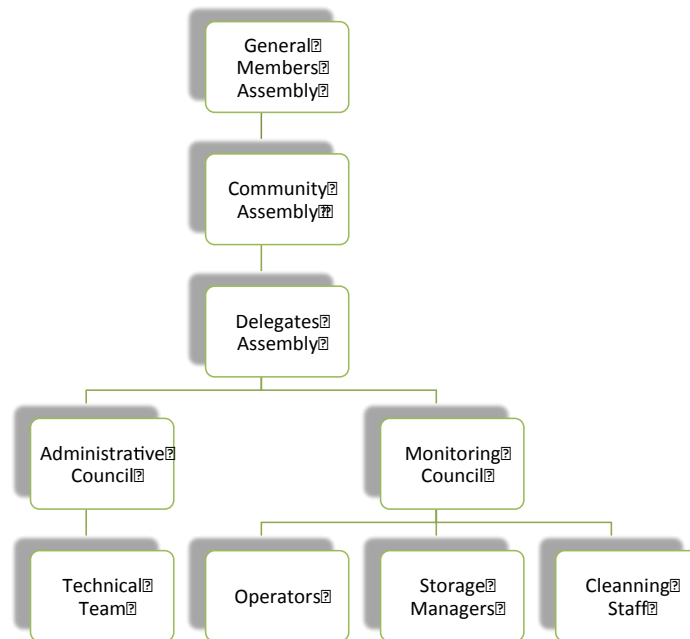


Figure 5.2 Operational Structure in the decision-making process, Unión Majomut.
Note: Prepared by the author. This chart was adapted from the internal documentation provided by Unión Majomut, 2016.

Their main responsibilities are:

a) General Members Assembly. This is the highest authority within the organization and it is comprised of all the members of *Unión Majomut*. The General Members Assembly gathers together every three years to elect the new Executive Committee, where every community presents one delegate or candidate for each position—president, treasurer and secretary—followed by an open vote by show of hands as opposed to secret ballot. The members prefer this process because it makes the voting visible, transparent and error-free; everybody can see and be sure of the result (Unión Majomut, 2013, p. 20).

b) Community Assemblies. The organization is composed of thirty-five communities, where women and men make decisions for the common well-being of all members. In every community, a representative is proposed who then takes the role of delegate among the thirty-five delegates of the *Delegates Assembly*.

c) Delegates Assembly. It is in the Delegates Assembly where the majority of agreements are made. Argumentation and discussion by members is presented as a way to improve the way things have been done, tackle difficulties and propose solutions for current problems. Additionally, new projects are suggested and voted on to decide which ones would benefit the organization and its members. One of the most important tasks performed by the Delegates Assembly is to reach an agreement regarding coffee prices and the fixed price to be paid per kilogram. Financial reports are presented as well as information regarding the amount of coffee collected, the names and number of buyers and the places where their coffee is sold. Also, it is within this space where the profits of

the previous year are disclosed (before expense deductions), the expenses of the same term are analyzed, and the upcoming expenses are discussed in order to determine if they can be diminished. Similarly, a surplus, if present, is distributed among all members as part of the remnant or price adjustment. Lastly, the use of the social premium is discussed and analyzed where it should be applied, according to the conditions established by FLO and the SPP (Unión Majomut, 2013, p.21).

d) Administrative and Monitoring Council. These councils are responsible for presenting the reports regarding financial and commercial information, as well as to report on all the operations performed by the organization. The administrative council is composed of a president, a secretary, and a treasurer (elected every three years at the General Members Assembly). This executive committee: makes sure that all the agreements taken in the Delegates Assembly are executed; represents the organization before government and non-governmental agencies; handles and signs the contracts that promote the marketing of their coffee; and convenes and leads the General Member Assemblies and Delegate Assemblies. For its part, the Monitoring Council is in charge of internal control and makes sure that the activities in the organization are performed according to the legal and social structures of *Unión Majomut*. A president, a secretary, and a representative from the members comprise the Monitoring Council.

One can notice in figure 5.2 the hierarchy of the General Members Assembly and how the effect of the internal decision-making process is also further contextualized within the operational part of the organization, which is explained in more detail in the next sub-section.

5.1.3 The Internal Organization of *Unión Majomut* and its Functions.

In the previous sub-section, the main actors in the decision-making process were described. In this sub-section the internal operational structure of *Unión Majomut* is presented and it is comprised of the following actors (see figure 5.3).

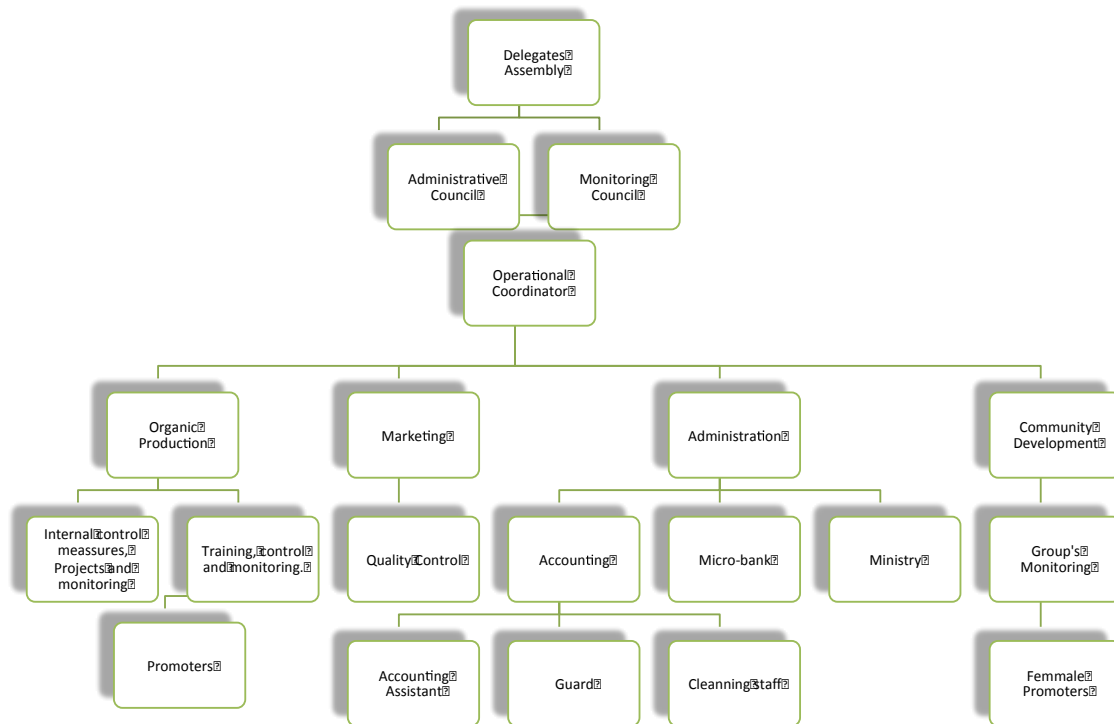


Figure 5.3 Operational oranzizational chart, Unión Majomut, 2016.

Note: Prepared by the author. This chart was adapted from the internal documentation provided by Unión Majomut, 2016.

One can notice the prevalence of the Delegates Assembly, denoting the importance of the social participation of the members. From it, the two councils are formed and at the same time, these councils create a new actor: the Operational Coordinator, who functions as a support to all the organizational activities, with the main responsibility to coordinate the different operational areas, which are divided into four important groups:

a) **Organic production.** This area is responsible for the training programs and projects that are promoted for coffee production. A technician and an agricultural engineer are part of this area and they provide technical assistance, training and follow-up with the development of the communities regarding organic production.

b) **Marketing.** The responsibility of this area is to make sure that the organization's commitments, regarding coffee exportation, are carried out properly and on time. This area also needs to monitor the coffee quality before making any arrangement with the buyers by implementing quality control measures.

c) **Administration.** The main objective of this area is to strategically plan the administrative activities and the financial resources so as to reach the marketing goals in each productive season.

d) **Community development.** This area is in charge of promoting women's participation by the formation of groups. These groups are responsible for producing food in a sustainable way, the usage of food and the capacity to produce it, all according to needs. Using a food sovereignty approach, the groups decide how to produce their food, taking turns to make sure the plants are growing well and determining when the crops are ready to be harvested. They share the harvesting task, and in the end the food produced is distributed among the groups. By doing this, the organization promotes the consumption of local fruits and vegetables and a diversified diet. Similar to this activity is the promotion of health and housing programs by the area of community development.

After 33 years of experience, *Unión Majomut* has brought together a number of different indigenous communities, from all five municipalities that comprise the organization, with a common objective: 'to work for a better future'. Moreover, the 33

years of ups and downs have resulted in valuable lessons to learn from, share and use as foundation for future years. In this sense, the next section presents the first part of the synthesis of the findings and the analysis of the data gathered: the role of *Unión Majomut*, as a promoter of organic farming and market access through fair trade, and the practice of these activities within the members of *Unión Majomut* living in Chenalhó, Chiapas.

5.2 *Unión Majomut* and its Impact on Organic Farming and Fair Trade

The small-scale coffee producers that live in the community of Chenalhó and who are members of *Unión Majomut* are 748 out of the 978 members comprising the organization. This community represents 76% of the total membership of the organization. This is an important fact to notice because the analysis of the data gathered, from the interviews conducted, suggests that the higher the enrolment of the community within the organization the stronger the commitment of all its members to protect, develop and preserve their land in the service of all the other members of the organization; firstly, for their own community, and secondly for the members of *Unión Majomut* living in other communities.

Out of the total interviewees, 86% were men and 14% women. All of them were from the Tzeltal indigenous group. 57% said they lived in common-law and 43% said they were married. The percentage of married couples is on the rise, I was told, due to the financial and technical assistance that the technical team provides to *Unión Majomut's* members to carry out the associated paperwork. It is worth noting that by having the

married marital status, provides some legal protection for women and children who are economically dependent on a male head of household, should anything happen to him.

The average age of the sample is 49 years old, and the average number of children per household is four. It was detected that 86% of the interviewees were literate; the 3rd year of junior high school was the highest level of education attained. However, the remaining 14% of the sample did not know how to read or write at all, having had no opportunity to go to school. All the interviewees speak Spanish, some of them only a basic level but sufficient to communicate. The majority of women are able to understand Spanish, some can speak it; however, they prefer to speak only Tzeltal or Tzotzil.

The members interviewed own between 1 and 4 hectares of land. Half is private property, 36% is communal land and 14% is part of an *ejido*. The main crop grown in the community is not coffee, although it is the one that brings in the most revenue (G. Meza, interview, February 3, 2016). The producers interviewed use the equivalent amount of land for the cultivation of coffee and for the cultivation of other staple-food such as corn, beans, peanuts, sugar cane, bananas, fruit trees, onions and tomatoes. One of the producers stated, “it is the coffee that gives us money, but it is also the land which gives us food; the technical team of the organization encourage us us to not only plant our land with coffee but also to plant other kind of trees and crops for our own consumption in between coffee plants” (M. González, interview, January 29, 2016).

In this sense, the main economic activity between the producers of Chenalhó is the cultivation and marketing of coffee. Approximately 85% of *Unión Majomut*'s coffee produced in Chenalhó is organic and only 15% is in transition stage 1 or 2. It is worth

mentioning that organic coffee is better paid than transition coffee, because of the amount of effort and time put in to converting traditional farming land into organic farming land.

5.2.1 Organic Farming and its Practice in the Communities.

Organic farming appears to provide economic, ecological and social benefits. While some members of *Unión Majomut* stated that they changed from traditional to organic farming practices because they were required to do so by the producers' organization, other members made this change on their own. For instance, one member of *Unión Majomut*, Mr. Eduardo Elias, commented:

By the year 1986, the government established a program, and this program gave chemical fertilizers and promoted this practice; but we saw our plants and it was not good for them or us. Besides this fact, this program did not give any training for the use of these chemicals and the people did not only use it on the land but also put it on the plant, thus the plants were burned, the land started to look bad and dry, and later on we couldn't plant anymore. Then, we realized that these measures were not good at all; so, we decided to get involved with organic farming, even though we did not know much about the organic practice. And we started to give the land only what it needed and nothing more, so we learned to produce not only better coffee but also better, cleaner and healthier vegetables for our consumption (E. Elias, interview, February 2, 2016).

As this quote suggests, some members of *Unión Majomut* recognize that the benefits to organic farming go well beyond the economic realm. In the same line of thinking, another member of *Unión Majomut*, Mr. Manuel González added:

In organic farming we don't need to go and buy any chemicals or poison for our land. Everything we need we have here and we can make our own compost and natural fertilizers, not only for the coffee but also for our corn and beans. Also our land looks prettier and it is a work that we, as farmers, are able to do (M. González, interview, January 29, 2016).



Figure 5.4 Mural found in the main office of *Unión Majomut*, in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas.
Note. Author's photograph.



Figure 5.5 Mr. Juan López from Pechiquil, Chenalhó, pruning a coffee plant.
Note. Author's photograph.

It was not until 1994 that *Unión Majomut* received the official certification to market its coffee as *organic*, and started receiving the economic benefits of this market. This event encouraged the members of the organization to further embrace organic farming; it was not long before those who refused to get involved in organic farming changed their mind (Unión Majomut, 2013, p. 31). The success of organic farming was not only related to the benefits this activity brought for the members, but it also had to do with the training, provided by the technical team, in organic practices by walking them through every step of the way. This training was of great importance due to the fact that, for several years, the communities were encouraged to use agrochemicals and fertilizers

as part of the agro-projects fostered by the Government as a result of the Green Revolution. As a result of such practices some producers were not familiar with organic practices anymore. In this sense, Mr. Jaime Soto commented:

The Organic Production Department and the Technical Team prepare workshops regarding organic farming, the use of organic waste and all of those things that we need to know for doing a better job in our lands, not only for coffee but also for our food (J. Soto, interview, January 18, 2016).

It is worth pointing out that these workshops and training sessions are meant to strengthen the knowledge that some of the producers already have, and in some cases, to introduce methods that they might not know or techniques that complement organic farming, for example: the provision of special areas to make compost, the identification of which plants or organic wastes are most suitable for rich compost or more recently the identification of diseases within coffee plants and how to deal with these plagues with organic methods. Thus, *Unión Majomut's* efforts have fostered the production of a high quality product, which has acquired an organic certification and brought small-scale coffee producers into the organic market. This, in turn, suggests that by reaching a higher quality in coffee production and entering the organic market, small-scale coffee producers have been able to enjoy the advantages that this market offers in terms of economic, social and environmental benefits.

The inclusion of *Unión Majomut's* small-scale coffee producers into organic farming practices demands the sum of all the *Unión's* members, both the Technical Team and the small-scale producers, so as to reach the quality required to receive the organic certification, which guarantees the quality of their coffee. The process of growing,

preparing and marketing coffee requires specific techniques, tools and skills that must be part of the practices carried out by the members of *Unión Majomut*.

Hence, the success of *Unión Majomut* will be based on how well these techniques, tools and skills are practiced by its members. *Unión Majomut* provides training, workshops, regular meetings and technical assessment related to organic farming, as Mr. Soto and Mr. Osuna mentioned in their comments above.

In this sense, the training is given in specific themes such as: seedling production and conservation of native seeds (endemic to the region); the cultivation of shade trees and fruit trees; alternative techniques for the conservation and improvement of the soil; climate-change issues; animal, plant and biodiversity conservation; disease and pest-infestation control; the use and production of compost and natural fertilizers; and so on.

It is worth mentioning that *Unión Majomut*, through the Technical Team, also encourages the integration of its members to be part of the 50 *communitarian promoters*, who are responsible for the internal control used to certify the organic production among the members of these communities. Therefore, in the case that a member of *Unión Majomut* from a specific community cannot attend a workshop, meeting or assembly, the communitarian promoter—designated to the member's community—is responsible for sharing and communicating what was taught during these sessions and for collecting the member's opinions and/or suggestions about the topics addressed. By promoting this kind of cooperation and responsibility, *Unión Majomut* fosters cohesion and partnership between all its members. It is important to mention that the position of the communitarian promoter is voluntary-based; hence, members who decide to be part of this team do so because they want to help to keep all members informed and to cooperate with those

members that cannot always attend meetings for diverse reasons, mainly due to health and transportation issues.

In fact, this kind of collaboration has led to the designing of a coffee tasting lab (see figure 5.7) that will provide the organization with its own specialist in this matter, who will be chosen and trained among the *Unión's* members. This project aims to cut the expenses of relying on external coffee tasters that sometimes are not available when buyers visit the organization, as well as to provide an additional service to the buyers and other small-scale coffee producer organizations of the region, in helping them to develop confidence and expertise in their own product.



Figure 5.6 Room where workshops, meetings and assemblies take place.
Note. Author's photograph.



Figure 5.7 New project: The building of a coffee tasting lab.
Note. Author's photograph.

Further to this collaboration, *Unión Majomut* provides a storage facility (see Image 5.8), the location of which was chosen because it was convenient for the members of all 5 municipalities. The storage facility has functional weights that are calibrated in front of each member (see figure 5.9). Overall, the storage facility provides the machinery not only necessary to receive the coffee beans but also to complete the process

until the coffee is selected (depending on its quality). As soon as the coffee is delivered, the producer is paid in accordance with the price agreement (see figure 5.10).

This process gives members an easy, relaxed and transparent transaction that translates into loyalty and trust between the Executive Committee, the Technical Team and the members that deliver their coffee in the storage facility. Moreover, when a member has difficulty to go and deliver his or her coffee to the storage facility—for reasons such as a health problem or natural disaster—*Unión Majomut* assists with a truck (see figure 5.11) to pick up the coffee from its members.



Figure 5.8 Storage facility.
Note. Author's photograph.



Figure 5.9 Weights and scales.
Note. Author's photograph.



Figure 5.10 Coffee classifications.
Note. Author's photograph.



Figure 5.11 Organization vehicle.
Note. Author's photograph.

In spite of all the facilities that *Unión Majomut* provides for its members, the main and more frequent problems that producers face are disease and pest control, due to the fact that, as organic producers, they are not allowed to use any kind of chemical on their plants. Climate change has exacerbated this problem, bringing one of the major problems in today's production: the *roya*, whose scientific name is *Hemileia vastatrix*.⁶³ This fungus has not only affected the volume and quality of the coffee but also the income of the producers, mainly because of the lack of organic solutions to eradicate it (see figure 5.12).



Figure 5.12 Plant infected with roya.
Note. Author's photograph.

Mr. Jaime Soto, member of *Unión Majomut*, commented:

Before, I used to harvest between 16 and 17 *bultos*⁶⁴, but I think this year I will harvest around six because of the *roya* (J. Soto, interview, January 18, 2016).

This issue with *Hemileia vastatrix* shows that in spite of the efforts made in order to ameliorate the current situation of the coffee farms, *Unión Majomut* has not been able to solve and come up with a definitive solution for the fungus plague. However, it is worth

⁶³ Roya or *Hemileia vastatrix* is a fungus that causes significant damage to coffee plants. It strips them of their leaves, leaving them without nutrients, and ultimately inhibits them from bearing fruit (Roya Recovery Project, 2016).

⁶⁴ One *bulto* equals approximately 59/60 kilograms.

pointing out that an isolated small-scale producer could not address this situation by himself because of the degree of specialization that it requires. These specific problems with *Hemileia vastatrix*, relate to climate change; therefore, the Technical Team of *Unión Majomut* is seeking alternative solutions by teaming up with other producer and government organizations.

Mr. Génaro Meza, the Engineer responsible for the area of organic production, commented that because of the problem with *Hemileia vastatrix*, some actions are being taken in order to help the members and their lands. One of these actions is the replacement of coffee plants. However, this alternative, which is promoted by government organizations, is not suitable for the small-scale producers because it will result in them losing all their actual production, not to mention that the lack of knowledge of different coffee plants and the impact that this will have on the quality of the coffee produced.

A second alternative that is being explored is the creation of a lab by the researchers of *El Colegio de la Frontera Sur* (ECOSUR), where they are carrying out studies testing different organic matters to discover a cure for *Hemileia vastatrix* that would also be suitable for other organic-coffee producers in the region. Mr. Génaro Meza added that within *Unión Majomut*, they are trying different techniques of soil conservation, cleaning and different mixes of organic fertilizers to reduce the impact that, mainly *roya*, is having on the members' production. He commented: "I hope these measures work long enough until a real cure or more permanent solution is available for us, because going back to the chemical fertilizers is out of the question" (G. Meza, interview, February 3, 2016).

These activities reflect how social capital in its utilitarian perspective, as scholars like Putnam (1995) and Coleman (1988) argue, serves as a tool, which allows individuals that form part of a group to act within a context conceived as complex for individual action. Therefore, the results of these actions impact all members and these results depend on the ability of the individuals to adapt their actions to what the social, economic and natural environment demands.

In this sense, coffee cultivation through organic-farming practices implies carrying out an amount of work that goes beyond the capacities of a single individual. Therefore, the process of organic-coffee cultivation not only has to do with regular agricultural tasks but also deals with specific techniques that the producer must learn. Although these techniques are common knowledge for some community members in Chenalhó, training is still required, as well as the acquisition of inputs to make the soil healthy and viable for organic-coffee production.

In summary, this case suggests that small-scale producer organizations provide an advantageous way for small-scale producers to gain access to niche markets for organic goods. They help to market organic produce and, since the organic market demands some kind of organic certification and labels, which are costly for an individual producer; therefore, by forming their producer organizations it helps small-scale producers hurdle entrance barriers.

5.2.2 Fair trade: An Alternative Market for Chenalhó's Coffee.

Organic production is only one part of the equation within this alternative model of doing business for and with small-scale coffee producers; fair trade is the other part of

this formula. As presented before, in *Unión Majomut*, there are several organs or spaces for decision-making, including: the General Members Assembly, the Community Assemblies, the Delegates Assembly and the Administrative and Monitoring Council. This decision-making structure includes the participation of all of these organs within the fair trade activity.

In first instance, we have the Executive Committee, whose members interact directly with the delegates and members in the communities, as well as with the other coffee organizations of the region. Different from others organizations, in *Unión Majomut* the decisions related to fair trade are made by the Executive Committee, which is comprised of small-scale producers of the organization, and in accordance with all the *Unión's* members.

The members of the Technical Team have a more managerial role in the organization. They are responsible for the commercialization process, the elaboration of harvest plans and the formulation of credit financing projects. They also assist in maintaining the relationship with the fair trade system. Since 1992 the members of the Technical Team of *Unión Majomut* have served as consultants to the Administrative Council, and in 1993 the organization sent the first coffee shipment to Holland (Unión Majomut, 2013, p. 49).

In this sense, pre-financing is divided proportionately between the quantities of organic and non-organic coffee that will be collected each season. Within the activities that the Technical Team of *Unión Majomut* performed to provide the members with a better understanding of fair trade, a normalized procedure is followed to socialize information about the fair trade system. In the Delegates' meetings the Executive

Committee reports news about coffee contracts and shipments, and information is shared about final account balances, which make known the final earnings and price premiums (see figure 5.13). And after each meeting the delegates and communitarian promoters share the information within their communities, where all of the results are discussed, proposals are made and agreements are arrived at.



Figure 5.13 First Delegates Assembly, where coffee prices were discussed ⁶⁵

Note. Author's photograph.

By the same token, visits from buyers (part of the fair trade system), are performed regularly in the region, strengthening the relationships between producers and buyers, as well as the visits that some members of *Unión Majomut* have made to different countries as part of the buyers' invitations to attend meetings, meet the costumers and build trust and partnership between each other. For instance, during my fieldwork, in

⁶⁵ Mr. Miguel Osuna is talking to his partners regarding the crisis in which the coffee market is going through, as a consequence of the roya and low coffee prices that are affecting, mainly, small-scale producers like them. Mr. Osuna said: "Even though prices are low, we should stay together as the big family we are, and we can't let down our organization, we have been together in the good times and we are going to be in this in bad times too. Remember we have always gotten through bad times, but together, remember brothers." (J. Díaz, fieldwork, January 29, 2016).

January 2016, Mr. Nicholas Eberhart and Mr. Adrien Brondel, buyers from Ethiquable Coop, visited the region of Chenalhó (see figure 5.14).



Figure 5.14 Producers from Chenalhó and buyers from Ethiquable Coop., France
Note. Author’s photograph.

As a researcher, it was remarkable to see the interaction between buyers and producers, and it is worth mentioning that the confidence that the producers showed when interacting with the buyers seemed to transcend cultural barriers. On the one hand, the producers were self-confident, prominent in their words and kind. Moreover, they were proud of their work, and by showing their coffee plants (even though the *roya* fungus has damaged a great number of them) the producers and the Technical Team demonstrated the passion and effort that they all put into the organization. On the other hand, the buyers showed concern not only about the ‘product’ they were trying to buy, but also about the communities’ development.

According to Mr. Jorge Cota, the Operational Coordinator of *Unión Majomut*, the current situation within the fair trade system is that, not only small-scale producers are part of it, but also large-scale producers, which are in better market positions and able to acquire “fair trade” and “organic” labels that might confuse a lot of consumers. Mr. Cota

also commented that the inclusion of these new actors has pushed away the “real spirit and principles” of fair trade.

Thus, more than three hundred small-scale producers’ organizations from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, are getting organized to create new spaces where small-scale producers could continue to interact horizontally (J. Cota, interview, January 29, 2016). This type of interaction fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion, which according to Bebbington (2005) makes it easier for individuals to access other resources that can influence and improve their situation. This can be conceptualized as an accumulation of social capital, which coffee producers have used so as to improve their position in the market. As a consequence of this interaction, some of the producers in the communities I visited were proud to comment on the creation of CLAC.

CLAC has facilitated interaction among, not only coffee producers, but also producers of honey, cocoa, juice, tea and fruit producers. Therefore, the interaction between different small-scale producer organizations promoted a greater participation in the decision-making process within fair trade, which culminated in 2001 when FLO, for the first time, allowed members of the small-scale producer organizations to vote to be on the board of directors of said organization.

Alongside the creation of CLAC, *Unión Majomut* has become part of the *Small Producers Symbol*. Mr. Nicolas Eberhart, from Ethiquable Coop., France and one of the founders of the SPP, expressed: “being part of the fair trade system, which sometimes is not what we intended it to be, requires continuous work in constructing an alternative that provides small-scale producers with the distinction that they deserve to have from large-scale producers, as well as from the big transnational companies” (N. Eberhart, interview,

January 20, 2016). Mr. Eberhart continues: “we want to increase the recognition of the SPP, it is more than just a fair trade label, we see it as an icon for sustainable production where transparency, democracy, solidarity and equity are the main drivers of SPP, as well as to make an inclusive economic model where true and fair relations are built.”

Mr. Cota added that the SPP makes it possible for the local and international consumers to recognize their effort as small-scale producers and to recover the philosophy that originated fair trade in the first place (J. Cota, interview, January 29, 2016). Although, some efforts are being made to strengthen the understanding of fair trade among the members of *Unión Majomut*, some members are still not able to define it well. In any case, many relate this term with the end of the struggle that existed with the *coyotes* and the beginning of an opportunity to sell their coffee at a better price. As Mr. Eduardo Elias puts it:

Well, I know a little about fair trade, not much. One thing is for sure fair trade has given us better prices for our coffee and overall we do not need to worry about the *coyotes* anymore (E. Elias, interview, February 2, 2016).

According to the guidelines of fair trade, producer prices for coffee should cover the average costs of operation, exceed the price that is prominent in the conventional market, and ensure environmental, economic, social, and economic development. Although this has helped to stabilize income for producers, the current situation in international coffee markets is not as good as it was a few decades ago, and the prices within fair trade are not sufficient to meet the producers’ needs. In fact, in 2016 *coyotes* were offering a higher price than the one established along fair-trade guidelines. It is worth pointing out that despite the fact that the demand for coffee is still growing and the supply is not catching

up with this demand, the prices of coffee are lower than previous years (Martínez-Torres, interview, February 5, 2016). This situation may be of interest for further research because according to the principles of economics when the demand is higher than the supply, prices should rise so as to meet an equilibrium point (Mankiw, 2011) but apparently the contrary is happening within the coffee sector in recent years.

Nonetheless, the partnership between *Unión Majomut* and its members, the experience that the producers have had within fair trade, the follow up, and the training that *Unión Majomut*, through the work of the Technical Team have given to all its members have made possible a sense of trust and support between the members of the organization. The following narrative is an extract from notes made in my research journal during a General Assembly Meeting, where the price issue was being addressed.

It has been a real surprise for me after a great discussion about the price that the producers will accept for their coffee, due to the current crisis in the coffee market the price is fixed at \$35.00 MX per kilogram, and the organization cannot afford to pay more to its members, according to the accountant and administrator of *Unión Majomut*, it is not that they do not want to, it is impossible at this point to do it. It is worth noting that the coyote is paying around \$38.00 MX per kilogram. The producer could refuse to give the coffee to the organization even if that represents less coffee for the commitments that they already had. Nonetheless, after a presentation explaining how the market stands right now, using terms such as the Chicago market stock and the current dollar price, the President of the Executive Committee asked who was willing to accept the price of \$35.00 MX and 68% were in favour and only 32% refused. However, the members who voted

in favour went to their partners and talked until they were convinced to accept that price, and not just for the price but for what it meant, and Mr. Miguel Osuna's final statement was the golden seal. He says: "it is in these moments when we show the world why we are still here, why we are still alive and that we are going to still be this family, Unión Majomut is ours, it is you and it is me; so partners have faith we are going to make it" (Field notes, January 27, 2016).

It became clear to me during my fieldwork that the influence that the small-scale producer organization has on the life of its members is greater than it simply being a place where coffee is delivered. Fair trade also gives the producers a certain sparkle of hope due to the dynamics that the organization has established in distributing surpluses among its members: a surplus that the *coyote* would never give.

The producers know that fair trade gives them an additional premium, at least most of the time, besides a guaranteed payment for their coffee. They seem to perceive this additional premium, not as a personal earning, but as a collective one that can be distributed to cover some of the operational expenses of the organization, payments for certification, and in most cases to increase the price paid to the producers. It is true that according to the precepts of fair trade the social premium must be invested in social improvements such as schools or hospitals. However, this premium is not always sufficient to finance such projects.

From the perspective of fair trade, the small-scale producer organizations are perceived as the means to enter into this market and as the collective agents responsible for commercializing the coffee of their members. Notably, the small-scale producer

organizations stimulate actions to improve the conditions within this market; for example, in CLAC and through the SPP initiative.

Therefore, one tentative conclusion regarding the role of the small-scale producer organizations in fostering development within the organic farming and fair trade context is that the producer organizations have a distinguished and complementary role in promoting development within its members. On one hand, this kind of organizations promotes development by the inclusion of the producers in the activities of organic farming; the producers get involved, allowing them to express their demands and work together so as to reach their objectives. On the other hand, the organizations play a key role by facilitating the distribution and commercialization of their coffee, and by being the means through which the producers get their income. The small-scale producer organizations are a facilitator, and although definitive conclusions can not be drawn at this point, the data I gathered suggests that small-scale producer organizations help in the alleviation of poverty by providing the means through which members get better payment for their coffee, fairer working conditions and the possibility to maintain their former farming practices, which plays a central role in their personal, family and community lives.

It is within this context, that the next section of this chapter addresses the main impacts, as identified within the course of this research, that *Unión Majomut* has had on the life of its members in Chenalhó, in two specific aspects: economic and social.

5.3 *Unión Majomut* and its Impact on the Quality of Life of its Members and the Development of their Communities

In order to continue with the analysis of the findings, the objective of this section is to explore what *Unión Majomut* has done to promote strategies to improve the quality of life of its members, in economic and social terms within the context of globalization; for example: search for better market conditions, higher prices for coffee, improvement in the environmental conditions of their region, and the encouragement of a more effective communication between the members of the organization so as to reach mutual agreements. These sorts of improvements amount to local development in Chenalhó and better quality of life for its members.

The information is presented in two sub-sections. The first sub-section discusses the economic impacts; the second addresses the social impacts, which can be divided into individual and community outcomes.

5.3.1 Economic impact.

Amartya Sen claims that economic protection—considered to be one of the *freedoms* for development—is essential for improvement in the living conditions of individuals (Sen, 1999, p. ix). In this sense, for *Unión Majomut*, economic improvements are the result of higher productivity and all the factors related to it such as: an increment in the number of members, control of pest infestations (roya), better performance of organic farming practices, networking with former and future clients; and offsetting the fluctuation of coffee prices.

All these factors are important for increasing the members' income. Included in this is the fact that producing more and having more clients results in better revenues. Economic protection is fostered by the small-scale producers organization when it promotes selling coffee among different clients, trains the producers to improve their farming practices and their financial abilities to distribute their income efficiently, or encourages them to save for emergencies. Although the results of such actions are not seen in the short term, *Unión Majomut* is creating the space for a healthy future through the construction of social capital capable of adopting and overcoming difficult times for the sake of results in the middle and long term.

The strategies that *Unión Majomut* implement are not for a specific community; its strategies are implemented in all the communities with members, including the ones in this case study. However, with the collaboration of the community promoters, each community, if having a particular problem, is addressed and then shared with the other communities as an example. Therefore, some of the members interviewed commented that they never feel alone throughout the process of cultivation nor when they need any kind of assistance.

Thus, all these activities promoted by *Unión Majomut* are ways to improve the economic benefits of its members since these activities focus on getting more revenue for them. Mr. Eduardo Elias argued that he has had improvements in his living conditions due to the premiums and better prices that he gets from fair trade (E. Elias, interview, February 2, 2016).

Although *Unión Majomut*, through financial training, advises its members in financial matters and encourages them to save, it does not interfere in the decisions that

each member makes in regard to its income or spending. The producers interviewed mentioned that their income is mainly spent on food, housing and the acquisition of more land.

Before we were part of an organized group of producers, we were very very poor. We did not have anything and now, after working in *Unión Majomut*, I have the resources to build three houses and all of them are mine, so I can leave those houses to my children (J. López, interview, January 18, 2016).

The coffee producers of Chenalhó receive a payment previously arranged with the buyer, according to fair trade guidelines⁶⁶. This payment is composed of three elements: 1) a minimum price. When the market price is higher than the fair-trade minimum price, producers receive the current market price or the minimum price negotiated in the contract, whichever is higher; 2) an organic differential, equal to 30 cents US; and 3) a fair trade premium, equal to 20 cents US (Fair Trade, 2016).

Thus the organic differential and the fair trade premium are added to the price used as a base (fair trade minimum price or market price) so as to get a final price. The difference in prices that the producer would receive in the conventional market is around 15% less than the price received through fair trade. For example, during the season 2014-2015, the price at which the members of *Unión Majomut* were paid was \$53.67 MXP versus \$45 MXP in the conventional market (see figure 5.15).

⁶⁶ This subject is addressed in chapter 3.

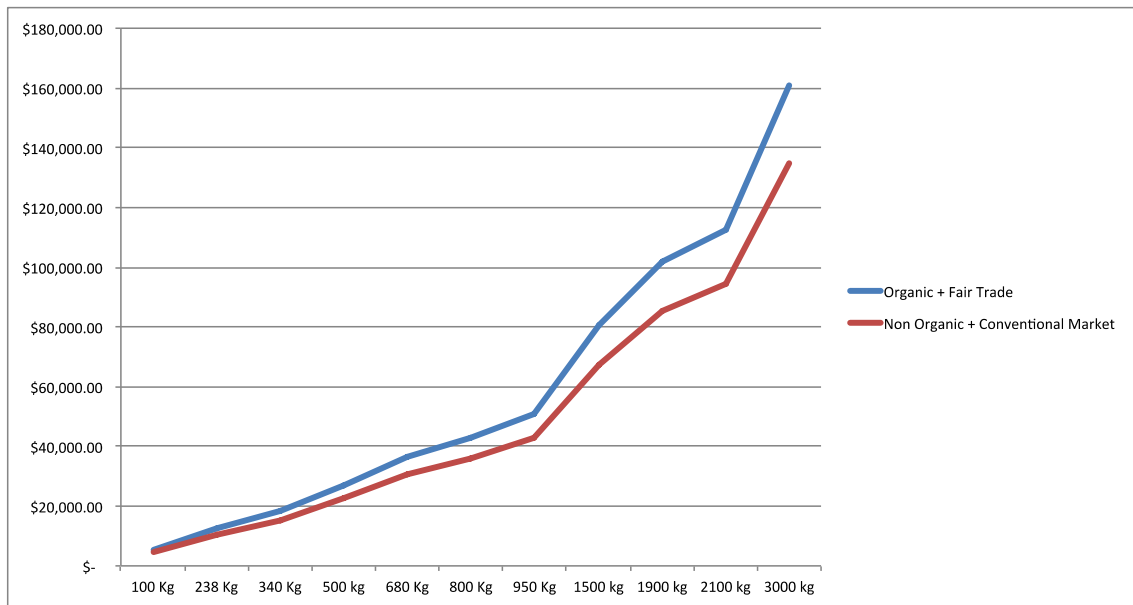


Figure 5.15 Difference in the payment received for organic and fair trade coffee versus conventional market and non-organic coffee, December 2015

Note: Prepared by the author, with information provided by Unión Majomut of the season 2014-2015, according to the prices and differentials used by the organization, but considering random kilograms to exemplify this exercise, since Unión Majomut sells all its coffee in fair trade market and 98% of it is organic and only 2% of the season 2014 was in a transition phase.

a The price is fixed in Mexican pesos, considering USD at a rate of 17.34 (Dec, 2015). Applying the coffee price of the season 2014-2015, \$45/kg; the organic differential \$0.3 USD; and the Fair Trade premium \$0.2 USD.

Recognizing that the price at which the members of *Unión Majomut* are paid is sometimes not enough for some members to satisfy all their needs, the organization has sought alternatives to help meet those needs. These alternatives will be described in the next section of this chapter (Social Impact).

Since the monetary income of most of the members consists solely of coffee cultivation, their revenues depend on how much they produce. Therefore, there are some producers that are able to obtain a considerable amount of money to live well (those producers who possess between 3 and 4 hectares of land), but there are other producers that cannot meet their basic needs by just relying on their coffee income (producers who possess between 0.5 and 1.0 hectares of land). It is worth mentioning that the care given

to the land is also an essential factor in determining productivity, and hence, revenue (see table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Income perceived by producer members of Chenalhó, according to the quantity of coffee produced (2014-2015 prices)

Producer	Number of ha.	Coffee produced (kg)*	Annual Income (MXP)**
Ms. Félix	1	400	\$25,761.60
Mr. González	1.5	1000	\$53,670.00
Mr. Elias	4	2000	\$107,340.00
Mr. Osuna	4	2300	\$123,441.00

Note: Prepared by the author. Data provided by Unión Majomut and gathered through the interviews during fieldwork.

* The producers mentioned that these quantities were produced before roya. So these were the approximated quantities used for the exercise.

** The price used for this exercise was the minimum price + social and organic premiums of the season 2014-2015.

In this sense, it is possible that members like Ms. Félix will look for other ways to complement their income so as to meet their basic needs, as well as to participate in the projects that *Unión Majomut* provides for them (see the Social Impact section). So, if income is not enough, what are the advantages for producers like Ms. Félix? In the first place, they have a price stability that helps them to plan and rely on the assurance that they will receive a secure payment. In a similar line Mr. López commented:

We get an initial payment and another one at the end. We always know that we are going to have a little more at the end and we are sure that we won't be deceived by the organization, without doubt we are better here than with the coyotes (J. López, interview, January 18, 2016).

All in all, the impact that the economic benefits have on the members goes beyond monetary terms, impacting also their self-esteem, which can be noted by direct observation when participating in the General Assemblies. In the Assemblies that I

participated in, members showed their desire and interest in continuing with organic farming practices, providing food for their families, preserving their historical heritage and pride in calling themselves members of *Unión Majomut*.

The members of *Unión Majomut* commented that they have seen many of their neighbors forced to emigrate either temporally or permanently in search of work due to the dramatic decrease in international coffee prices. By contrast, the members of *Unión Majomut*, have access to financial resources through the organization, which provide them with more opportunities to stay at their farms. Nonetheless, this does not mean that some of the members do not eventually migrate from their communities in search of supplementary income.

By the same token, some of the producers of Chenalhó expressed the pride they feel in belonging to a transparent and trustworthy organization that, in spite of the current economic crisis, has continued to improve its infrastructure and provide assistance to all its members through development projects, as far as possible.

5.3.2 Social impact.

5.3.2.1 Community context.

According to Sen (1999), the social opportunities and services that a society is able to offer to the development of its members are an indispensable part of the achievement of an integral development. Individuals are not able to enjoy other *freedoms* if they lack social opportunities, education, healthcare, public services, and housing. The enjoyment of these opportunities depends, in the first place, on the State and secondly, on the individuals of the civil society and their actions toward the enjoyment of these

opportunities.

The precepts of collective action and *comunalidad* that producer organizations, like *Unión Majomut*, have within their philosophies are greatly appreciated by the public officials (the ones in charge of interacting with groups of the civil society), because these kinds of organizations give the assistance that sometimes the public service is not able to provide.

The producers of Chenalhó commented in interviews that they received direct cash payments from the federal government, through its program *Próspera*⁶⁷, and that although it is not a great help, it is at least something. Regardless of the benefits that the members might receive from this program, some producers have decided, individually, not to accept their “little help,” as some of them call it. This is because, as stated in the previous chapter, they see this kind of “help” as undignified and shameful, that instead of being planned to address their economic and social problems, it proves that the government sees them as recipients of charity.

Mr. Miguel Osuna, founder member of *Unión Majomut*, comments that for him and his family it has never been an option to trust or rely on this kind of solutions, he said:

I will never let my wife travel almost two hours by herself (because I need to stay and work on the coffee farm or in the *milpa*) and then to be hours and hours under the sun, or in the rain, waiting for those “pesos”. They don’t care how far you need to travel, or if you are going to be able to come back to your community,

⁶⁷ This program aims to target the poorest groups in the country, the help that the producers of Chenalhó received goes from \$335.00 MXP up to \$600.00 MXP, i.e., \$23.00 CAD-\$42.00 CAD respectively (F. García, interview, February 3, 2016).

sometimes you spend more money going there, because the facilities to give the “help” are set up only in San Cristóbal (M. Osuna, interview, January 29, 2016).

Nonetheless, there are other producers that take the cash payments and for those that are willing to accept the help provided by the State, *Unión Majomut* serves as a facilitator for them (paperwork and when possible with transportation for those living close to the city). It is worth mentioning that the help given by the State is not provided for those communities that are part of the Zapatista’s communities, such as Polhó in Chenalhó, which is also part of *Unión Majomut*. Regarding this situation, the Technical Team of *Unión Majomut* has searched for alternatives to free the members from waiting for government help by teaching them to work together so as to bear the difficulties they may face. And for those communities that form part of the Zapatista’s movement, *Unión Majomut* is willing to provide a space for anyone wanting to work and be part of a collective organization.

When the Zapatista movement arose some producer organizations in the region of Chiapas took one of two sides: the Zapatista side or the government’s side. In spite of the criticism that was directed at *Unión Majomut* because it did not take any side, since the beginning the organization has kept the same philosophy: “Anyone wanting to join an open and collective organization is invited, all you need to have is the faith and the willingness to work for a common objective: the improvement of all of your partners and the development of the organization” (J. Cota, interview, January 29, 2016). Mr. Jorge Cota, the Operational Coordinator, also commented:

We have looked for help from government agencies, to directly help the producers, since the aid for the producer is little to nothing most of the time. For

example, in renewing coffee groves they [the government] do “help” you but with super high interest rates that the people cannot afford, so the producers go into debt and there are no benefits for them. That is why we need to look for other alternatives (J. Cota, interview, January 29, 2016).

As an example of this search for alternatives, in 1996, *Unión Majomut* started to promote women’s participation, due to the insistence of the wives of the *Unión*’s members to take care of their own food production. Thus, *Unión Majomut* started a new program called: *Community Development*. This program focuses on promoting women’s participation by creating groups in different communities located in one of the five municipalities that comprise *Unión Majomut*. The main objective is to produce healthy, diverse and organic food. Within the program women have the assistance of two professional experts that help with training, coordination and follow up.

It is important to point out that I was not able to gather enough information to compare and measure the impact of this objective, whether food was produced organically before and they just produce more now or if people are healthier after the implementation of such project. Nevertheless, it is clear that one of the main intentions of the Community Development project is to get women involved (see figure 5.16).



Figure 5.16 Some of the women's group at the Food Sovereignty Workshop.
Author's photograph.

This participation goes beyond technical capabilities; it goes deeper to the self-esteem of the members of the groups, the women and the community in general. Ms. Marina Félix, a member of *Unión Majomut*, said:

Before, we did not have any participation. We did not come to *Unión Majomut*, but then the organization [...the technical team, mainly Mr. Cota] started to tell us about the farming and the work that we could do if we wanted. At the beginning, nobody wanted to come because the women said that we couldn't read or write since we did not go to school. What are we going to do if we know nothing? But the organization [...the technical team] told us that it was enough to be willing to do it and that we will learn, and what we learn we must teach it to our partners. After that a lot of us accepted and we went to learn so as to form this group (M. Félix, interview, January 22, 2016)

Focusing on women, workshops and training regarding healthcare issues are provided by a partner NGO, *Sanando Heridas A.C.* In addition, *Unión Majomut* tries to give a workshop every other month as a preventative measure to help the female population become aware of the signals of the most common health conditions that they might

suffer. It is worth pointing out that the main motivation behind this initiative is the concern about the lack of healthcare facilities in the region. Therefore, with this project the organization aims to achieve awareness among its members about health issues that they may find unfamiliar.

Similarly, the organization has promoted the integration of a housing project that will build 500 houses this year for the members that do not have proper housing. The project was first presented to the Operational Coordinator, Mr. Jorge Cota, by Fomento Social Banamex⁶⁸. *Unión Majomut* has worked with Fomento Social Banamex in the past, in projects regarding improvements in the coffee production. It was because of this relationship that the project was considered by *Unión Majomut* and after discussing it in the General Assembly, the members accepted the project. Because Fomento Social Banamex is only giving a certain amount of money for the construction of these houses, *Unión Majomut* is in partnership with an NGO called *Hábitat para la Humanidad A.C.*, with the Federal Government, through *Comisión Nacional de Vivienda* (CONAVI), with the Government of the state of Chiapas through *Promotora de Vivienda Chiapas* (PROVICH) and the Construction company *Grupo Mia*.

Although the houses will have a cost of \$7, 000.00 MXP, this price will be fixed and no interest will be added. The houses need to be paid for by the member owning the property, within 3 years of construction. However, if at the end of the 3-year period the member is not able to fulfill the payment, *Unión Majomut* will absorb the remaining payment. Therefore, the debt will now be paid to the *Union's Microbanco Campesino*

⁶⁸ Fomento Social Banamex is a non-profit organization created under the initiative of the Managing Council of Banco Nacional de México, S.A., with the main purpose of bridging the gap of social inequality existing in our country (Banamex, 2016).

(Peasant Micro-bank), i.e., by the member's own organization. Another interesting part of this project is that materials for construction will be delivered but labour will be provided not only by the construction company but also by the members of *Unión Majomut*, who will eventually own the houses. This is done to facilitate communication between the *givers* and the *receivers* so as to meet their requirements and respect their way of living rather than imposing houses that the members might not be able to maintain in the future.

Another example of community engagement, from part of *Unión Majomut*, is the creation of the *Microbanco Campesino* (Peasant Micro-bank) in 2002. In the *Microbanco Campesino*, members are oriented and assessed about their savings, loans and how to get the most out of them by a professional technician who is able to speak Spanish as well as the members' native language (Tzeltal or Tzotzil). The location of the *Microbanco Campesino* is in the central-storage facility, which is accessible to everyone in the communities.

It is important to mention that the *Microbanco Campesino* is not a micro-finance project; rather it consists in providing a savings and small-loans system for those members that want to start putting into practice the financial training that they are receiving. The objective of the *Microbanco Campesino* is to make the interest rates as low as possible (from 2% to 3.5% monthly), according to the capacity of each member of *Unión Majomut*, in case they need a loan for an extraordinary situation, such as health issues or any other urgent matter. Therefore, the *Microbanco Campesino* is not intended to finance any farming or commercial activity. For these activities, *Unión Majomut* counts on the support of International and National specialized financial institutions.

One of the interviewees who chose to remain anonymous commented that there had been previous attempts to establish this kind of system but the people in charge of those projects stole the money⁶⁹. It was not until *Unión Majomut* opened its own *Microbanco Campesino* that the members went, at first with doubts, and started to save and withdraw money as well as to ask for loans. The interviewee continued to explain that it is difficult to deal with money; it is a great responsibility but that is why they work together and supervise each other in order to make the project succeed.

In this sense, the advantages of acting collectively are demonstrated by the joint effect that these actions have. The projects described above are examples of direct participation that has brought some social benefits to the communities in general. It was not possible, however, to reach definitive conclusions about these social benefits, so as to generalize the overall impact of the organization on the quality of life of the small-scale coffee producers who are members of *Unión Majomut*. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that even though some projects are motivated by a quest for economic benefits, rather than by the social benefits they bring, processes such as the renewal of coffee groves, the cultivation of fruit trees in between coffee plants for shade, and the use of organic compost, appear to have a positive impact on the community and the environment.

Within the main objectives of *Unión Majomut*, it can be noticed that the pursuit of economic benefits results in the promotion of some social benefits that occur on three different levels: individual, household and community. Therefore, some of the social benefits that could be observed include: housing, health awareness, some sort of financial

⁶⁹ It is worth mentioning that these other similar projects were carried out by external organizations to *Unión Majomut*, which aimed to “help” and “guide” small-scale farmers to a better use of their finances.

and environmental education, as well as training in food self sufficiency. Within the natural environment of the community the perceived benefits include: improvement of the land, planting of different kinds of trees and reduction of chemicals. In this sense, these outcomes suggest a transformation from economic benefits to social benefits, promoted by *Unión Majomut*. At the individual level, the organization impacts the producer in a direct proportion to what the producer works to get economic benefits; these benefits are seen as an increase in the producer's income.

5.3.2.2 Individual context.

The way in which *Unión Majomut* has impacted the life of its members, on an individual level, is in line with what Sen (1999) would call *political freedom*. According to Sen political freedom has to do with transparency in relations between people. Within the members of *Unión Majomut* this freedom can be found as the right to express themselves, to vote for the election of their representatives, to criticize and make objections when things do not seem right, and to ask for personal guidance when needed. Thus, in a collective-oriented community, the use of this freedom is essential so as to remain active within the community as well as to set and reach common goals. Therefore, as the producers implied, by enjoying this freedom the members of *Unión Majomut* have been able to improve their quality of life, and not only from an economic standpoint.

Some of the producers of *Unión Majomut* expressed that they became part of it in the first place for economic reasons when they realized that alone, it would not be possible to get a good price for their coffee because it would be sold to the *coyotes*. “I joined the organization for a better price for my coffee”, commented one member of

Unión Majomut in interview (E. Elias, interview, February 2, 2016). Afterwards, though, they noticed that *Unión Majomut*, through the Technical Team, does not only try to take care of the marketing part, but it also tries to take care of their basic individual and family needs, as far as possible, such as: housing, healthcare and food security. Ms. Marina Félix, member of *Unión Majomut* and one of the leaders of the Women's Group, commented: "At the beginning I saw how the organization [...through the work of the Technical Team] taught its female members how to work and farm and I wanted to learn, and I also realized that those teachings helped the people that were already members of the organization" (M. Félix, interview, January 22, 2016).

It is worth pointing out that for other members the reason for being part of *Unión Majomut* stems from a legacy, i.e., their parents were part of it, and now it is their turn. These cases are the ones that *Unión Majomut* looks forward to strengthening because of the impact that these members bring to the organization. An important point to raise here is the reality that the communities in rural areas are currently facing. Mr. José Castro, part of the Technical Team, expressed the following on this matter:

It is sad to see how the young generations no longer want to farm the land, everything that their parents, grandparents and even us as their organization have taught them is lost when they think it is worthless or without pride in it. On one hand it is great that our young members are able to go to school and to prepare and become professionals so as to improve the situation of the land in their region. On the other hand we face the reality that, when they graduate from school they do not want to come back to their communities, or if they do, they don't want to work in farming. They have lost the passion and vision for their inheritance. This

is why as an organization we want to strengthen this passion with dignity and pride where the young can feel part of it and, as their parents and grandparents, they will teach their children to love their land, because if they don't come back, more important questions will arise: What will happen with the Mexican farmland? Who is going to take charge of it? And I can assure you that this is not a dilemma that is exclusive to our region (J. Castro, interview, February 3, 2016).

Although this indifference from the young population can be found, it is also what motivates diverse projects to combine efforts between *Unión Majomut* and each of its members. This decision of autonomous association so as to reach a common objective is a representation of what Melucci (1989) considers essential in bringing about collective action. In this sense, each person is enjoying his or her right to free association.

In a similar line, the small-scale producers of *Unión Majomut* enjoy a form of democratic participation within the decision-making process (described in the first section of this chapter) in every aspect of the organization; in this way the members express their ideas and opinions without restrictions. The producers are also aware of all the activities that the organization is doing, the expenses and incomes as well as the final destination of their coffee.

From the sample taken for the analysis of this section, all the members commented that they were happy and satisfied with the role that they have within the organization (promoters, regular members, a member of the Executive Committee), because they can express themselves and be part of all the activities the organization prepares for them. Although not all the members feel the same way about participating, they know that they can do it if they want. These comments make obvious the degree of

trust and confidence that not only the producers have with the organization but also the other way around.

This degree of trust is also strengthened by the ethnic identity that the members of *Unión Majomut* share. As Stavenhagen (2010) argues, and as mentioned in Chapter 2, ethnic identity implies an affirmation of ‘us’ versus the ‘other’. So, “when a group or a person is defined as such, it is done so as a means of differentiation in relation to any group or person which they face. It is an identity that arises in opposition, which cannot be affirmed in isolation” (Stavenhagen, 2010, p. 75-76). Although, small-scale producer organization still have limitations in the benefits they can deliver to their members, organizations like *Unión Majomut*, can be seen as a means for a small-scale producer to improve some aspects that can be of influence in their quality of life, as long as the organization focuses its actions to promote the *freedoms* that are basic for providing options for its members; options to choose, and these choices themselves can be translated as a more basic way of freedom... a freedom that brings development in their own terms.

5.4 Conclusions

Following the line of investigation of this research, the following paragraphs will outline the role of *Unión Majomut* as a promoter of organic practices and a facilitator for market access through fair trade within the context of the community of Chenalhó. These tentative conclusions have to do with the actions that the organization has taken to improve the quality of life of its members, and the degree to which these actions have

succeeded. In this case, *Unión Majomut* acts like an intermediary for the allocation of tangible and intangible benefits for its members.

Before outlining the tangible and intangible benefits that accrue to the members of *Unión Majomut*, it is important to underscore the limitations associated with the data collected and the associated ranges of uncertainty. I have not tried to marshal quantitative data for statistical longitudinal analysis that would indicate improvements over time in the quality of life of the organizations members, trying to separate the organization's impact from that of other factors. Admittedly, this would be a complementary line of investigation that could help 'triangulate' my findings. However, it is beyond the scope of my research, for reasons already mentions. My evaluation of the benefits that members of the *Unión Majomut* have enjoyed are presented in a descriptive way, based on interviewees' comments and my direct observation during the short time I was in the field.

I was not able to gather sufficient information to come to a definitive conclusion about the benefits that financial and food assistance have brought. However, based on what I was told and what I observed, the members of *Unión Majomut* have improved their living conditions in comparison to those small-scale producers that are not part of the organization, who are working in isolation and vulnerable to the exploitation of the *coyotes*. Some of the tangible benefits appear to be: greater awareness of health issues; the provision of housing; and the provision of financial and food assistance (whether in partnership with different NGOs, governmental projects or through its own initiative). It is also worth pointing out that even if the social premium given by fair trade is designed to address social problems in the communities, the producers are given the choice to

decide where to allocate this premium, and in the past couple of years this premium has been used to improve the payment for their coffee.

As for the intangible benefits, we can mention the inclusion of all the members of *Unión Majomut* in democratic decision-making processes; the creation of spaces for collaboration and self-expression, where the members can talk freely about any subject that may be important for them; and the inclusion of women by fostering their participation in the activities of the organization (a subject of great interest that can be addressed in further research). Although the organization gives importance to communication and free expression, there remain some areas of opportunity that can be improved when talking about participation strategies so as to get the most out of every assembly, workshop and meeting.

Consequently, the economic and social, tangible and intangible, benefits that *Unión Majomut* seeks to promote within its membership are indicators that help to evaluate the changes in the quality of life of the small-scale producers of *Unión Majomut*. Furthermore, the presence of the activities, which are not only related with coffee cultivation, but are also intended to improve the quality of life of the members, are ways of producing positive changes on three levels: individual, household and community.

There appears to be a strong connection between the social and economic benefits: the greater the impact of the economic benefits, the greater the opportunity to acquire social benefits. Therefore, the enjoyment of economic and social benefits could be conditioned by the outcomes and achievements that the organization is able to accomplish. In other words, after meeting the first objective of economic retribution, the second objective is to distribute this income effectively into the producers' territory so as

to improve their quality of life, and thereby promote an integral form of development.

During the 33 years of *Unión Majomut*, the organization has had a number of setbacks, which has allowed it to appreciate the valuable process of collective apprenticeship. Its members have learned to overcome problems associated with coffee production and they have improved decision-making processes, making them more transparent and democratic. Evidently, there is still room for improvement and many challenges ahead. Social reality is always dynamic; it is in constant change. Being that this is a current case study, the organizational processes of *Unión Majomut* have to face new challenges every day and come up with new strategies.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

“The present is theirs; the future, for which I really worked, is mine.”
Nikola Tesla

This chapter presents the conclusions of my research, the objective of which was to analyze the extent to which *Unión Majomut* plays a central role in encouraging the practice of organic farming and in facilitating market access through fair trade for its members. Also, a related objective has been to determine the degree to which this organization has led to an improvement in the quality of life of its members and to local community-based development.

The analysis of social reality, from a developmental perspective, seeks to understand the complexity of an organizational processes such as the one presented as a case study for this thesis. This includes an examination of the structural characteristics that shape the creation and evolution of a collective actor in a specific rural context, and from there to the daily elements that influence its organizational dynamic, within a specific place and time in history.

The theoretical elements taken into consideration for this research are based on the conceptual building blocks of civil society, social capital and collective action theory. In relation to these concepts, the role of *Unión Majomut* is seen as the centerpiece of the organizational behaviour that my field research sought to shed light on.

As we have seen, *Unión Majomut*, as a collective actor, has allowed small-scale coffee producers in the Highlands of Chiapas to face the challenges posed by neoliberal

globalization. By using the same platform that this neoliberal globalization set up, *Unión Majomut* has helped its members to develop agro-ecological techniques and to access niche markets, thereby providing advantages for individual and community development. Abstracting, then, it can be tentatively concluded that small-scale producer organizations like *Unión Majomut* play the following roles:

- *A means of capitalization*, because the organization makes affordable the organic certification needed to be part of this market. Also, specialized training for organic farming, while difficult or impossible to adopt for individual members, is not difficult with the help of the organization, which can provide the follow-ups and workshops to develop the skills of a larger number of members. A producers' organization can also address environmental problems that might arise, like the fungal pest described in this case study, and it can provide a fund to help producers if the harvest suffers any damage.
- *An expression of cooperation*, because of the demands of organic farming and collective marketing, which go beyond the individual capacities of producers. The organization, in its cooperative role, promotes among its members the acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed to reach the quality required for organic certification.
- *A precursor of environmental and health benefits*, due to the fact that organic farming promotes the conservation of a balanced environment and is also beneficial for human health. It is worth noting that it is possible for small-scale producers to farm in organic ways even with no *professional knowledge*, if they do not use any chemical fertilizers on their plants and secure their growth by

natural means. However, it is also true that these producers will not be able to commercialize their production without the support of the organization, or at least not in the higher priced organic market.

- *An instrument to strengthen ethnic identity and inclusion*, because small-scale producers can identify with this way of farming as a part of their historical heritage, not to mention that they are proud to be in a market that provides economic benefits and allows them to interact with the land, *their origin*, as they call it.

Similarly, within the fair trade system, the role of the small-scale producer organizations includes:

- *An intermediary between the small-scale producer and the buyer*, since it is not until the coffee is delivered into the facility storage of the organization that the marketing and commercial processes begin. The producers' organization, through its technical team, serves as a facilitator for all the activities and tasks that entail connecting to fair trade and organic markets.
- *The most effective means for small-scale coffee producers to commercialize their product*. This is because a small-scale producer, by himself, is not able to reach the required quantities, but also because the fair-trade system requires certification and adherence to certain administrative procedures, which the small-scale producer cannot afford and/or provide individually.

The perception of small-scale producers is twofold regarding the role that their organizations play within these markets. On the one hand, small-scale producers perceive the organization, within the organic market, as their farming partner, from whom they

learn and get the knowledge needed to improve their farming techniques. On the other hand, they see their organizations, within the fair trade system, as the body that sells their coffee, gets the payment for it, advises them in administrative procedures, reports on all results and informs them of any change within the market (prices, currency variations and the likes). Although there are different opinions amongst the members of small-scale producer organizations regarding the role that their organizations play within organic farming and fair trade, it is also within these organizations that small-scale producers are able to transform their alliances into deep bonds. These kinds of relationships, networks and bonds of trust form part of their social capital, which helps individuals who are part of these small-scale producer organizations to reach their common objectives.

However, it is important to note that the organic fair-trade model does not challenge the neoliberal economic model, at least not in a contentious way. The Food Sovereignty does; it seeks structural change: get agriculture out of the WTO, redistribute land to landless peasants and smallholders, provide public support for agroecological production, reorient food production towards local and regional markets, in accord with culturally defined tastes and needs. And to push for this agenda, the members of Vía Campesina, not only carry out workshops to promote agroecology, but also mobilized to protest the imposition of the neoliberal model and to make visible their alternative. In Mexico, the main membership organization to Vía Campesina is *Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas* (UNORCA). UNORCA is a decentralized umbrella or network organization that brings together state level chapters around the country. Unfortunately, the UNORCA chapter in Chiapas has provoked violent conflict with Zapatista communities in Chiapas.

The members of *Unión Majomut* are not involved with UNORCA nor with the Zapatistas. The organization seeks to avoid contentious politics and to work within the constraints of the existing political order and in the interstices of neoliberalism, in an effort to improve the quality of life of its members. As such, it does not challenge neoliberalism. Yet, it seeks to be an alternative to monopoly capitalism and the destructive forces of conventional global markets, where everything revolves around maximizing profits, where global stock markets give the main signals for productive and market behaviour, and where egoistic individuals enrich themselves as much as they can by exploiting workers and controlling resources. As a small-scale producer organization, *Unión Majomut* operates on different principles than those that typically prevail in large privately owned companies, especially with regards to the distribution of benefits. In the case of *Unión Majomut*, benefits are distributed as widely as possible among its members. Likewise, fair trade is constructed on the idea of cutting out intermediaries and channeling a greater share of the profit to small-scale producers, in collaboration with civil society organizations that help these producers connect to health and justice conscious consumers in urban centers and in the Global North. Likewise, the organic component seeks to be an alternative to capitalist production that is focused predominately on short term profits and inclined to ‘mine’ natural capital.

On a different level, this search of alternatives among small-scale producer organizations, like *Unión Majomut*, seems to support Olson’s (1971) argument about the origin of collective action, which is motivated not only by the objectives and interests of a single person but also by his limitations to reach those objectives. This hypothetical person tries to find other individuals with similar objectives, who are also unable to reach

their objectives individually. Therefore, their parallel challenge brings them together to fight for a common objective.

In this sense, this research cautiously suggests that small-scale producer organizations, as part of the civil society and as an expression of collective action contributes to the improvement of the quality of life of its members through advancements derived from alternative farming and marketing practices, while strengthening ethnic and social identity. Along these lines, *Unión Majomut* provides an example of how to promote a kind of development in which everyone involved can take part in decision making and in sharing the benefits, thereby promoting better living conditions for all who are directly linked to the organization.

I hope that this thesis can serve as a framework for developing further analyses of other rural organizations facing the constant changes stemming from the process of globalization. My intention has been to contribute, albeit modestly, to a better understanding of how cooperatives of small-scale producers, organic farming and fair trade can translate into improving the lives of marginalized producers. Also, I hope that my analysis can contribute to the consolidation and strengthening of *Unión Majomut*, whose motto is “from the sky nothing will come but the water to farm our land, the rest is effort and organization” (Unión Majomut, 2013, p. 56).

Annex A
Interview Guidelines

A) Interview questions for the members of the small-scale coffee producers organization, *Unión Majomut*

Proposed Interview Questions
SMU REB-File #16-001



Title: In the market but not for the market: Civil society participation, collective action, organic farming and fair trade. A case study of Unión Majomut and its impact on the living conditions of its members.

A) Guía de Entrevista 1, para miembros productores de la cooperativa.

I. DATOS DEL ENTREVISTADO

Nombre:

Edad:

Estado civil:

Número de integrantes de familia nuclear:

II. ASOCIACIÓN DE PRODUCTORES

¿Puede usted platicarme de la historia de la formación de la cooperativa?

¿Cuánto tiempo lleva formando parte de la cooperativa?

¿Cuál fue el motivo por el que decidió incorporarse a la cooperativa?

¿Cuáles son los requisitos para incorporarse a la cooperativa?

¿Qué beneficios le ha proporcionado el pertenecer a la cooperativa?

¿Qué rol desempeña dentro de la cooperativa?

¿Con qué frecuencia se realizan las asambleas o juntas de participantes?

¿Cómo eligen a sus representantes?

¿Sabe que funciones tienen sus representantes?

¿Cómo obtienen dinero para las actividades de la cooperativa?

¿La cooperativa realiza eventos en los que conviva la comunidad?

11.1 ¿Qué tipo de eventos?

11.2 ¿Con qué frecuencia?

¿La cooperativa les programa cursos de capacitación?

¿Tiene alguna obligación como parte de la cooperativa?

¿Conoce algunos productores de café que no pertenezcan a la cooperativa?

¿Sabe por qué no se han incorporado?

¿Todos sus compañeros en la cooperativa pertenecen a la misma comunidad?

¿Existen algunos productores que hayan querido incorporarse a la cooperativa y no los hayan aceptado? ¿Sabe cuál fue el motivo?
Dentro de la cooperativa, ¿han tenido algún conflicto? ¿cuál fue el motivo?

III. PRODUCCIÓN ORGÁNICA DE CAFÉ

1. ¿Cómo produce su café? ¿De manera orgánica o convencional?
2. ¿Antes había cultivado con otro tipo de técnicas?
3. ¿Por qué cambió a esta forma de cultivo?
4. ¿Cuándo empezó a cultivar con este tipo de técnicas?
5. ¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas de producir café sin usar agroquímicos?
6. ¿Conoce cuáles son las fases del proceso de cultivo orgánico? ¿Podría comentármelas?
7. ¿Cómo se organiza para realizar su trabajo?
 - 7.1 ¿Toda su familia le ayuda?
 - 7.2 ¿Cuántos de ellos sí y cuántos no?
 - 7.2.1 Si hay alguno que no le ayuda, ¿a qué se dedica?
O ¿Alguien que no pertenece a su familia le ayuda?
 - 7.2.2 ¿Este o éstos pertenecen a la misma comunidad?
 - 7.2.3 ¿De dónde es originario?
8. ¿Cuánto tiene que invertir, en dinero y tiempo para la cultivar su tierra con este tipo de técnica?
9. Cuando cultiva, ¿en qué gasta más dinero y tiempo?
10. ¿Cuántas hectáreas de café siembra?
11. ¿Cuántos kg? de café produce?
12. ¿Considera que lo que gasta lo recupera y le sobra?
13. ¿Producen en la cooperativa otros cultivos aparte de café? ¿Se usa para venta o autoconsumo?
14. ¿Cuántas hectáreas se destinan para la producción de éstos otros cultivos?
15. ¿Cómo está organizada la tenencia de la tierra? ¿Es ésta propia, comunal o ejidal?
16. En caso de ser ejidal, ¿Ésta está parcelada?

IV. COMERCIO JUSTO

1. ¿Qué opina sobre el comercio justo? ¿Cuánto le pagan por cada kg? de café?
2. ¿Usted sabe a qué países llega el café que producen?
3. ¿El pago por su producto le alcanza para ahorrar?
4. ¿Ha visto beneficios en su vida a partir de que usted forma parte de la cooperativa y vende con comercio justo?

V. CALIDAD DE VIDA

1. ¿Cuáles son los gastos más fuertes en su hogar?
2. ¿En qué le gustaría utilizar su dinero?
3. ¿Cuántas comidas realiza al día?
4. ¿Qué es lo que come más le gusta comer?
5. ¿Lo come con frecuencia?
6. ¿Qué es lo que come con más frecuencia?

7. ¿Desde cuándo acostumbra comer eso?
8. ¿Cómo consigue sus alimentos? ¿Usted lo siembra, lo compra o lo intercambia entre sus compañeros?
9. Usted o su familia ¿A dónde acude cuando se enferma?
10. Usted y su familia ¿Cuál es la enfermedad más común que sufre y/o sufren?
11. ¿Cuenta con vivienda propia?
12. ¿Sabe leer?
13. ¿Hasta qué grado curso?
14. ¿Cuántos de su familia asisten a la escuela?
15. ¿En qué grado están inscritos?
16. ¿Alguien de su casa ha migrado para estudiar?
17. ¿Qué hace con los desperdicios de los alimentos?
18. ¿Qué otras actividades aparte de la siembra del café realiza
19. ¿Alguien en este hogar tiene un trabajo asalariado?
20. ¿Alguna persona de su familia ha migrado en busca de empleo?
21. ¿El gobierno les da alguna ayuda?
 - 21.1 ¿Qué tipo?
 - 21.2 ¿Cómo la gestionaron?
22. ¿Hay delincuencia en su comunidad?
 - 22.1 ¿Qué tipo de delito cometen con más frecuencia?
 - 22.2 ¿Conoce el motivo del delito?

B) Interview questions for the technical team of the small-scale coffee producers organization, *Unión Majomut*.

Proposed Interview Questions
SMU REB-File #16-001



One University. One World. Yours.

***Title:** In the market but not for the market: Civil society participation, collective action, organic farming and fair trade. A case study of Unión Majomut and its impact on the living conditions of its members.*

B) Guía de Entrevista 2, para Líderes y Administrativos de la cooperativa.

I. DATOS DEL ENTREVISTADO

Nombre
Edad
Cargo desempeñado
Antigüedad en el cargo

II. ASOCIACIÓN DE PRODUCTORES

1. ¿A qué etnia pertenecen los integrantes de la cooperativa?
2. ¿Qué actividades realizan aparte de las relacionadas con la producción de café?

3. ¿Cuáles son los objetivos que persigue la asociación?
4. ¿Con qué criterios y con qué frecuencia se llevan a cabo los procesos de elección de dirigentes, planeación de actividades?
5. ¿Cuáles son los fines económicos que persigue la cooperativa?
6. ¿Cuáles son los fines sociales que persigue la cooperativa?
7. ¿Cuáles son los fines culturales que persigue la cooperativa?
8. ¿Cuáles son los principales objetivos y retos del proceso de producción del grano?
9. ¿Qué medidas establece la organización para cuidar la calidad del producto?
10. ¿Con qué recursos cuenta la cooperativa para financiar sus operaciones?

III. PRODUCCIÓN ORGÁNICA DE CAFÉ

1. ¿Cómo es la práctica del cultivo orgánico?
2. ¿El cultivo está dividido en fases?
3. ¿Cuáles son los mecanismos de cada fase?
4. ¿Proporcionan algún tipo de capacitación para la elaboración de la composta y el uso de otros insumos involucrados en el cultivo orgánico?
5. ¿Cuentan con lineamientos para satisfacer las preferencias de los consumidores?
6. ¿Cuál es el costo promedio por libra de café?,
7. ¿Cuál es el precio por libra de café?
8. ¿A cuánto asciende el costo y el ingreso promedio de la cooperativa?

IV. COMERCIO JUSTO

1. ¿El pago recibido por el producto es el pactado antes de la entrega del producto?,
2. ¿El pago recibido cubre los gastos de producción y operación de la cooperativa?
3. Aproximadamente, ¿cuánto excede el pago que recibe por el producto en el esquema de comercio justo, con respecto al que recibirían en el mercado convencional?
4. ¿Cuál es el principal destino de la prima social en la comunidad?
5. ¿De qué depende el destino de la prima?
6. ¿Qué factores se toman en cuenta para su distribución?
7. ¿Cómo se realiza en consenso para destinar la prima?
8. ¿Quiénes intervienen en la toma de decisiones?
9. ¿Cuáles son las principales normas de certificación, de calidad y laborales que la cooperativa debe cumplir bajo este esquema comercial?
10. ¿Llevan un seguimiento de evaluación del cumplimiento de las normas de certificación?
11. ¿De qué manera se hace la evaluación?
12. ¿Quién la realiza?
13. ¿Cómo se dan sus relaciones con otras organizaciones?
14. ¿Las organizaciones con las que se relaciona producen café u otro producto?
15. ¿Cuál es el principal motivo por el que se dan estas relaciones?
16. Se recibe alguna capacitación en materia de comercio justo para los integrantes de la cooperativa.

V. CALIDAD DE VIDA

1. ¿Se ha llevado a cabo algún proyecto que provea de alimento de alto valor nutricional a los miembros de la comunidad y promueva la soberanía alimentaria?
2. ¿Alguna vez se han presentado pláticas de inducción al consumo de alimentos nutritivos?
3. ¿Se ha llevado a cabo algún proyecto que promueva el uso de los servicios de salud, o que promueva la construcción de un hospital, clínica o consultorio?
4. ¿Se ha llevado a cabo algún proyecto que promueva la conservación del ambiente entre la comunidad?
5. ¿Se ha llevado a cabo algún proyecto que provea la mejora de las viviendas de la comunidad?
6. ¿Se ha llevado a cabo algún proyecto que contribuya a abatir el analfabetismo?
7. ¿Qué orientación han tenido los cursos de capacitación impartidos?
8. ¿Se ha llevado a cabo algún proyecto que promueva la diversificación de actividades entre la comunidad en los tiempos de espera de la cosecha del grano?
9. ¿Quiénes han sido los principales destinatarios de los proyectos?
10. ¿Cómo se dan las relaciones con los organismos gubernamentales?
11. ¿Cuál ha sido el objetivo más recurrente por el cual han tenido alguna relación con las dependencias de gobierno?

C) Interview questions for volunteers of the small-scale coffee producers organization, *Unión Majomut*.

Proposed Interview Questions
SMU REB-File #16-001



One University. One World. Yours.

Title: In the market but not for the market: Civil society participation, collective action, organic farming and fair trade. A case study of Unión Majomut and its impact on the living conditions of its members.

C) Guía de Entrevista 3, para voluntario de la cooperativa.

I. DATOS DEL ENTREVISTADO

Nombre

Edad

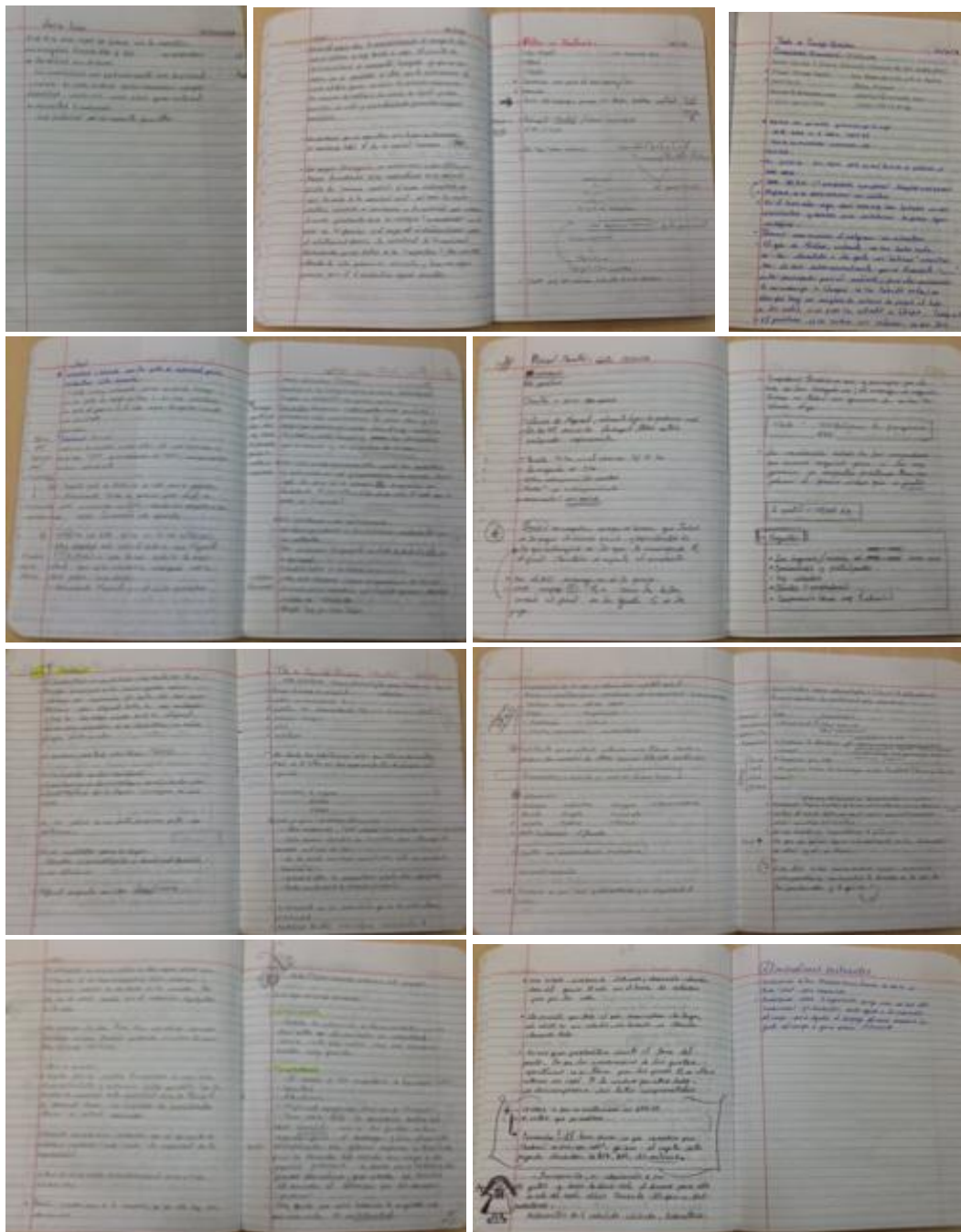
Cargo desempeñado

Antigüedad en el cargo

1. ¿Por qué te interesaste en ser voluntario en esta organización?
2. ¿Qué opinas de las labores que aquí se realizan?

3. ¿Qué comentarios pudieras dar al respecto, o recomendaciones a la organización?
4. ¿Qué es lo más importante que has aprendido en tu estancia en la organización?
5. ¿A qué te gustaría dedicarte al terminar tu etapa como voluntario?
6. ¿Volverías a la organización?
7. ¿Qué opinas sobre la producción orgánica?
8. ¿Qué opinas acerca del esquema de comercio justo?
9. Antes de ser voluntario en la cooperativa, ¿tenías nociones de estos conceptos?
10. ¿Cómo describirías a Unión Majomut?

Annex B Research Journal



Annex C
Photographic Archive







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