

# FORUM THEATRE AS A MECHANISM TO EXPLORE REPRESENTATION OF LOCAL PEOPLE’S VALUES IN ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

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Local representation of people’s values in environmental decision-making has been a constant challenge, reflecting power dynamics. Participatory methods have been implemented to include marginalised voices but they have not yet been able to fully engage with power dynamics. Art-based methods can represent an alternative, allowing locals to speak and imagine beyond the limits settled by power dynamics.



CAN FORUM THEATRE, AN ART-BASED METHOD HELP TO ADDRESS EXCLUSION OF PEOPLE AND VALUES IN ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE?

Forum Theatre is a method that uses theatrical forms to facilitate and encourage engagement from the audience to ‘solve’ social issues. In the forum, performers present a fictitious but very real scene in which a character is oppressed by attitudes, the status quo or other people’s behaviours. During the presentation, audience members can stop the scene, go on stage and perform ideas to ‘solve’ the problem. It is what Augusto Boal (2013) calls ‘rehearsal for revolution’.

## Case Study & Methods

This was implemented in El Pirú and Galacia, in the Lacandon rainforest, Chiapas, Mexico.



- A script was elaborated based on preliminary interviews in the communities. It was about a community assembly to discuss an eco-tourism development.
- Training and rehearsals with performers: 16 participants 7 selected
- Forum Theatre: 20 people In Galacia (17 ♀ and 3 ♂ ) and 21 in El Piru (11 ♀ and 10 ♂ ).
- 28 interviews with participants after Forum Theatre

## Results

The empathy and dissatisfaction participants felt over the characters worked as an input to cross the limits and bring to the fore their values during the fictitious community assembly.

*"I also participated there, I said something because as a woman feels reflected, sees that poor Marcela who is fighting for her son... and her husband who does not support her and neither does her mother-in-law, it gave me courage and that's why I spoke"* A female participant, in El Pirú

However this is not a magic method, there are some power dynamics that might need more than one Forum Theatre to perform some changes. For example, we presented the character without land rights, as an opportunity for non-landowners to speak up about their difficulties to be part in environmental decision-making but during the forum there were no comments about it. Values as formal objects of emotions and desires were identified immersed in the narratives as guiding principles for the proposed changes by the ‘spect-actors’.

Values categories

Fundamental Values:

Universalism

Governance-related Values:

Inclusion

Assigned Values:

regulating/provisioning services

For example, in the fourth scene, when a female participant tried to convince the oppressor character (cattlemen) in support of economic activities aligned with conservation.

*"We all want to live a little better, let's say maybe not rich but with a little more standard of living, so we invite you (cattleman) to do a good project that can create other jobs for us, such as taking care of the calves. So, we invite you to analyze it, for example, right now there are reforestation projects. For example, in the rivers you can plant trees for firewood or timber trees so that the water sources do not end and to have firewood... and thus (reforesting) you are giving life to yourself and the community"*.  
A female participant in the Forum Theatre, Galacia

## Conclusions

Experienced of exclusion are a reflection of power differences; and empathy and dissatisfaction (emotions) are important to blur or change those power differences. In the processes of performing those specific changes participants were using/sharing their values, which were interconnected and dynamic. In Forum Theatre, participants can rehearse and practice different ways in which they can put their values on the table of environmental decision-making.

