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Neoliberal development through technical assistance: Constructing communities of entrepreneurial subjects in Oaxaca, Mexico

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Abstract

Technical assistance (TA) has a long and varied history as a development practice. It initially emerged as a set of 'hard' programs, tools, and technologies delivered to developing countries by imported First World experts, typically in the agricultural and resource sectors. Later, in response to critical and antidevelopment theories, TA morphed into its 'soft' version, attempting to empower marginalized people in the Global South by delivering the know-how – often collaboratively generated – sufficient to produce forms of development 'from below'. In spite of this shift in the politics and practices of TA, it remains susceptible to neoliberal styles of development that have proceeded apace with withdrawal of state institutions in the funding and operation of social and economic development programs, and with the concomitant rise of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

In this paper, we follow the operation of one TA program operated by an intermediary NGO in Oaxaca, Mexico. We find that the program intersects with neoliberalization in two prominent ways, relying on a form of governmentality that codifies and prescribes: (a) the social spaces of action and need, and (b) learning subjects deficient in entrepreneurial initiative and know-how. We conclude by commenting on the political economic conditions that continue to underwrite TA as a development practice in spite of a decade or more of criticism directed at it and we consider the possibilities for its subversion.

Keywords: Technical assistance; Development; Neoliberalism; Governmentality; NGOs; Community foundations; Oaxaca; Mexico

1. Introduction

Since the publication of James Ferguson's *The Anti Politics Machine* (first in 1990 [1994]) and Arturo Escobar's *Encountering Development* (1995), critical analyses of development – drawing often on the insights of Michel Foucault – have multiplied. In their oft-cited work, Ferguson and Escobar explored the contradictory and power-laden logics of development that were put into practice in schemes such as the "integrated rural development" project studied by Ferguson in Lesotho or the "food and nutrition" plan undertaken in Colombia and analyzed by Escobar (Ferguson, 1994; Escobar, 1995). *The Development Dictionary* edited by Sachs (1991) brought together a first collection of critical examinations of key concepts in development discourse, with a critical indictment of the whole development project. In the wake of these works came calls for more studies of development as a set of institutionally situated knowledges and practices, embedded in and constitutive of uneven geographies of power (e.g., Watts, 1995). Analyses of development discourses relying on critical readings of textual materials (e.g., Kumar, 2003) appeared, along with more ethnographic approaches that attended to the daily, on-the-ground practices of those actually engaged in development (e.g., Crewe and Harrison, 1998). True to

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Foucault, many of these analyses have sought to chart not only the problems, but also the political possibilities residing in development discourses and practices. As Cooper and Packard phrased it:

> The point is not to decide whether or not development discourse is truly hegemonic, but to examine projects of building and fracturing hegemonies: how financial, political, and discursive power was deployed, how such projects were contested within their own terms and through efforts to redefine the terrain of debate, and how one can find where the room to maneuver remains in international institutions and in the numerous sites where development initiatives encounter the complexity of particular social struggles (1997: p. 13).

At the same time, actual practices of development have changed. In particular, the past 15 years or so have seen the dramatic worldwide growth of NGOs, including many dedicated to aspects of development in the Global South. Under neoliberal pressures that have eroded the developmental role of the state, NGOs are now primary organs of development.[1] They are often the key institutional channels through which development initiatives flow (Cerny et al., 2005; Fisher, 1998; Lewis, 2003; Roberts et al., 2005). As a result, studies of NGOs have become vehicles for understanding how development is conceived and implemented in the contemporary era (Lewis, 2005; Markowitz, 2001). There are now numerous critical analyses, including ethnographies, of development NGOs informed by the writings of Ferguson and Escobar, among others (e.g., Crewe and Harrison, 1998; Dolhinow, 2005; Elyachar, 2005; Mosse, 2005).

Other analysts, not necessarily focusing on development *per se*, have identified and examined key discursive elements of neoliberalism, investigating the ways it is framed and works within a host of state and nonstate institutions. For example, Barbara Cruikshank has studied the way idea(l)s of *empowerment* and the associated programs of social service agencies and practices of political groups operate with results that can be deeply contradictory, being "*neither* clearly liberatory *nor* clearly repressive" (Cruikshank, 1999: p. 72, emphasis in original). In her ethnographic work on a neighborhood health group in Santiago, Chile, Julia Paley (2001) offers an analysis of *democratization* as a set of ideals and political practices that are similarly ambiguous. Lastly, David Walker et al. (2007) show how *participation,* as it gets built into the practices of an international conservation NGO in southern Mexico, is unsettled and contested, especially by some of those who are intended to be its beneficiaries. In each of these three cases, salient keywords (such as empowerment) serve as entry points for a consideration of how such terms and their associated institutional forms, social practices, and technologies reverberate. Each of the examples cited above points toward the importance of discursive practices in analyzing both development and neoliberalism (see also Bondi and Laurie, 2005; Larner, 2003; Laurie and Marvin, 1999; Power, 2005).

In this paper, we contribute to this body of work by considering the practices of 'technical assistance' as carried out by one organization in Oaxaca, a relatively poor southern Mexican state heavily populated by development NGOs (Moore et al., 2007). The *Fundación Comunitaria de Oaxaca* (Community Foundation of Oaxaca; hereafter, FCO) has been administering a half-million dollar program, funded primarily by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), to deliver technical assistance in targeted regions of the state. Bringing together critical development studies with existing scholarship in political theory, we see technical assistance (TA) as potentially congruent with the broader currents of neoliberalism, even as other cases demonstrate that TA is neither wholly nor necessarily neoliberal (cf., Gordon, 1991; Dean, 1999; Barry et al., 1996).

Specifically, we analyze the FCO's program as an instance of a broader, more complex and increasingly widespread social regulation (e.g., Elyachar, 2005; Li, 2002; Rankin, 2001; Watts, 2001), an instance of governmentality at 'work'.[2] For Gordon, "governmentality is about how to

[1] Neoliberalism is a complex term, but one that has theoretical and analytical utility, we believe. We understand neoliberalism as denoting political-economic shifts and a concomitant set of transitions in the way people are understood in relation to others and to the market. Markers of neoliberalism include: liberalization of the movement of goods and capital (not people); deregulation of the financial sector, but with state guarantees for bail-out in a crisis; a minimized role for the state in economic life – reduced to guaranteeing property rights, upholding contract law, and containing civil unrest (hence the privatization of publicly-held assets and deregulation and hence the expansion of social service-oriented NGOs under neoliberalism); the expansion of market mechanisms into previously relatively non-marketized domains (e.g., water, health, education); and, a social culture of responsibility and individualism. Neoliberalism, then, is a dynamic bundle of tendencies and, as many have pointed out, is flexible enough to contain many incoherences. In terms of development, it is often observed that many of the elements identified as neoliberal have a long history in the Global South. The Global South was, in fact, a formative test bed for many of the axioms of neoliberalism rather than some periphery to which neoliberalism diffused (cf., Harvey, 2005; Larner, 2003; Peck, 2004). Such complexities do not, we believe, undermine the usefulness of the term to signify both far-reaching political economic shifts and social and cultural changes that are underway, albeit in very different ways, in places such as southern Mexico, marking them and the lives lived in them in qualitatively distinct ways (see also, for example, Portes, 1997; Soederberg, 2005).

[2] Because development programs such as TA prescribe and codify (Foucault, 1991a: p. 75), they are also 'governmental.' Seeing the on-the-ground processes of prescription and codification as they circulate within the FCO, we can approach TA as one element in a quite expansive regime of neoliberal governmental practices (Rose, 1999). Indeed, in neoliberalism, civil society has a particularly significant role – as both "object and end of government" (Burchell, 1996: p. 25). We are using a broad understanding of governmentality that does not confine it to neoliberal rationalities nor restrict it to the realm of the state, but draws upon Foucault who saw such practices as working through procedures of classification and calculation, and importantly, through processes of self-regulation on the part of subjects (Foucault, 1991a; 1991b; 2007; see also Dean, 1999; Lemke, 2001; Rose, 1999).

govern'' (1991: p. 7), which implies a necessary attention to government as an ''activity or practice'' (1991: p. 3). Practices are seen by Foucault as existing in often regularized relation with one another and he notes that: ''To analyze 'regimes of practice' means to analyze programmes of conduct which have both prescriptive effects regarding what is to be done..., and codifying effects regarding what is to be known...'' (1991a: p. 75). For the FCO, appropriate sites of analysis are what the program prescribes and how it is enacted – what does it say is to be done, and what does it do? And, what does it insist on being known and on knowing – what forms of knowledge does it draw on and bring into being? From our field research, particularly the organizational ethnography conducted by MW, we were struck by the ways in which the prescriptive and codifying practices of TA worked through the transformation of subjects. As Foucault detailed, governmental practices work through procedures of classification and calculation that intersect with processes of subject-making (the so-called techniques of the self; Foucault, 1991a,b; see also Hannah, 2000; Lemke, 2001). In the case of the FCO, attempts to forge communities for the market and to make willing subjects ready to learn entrepreneurial behaviors were, we found, central to the project of technical assistance.

Organizationally, we proceed by tracing the geo-history of TA as a key element in development practice. Then we turn to the institutional networks that have arisen and proliferated alongside TA. We briefly consider the rise of NGOs and the recent emergence of a specific institutional form – the community foundation – in the Global South. We believe this may be a model neoliberal development institution: well-positioned to link state, quasi-state, corporate, and civic elements and lying at the nexus of circulating practices and knowledges of how to 'do' TA. We then consider the empirical case of a TA program undertaken by the FCO in Oaxaca.

The paper draws upon a yearlong organizational ethnography of the FCO undertaken by one of the authors (MW), which was part of a wider research project on the circulation of managerial knowledges and practices throughout networks of NGOs in Oaxaca. The wider research was conducted jointly by researchers based in the US and Mexico, and entailed an extensive study of the geographies of NGO formalization in Oaxaca (Moore et al., 2007) as well as intensive studies of particular cases, such as the one reported on here (see also Walker et al., 2007). In our case study of technical assistance, MW conducted organizationally-sanctioned participant observation and interviews (both structured and semi-structured) during nearly a year as a researcher within the FCO. She was given access to NGO documents and observed and participated in daily office routines, attended meetings, undertook funding research, traveled with outreach teams, assisted visitors, and provided oral and written translation services. She interacted regularly with headquarters staff and field workers and was able to observe how the TA program was implemented. The materials made available by the FCO, the transcribed interviews, and the field notes taken during this year long research, are the main sources for the details of the case study that are reported in this paper. With this research, we are responding to calls to ground studies of neoliberalism and development through investigations of specific localized practices (Bondi and Laurie, 2005; Ferguson, 2006: p. viii; Larner, 2000; Mercer, 2002; Power, 2005; Rankin and Shakya, 2007).

As the organizational ethnography progressed, it became clear that the FCO's program focused on two key aspects, both of which could be interpreted as arenas in which neoliberal governmentality is being shaped: the forging of the social spaces of communities and the pedagogical production of learning entrepreneurial subjects. These moments of governmentality are found operating together, but they also exist in tension with one another and in complex relations with wider aspects of social and political life in rural Mexico. We conclude by returning to the political questions that arise at the intersection between ''development initiatives'' as instances of neoliberal governmental regimes, and ''the complexity of particular social struggles'', as raised by Cooper and Packard (1997: p. 3).

2. Technical assistance

Various definitions may be found, but a typical one states that TA is ''any activity that enhances [...] human and institutional capabilities through the transfer, adaptation, and use of knowledge, skills, and technology'' (Wallace, 1990: p. 26). Clearly an enormously broad category, TA is heterogeneous. It comprises varied emphases and operating logics in varied historical and geographical contexts. To flesh out the context for the uptake of TA in southern Mexico, we provide some broad outlines of its emergence in development.

TA is historically related to colonial practices of knowledge and technology transfer (see Arndt, 1981; Berg, 1993: Chapter 2). It is also bound up with ideas about expertise and the role of experts more generally – foundational to the modern project of development (Mitchell, 2002). The familiar development programs of the post-World War II era tended to rely on expatriates offering advice in a form that has come to be known as 'hard TA.' Typically, this type of TA took the form of short term assignments by agricultural or infrastructural experts guiding large-scale, capital-intensive projects, such as water supply for irrigation or dam construction. Hard TA grew steadily through the 1960s and the 1970s and was a major focus of all major bilateral donors, including USAID, and of multilateral organizations, such as the UNDP. Elliot Berg reported that by 1970 TA accounted for 27% of bilateral overseas development assistance and 25% of multilateral assistance (Berg, 1981: p. 68). TA projects remained focused upon agriculture and engineering, but expanded slowly to

include other sectors, notably education and health (Berg, 1981: p. 78).

With the advent of World Bank and International Monetary Fund programs of structural adjustment in the 1980s, TA shifted to so-called 'soft TA', which is characterized by a greater emphasis on the "provision of expert services for institutional and human development and [...] training" rather than concrete projects (Wallace, 1990: p. 27). The shift in emphasis, from agricultural inputs and infrastructure to people, is associated with the idea of "human capital", as we explain later in this paper. It marks a turn toward the cultivation of certain types of subjects and, as such, we could say that TA has become more of an embodied set of practices than ever. By the 1980s, nearly one dollar in ten of all World Bank spending went to TA, much of it of the 'soft' variety (Wallace, 1990: p. 27). Just as Structural Adjustment Programs were intensely applied in Sub Saharan Africa (Ferguson, 2006: pp. 69–88; Roberts, 2006), so too was Africa a prominent destination of TA spending, estimated to be about 15% of the value of all Bank financing in the region (Wallace, 1990: p. 27).

In the 1990s soft TA programs were also associated with the global push for neoliberal reforms in public administration, sometimes under structural adjustment, sometimes not. Many commentators have pointed to the significant political effects of the promotion of 'New Public Management' as a more efficient approach to public administration, changing the nature of the state in the Global South as well as the Global North (see Batley and Larbi, 2004; Dent et al., 2004: Dibben et al., 2004). As states in fiscal crisis sought to contract out things they had previously done (such as running hospitals), New Public Management was promoted as the most appropriate way to approach such tasks, dovetailing with structural adjustment programs and the overall push to neoliberalize developing country state apparatuses (Batley and Larbi, 2004; Dibben et al., 2004; Larbi, 1999).

It was after 1989, and especially in the early 1990s, that the discourse of TA as a major part of institutional strengthening got a boost in the form of the challenges of 'transition', as events in Eastern and Central Europe "triggered a virtual explosion in the demand for TA" (Wallace, 1990: p. 28). Twinned with this was the rapid development and acceptance of neoliberal discourse; skeptical about the potential for states to act efficiently and optimistic about the potential for civil society organizations, notably NGOs,[3] to be at the forefront of the move in Europe 'from plan to market,' TA was increasingly applied to development in both transition states and the Global South (World Bank, 1996). During the decade of the 1990s, for example, the World Bank went from partnering one-fifth of its projects with NGOs to one-half (cited in Pfeiffer, 2003; see also Mercer, 2002). The proliferation of development NGOs in the 1990s was not just coincident with the rise of TA, but intimately connected to it. In the later 1990s, NGOs were joined in their TA efforts by large, newly established foundations (such as the Gates and Soros Foundations) and other hybrid public–private partner organizations, making TA a big business (Morgan, 2002: p. 16). In a study of TA in Cambodia, Godfrey et al. (2002) reported that in 1998, TA alone was equivalent to 40% of the total foreign exchange earnings from exports or, in even more striking terms, that "expenditure on technical assistance alone exceeds total tax revenue raised by the government, and exceeds nondefense expenditure by almost three quarters" (Godfrey et al., 2002: p. 359).

Additionally, many organizations and groups seeking ways to facilitate inclusive and progressive social change saw considerable scope in TA, especially as it operated through the NGO sector. The role of TA in programs designed to 'empower' various groups, for example, has been significant. While, in some cases and in some places, such programs can have the effect of further enrolling people into neoliberalism, this is not a foregone conclusion. Participation and empowerment have been shown to be slippery discursive elements that can operate with any number of intended and unintended effects, and the same can be said of TA (Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Walker et al., 2007).

Having noted this, and despite its uptake by old and new actors in development, TA has long been criticized. Even as it was being put into operation in the developing world it was coming under fire from both inside and outside critics. Berg's controversial World Bank report on Sub-Saharan Africa (1981) is the most cited example, and one that generated substantial reflection and assessment inside international development organizations. In other assessments TA was variously characterized as "ineffective", "dysfunctional", and "arrogant" – as a "failed idea" and an "addiction" (see Morgan, 2002). Writing of NGOs in the health sector in Mozambique, Pfeiffer notes that: "While the transfer of appropriate technical skills is essential, the development shibboleth 'capacity building' is too often translated to mean 'seminars' and 'workshops' (Pfeiffer, 2003: p. 736). Even when the effectiveness of the seminars and workshops was in doubt, Pfeiffer observes that: "There was little incentive to reduce the number of training sessions since seminars allowed agencies to claim that they were 'capacity building', while the per diems provided crucial salary augmentation for local workers" (2003: p. 733). Other critics of TA have similarly remarked upon the importance of maintaining a steady flow of payments, especially per

[3] Just to be clear, while in neoliberal treatments civil society is often reduced to NGOs, we see NGOs as a heterogeneous category and the NGO sector as just one element in broader civil society. Civil society designates a sphere that is not entirely part of the state nor part of the market. In addition to including NGOs, civil society encompasses a wide array of formal and informal organizations, unions, associations, clubs, and activist groups.

diems. The political economy of TA is such that it can become the conduit for socially embedding flows of money into related patterns of privilege that those involved may have little incentive to question. As one critic put it: "Donors have … used technical cooperation to lubricate the cogs of a self-perpetuating engine that pumps large volumes of money to developing countries" (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2001: p. 11).

When TA is associated with foreign consultants the disparities attending the relatively high salaries and fungible (per diem and travel) income commanded by expatriates have been particularly glaring, and have been criticized for being obviously inequitable and, ironically, thwarting the potential for local capacities to develop. The move to NGOs in 1990s and beyond has not, moreover, altered the impression that a neocolonialist model is at work: "International or Northern NGOs often act like donors themselves and tend, however inadvertently, to perpetuate expatriate attitudes and organizational culture" (Banerjee et al., 2002: p. 150). In fact, as Banerjee et al. (2002) point out, while NGOs may now employ fewer expatriates and direct more funds towards 'local' experts, they may also be under pressure to channel even more funds through fungible routes, giving their staff or their contracted TA experts and others more money in their pockets with fewer strings attached. One result is that there is little incentive for those doing TA ever to assess it negatively (Banerjee et al., 2002: p. 150).

Despite a history of criticism, TA has endured in the development industry, its continuation ensured by a succession of makeovers and newly defined measures to reassess, reform, and rehabilitate its operation. Fukuda-Parr et al. (2001) trace how technical assistance became 'technical cooperation' as development practitioners recognized the dependency implied by the word 'assistance.' As Fukuda-Parr et al. go on to note, the perceived shortcomings of technical assistance, even in the guise of technical cooperation, have not led to their *abandonment*, but rather to their *intensification* with donors "drawing up cooperation programmes emphasizing the need for *more* technical cooperation, and new rounds of experts and training" (2001: p. 3 emphasis added).

In what appears to be an effort to save TA, a series of reformist qualifiers have been added to create 'new paradigms'. Thus, in the 1990s there was much consideration given to 'ownership' issues, often linked to wider emphases in development discourse upon 'partnership', or concerns with 'stakeholders' and 'participation', partly in response to demands made by people who had been the 'objects' of TA (Denning, 2001; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Mercer, 2003; Walker et al., 2007). More recently, TA has been linked to capacity development, which is understood to be "not merely the acquisition of skills, but also … the capacity to use them" (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2001: p. 10). While overall we agree with Fukuda-Parr et al., and see more continuity than discontinuity between TA and the so-called 'new paradigms', this does not mean that these shifts did not in some instances signal fresh approaches to established aspects of TA.

Concerns over TA as well as efforts to reform it have increasingly led donors to seek out partner arrangements with local organizations, and to insist on high standards of transparency, formal and regularized management and accounting practices, and assessment exercises (Roberts et al., 2005). The organization we report upon in this paper meets such requirements. It is unusually professionalized by Oaxaca standards, and has been a preferred partner selected by many international donors, including USAID. It is to this organization – and to its fit within the growth of community foundations more generally – that we now turn.

3. From NGOs to community foundations: the case of the FCO

The changing fortunes and characteristics of TA are linked to broader developments in the organizational landscape of the NGO sector. From the 1990s onwards, increasing numbers of NGOs have established themselves not as direct deliverers of TA, but rather as intermediaries or brokers (Carroll, 1992; Roberts et al., 2005). International donors or agencies charge an intermediary NGO with the responsibility of overseeing TA programs, rather than doing them. This sub-contracting model of TA is increasingly common in the commodity-chain (as it were) of technical assistance. For donors, intermediary NGOs can be particularly appealing because they tend to be highly formalized (Moore et al., 2007). They are often set up along corporate lines, with clear legal status, formal accounting procedures, and professionally-managed offices. Donors attuned to issues of 'transparency' and 'accountability' – managerial watchwords of development assistance – might very well be more comfortable having the finances for a TA project managed by an intermediary NGO than by a less formalized one (Banerjee et al., 2002). Often, intermediary NGOs position themselves in urban centers so as to be able to offer an accessible and centralized management function to donors. They might, for example, offer a donor the ability to reach many remote and far-flung locales through the sub-contracting model, but with financial accountability and record-keeping functions centralized in the intermediary NGO's urban offices.

Another factor that leads donors to intermediary NGOs is that they are often better positioned than smaller, project-based NGOs to enact the kind of multi-sector partnerships between business, the state, and civil society that many neoliberal development projects have as touchstones. Changes in the philanthropic sector have resulted in a greater emphasis on partnerships and on an entrepreneurial model in which philanthropy is seen less as 'giving' and more as 'investing' – a perspective that sits

very easily with the emphasis on delivering soft TA rather than direct grants. One particular type of intermediary NGO emerging in the Global South, one that sits at the nexus of these recent shifts in development funding and in philanthropic practices, is the community foundation.

The community foundation as a distinct organizational form (different from private foundations such as those set up by the Carnegies or Rockefellers) first emerged in the US in the early 20th century (Tittle, 1992). In the US they are tax-exempt charitable organizations, run by professionals but with volunteer boards, managing funds from individuals, families, businesses, and other organizations and disbursing or investing them in the 'community' (Council on Foundations, 2007). Seeing themselves very much as "local institutions that exist solely to support the civil society sector by building their operational and financial capacity" (Malombe, 2000: p. ix), US community foundations leveraged their financial and managerial expertise to adapt to the newly competitive philanthropy sector of the 1990s and since. There are now over 650 community foundations in the US controlling over $30 billion in assets (Bernholz et al., 2005: p. 1; Hamilton et al., 2004: p. 4).

In addition, community foundations are now proliferating outside the US. Touted by some as the next best thing, there are now over 1100 community foundations active in 46 countries (Sacks, 2005: p. 9). Community foundations are well positioned to develop the sorts of partnerships that blur the boundaries between nonprofit and profit, between business and NGO, between philanthropy and development, as both worlds conform more and more to a neoliberal market model of investment and returns (Letts et al., 1997).

Mexico is one country in which community foundations have appeared only in the past couple of decades, and where their organizational function is often similar to that of a typical intermediary NGO. There are now a score of formally organized community foundations in Mexico (Vamos, 2006). These have grown alongside a small but developing interest in philanthropy on the part of Mexican corporations and multinationals in Mexico, including Wal Mart, Mexico's biggest private employer and its largest food retailer (Institute of the Americas, 2005; Weiner, 2003). The analysis in this paper focuses on one example of this relatively new type of organization in Mexico: the *Fundación Comunitaria de Oaxaca* (FCO) or Community Foundation of Oaxaca.

The FCO was set up in 1995 to distribute funds from donors to projects and other NGOs throughout the state of Oaxaca. The FCO did not arise from local initiatives or grassroots mobilization. Instead, the so-called 'Big 5' US foundations had key roles in setting up the organization. The five foundations involved in the beginning of the FCO were the Inter American Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the International Youth Foundation.[4] Until 2000, representatives from Ford, Kellogg, MacArthur, and the IYF were members of the FCO's Board of Directors, but in 2000 the FCO shifted its focus and moved to a board with more members coming from within Mexico. The FCO retains its role as an intermediary clearinghouse, however, undertaking few projects of its own while concentrating on funneling funds and other resources to smaller NGOs.

The FCO's main offices are in a colonial building on busy street just a few hundred meters from Oaxaca's central plaza, the *zócalo*. With a capital city location, legal status as a civil association, and operations throughout the state, the FCO is one of the most 'formalized' of the nearly 400 NGOs operating in Oaxaca (Moore et al., 2007). Its permanent staff of ten is led by an Executive Director who has held the position since the organization's inception. All staff are educated members of the middle or professional class. As is typical of the NGO sector in Mexico, some of the professional staff began their careers in the state or para-statal sectors but, with neoliberal reductions in social programming, they turned toward civil society organizations to secure professional employment at a level that maintains middle class lifestyles (see also Soederberg, 2005). The Executive Director has ties with the local political establishment and members of his family are part of the Oaxaqueño elite but, with the exception of the head secretary, other staff at the FCO headquarters come from outside the state of Oaxaca (Interview, 2004). Most of the FCO's headquarters staff can read English, but only three are fluent, and none speaks any of the 16 Indigenous languages that are the first tongues of many Oaxacan people. FCO staff are nonetheless committed to social development and tend to identify with the struggle of Indigenous peoples in the state, stressing the importance of, for example, preserving the cultural heritages and traditions of these groups

[4] The Inter American Foundation is an independent agency of the US government "that provides grants to nongovernmental and community-based organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean for innovative, sustainable and participatory self-help programs." It has awarded over $500,000 to the FCO (http://www.iaf.gov/index/index_en.asp). The W.K. Kellogg Foundation is a nonprofit organization founded in 1930 by Kellogg, the US cereal maker (http://www.wkkf.org/WhoWeAre/). It has given the FCO over $620,000 for community and youth programs. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is a US (Chicago) based "private independent grantmaking institution dedicated to helping groups and individuals foster lasting improvement in the human condition". It has had an office in Mexico City since 1986 (http://mexico.macfound.org/) and has awarded over $550,000 in grants to the FCO. The Ford Foundation is a private US (New York) based foundation whose mission is to be a "resource for innovative people and institutions worldwide". It has an office in Mexico City (http://www.fordfound.org/global/office/index.cfm?office=Mexico+City), but it is not clear to us what, if any, direct grants have been made by Ford to the FCO. The International Youth Foundation is a US (Baltimore) based foundation, established in 1990 (http://www.iyfnet.org/section.cfm/2). In the IYF's 1998 Annual Report (page 43), the FCO is listed as being awarded a $100,000 grant to "launch the Foundation's program..." (http://www.iyfnet.org/uploads/1998annualreport.pdf) and it has subsequently awarded the FCO over $275,000 in additional grants.

(Interview, 2004). The FCO's staff are also well aware that their work is rendered more urgent by the void created when the Mexican government withdrew some social services provisions under the banner of neoliberalism. The 2000 fall of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) to the conservative *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) after some 70 years of patronage and clientalism, further eroded state involvement in the provision of social services (Fröhling et al., 2001; Soederberg, 2005).

In order to fund their development work, staff housed in the FCO's Oaxaca headquarters spend a great deal of time researching funding possibilities and writing proposals to business, governmental, and nongovernmental donor agencies. The FCO is embedded in a dense network of other organizations and agencies – a network whose particular components and relations are constantly changing (see Roberts et al., 2005). A major constituent flow in the network is funding, and the FCO presently has funding links with a range of donors, including The Packard Foundation and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). It is also tied into international capital interests through a program sponsored by Citibank of Mexico City. Funding from governmental agencies at the national level comes from the National Lottery (*Lotería Nacional*), and from COPLADE (*Coordinación General para el Desarrollo del Estado*) at the state level, and also from CEMEFI (*Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía*), a Mexico City-based umbrella NGO. The FCO has also worked with the Oaxaca branch of Soriana, a major Mexican-owned supermarket chain, and with the local Terranova group, owner of fashionable restaurants in Oaxaca City (FCO, 2002).

By actively seeking to combine and link elements from the three sectors (state, civil society and capital), the FCO is acting as a development institution that is pursuing an archetypal neoliberal model – bringing business and state interests in line and emphasizing investment approaches to community development. Such tri-sectoral partnerships are now a mainstream feature of many development agencies, such as the Inter American Foundation and the World Bank. As the Bank observes in a typical formulation: "partnerships involving business, government, and civil society [...] may present a successful new approach for the development of communities around the world" (Business Partners for Development, 2002: p. 7).

4. The *Demiregión* program of technical assistance

To analyze technical assistance as a development practice, we examine an empirical case in which the FCO operated a program on behalf of the IDB but with links to other agencies. Formally titled *Fortalecimiento de Procesos de Desarollo Micro-Regional en el Estado de Oaxaca* – or Strengthening the Processes of Small Area Development in the State of Oaxaca – the so-called *demiregión* (meaning "of, or from, my region") program aimed at fostering sustainable development by building "local capacity" in the form of community organizations producing various goods or services for the market (FCO, 2006). *Demiregión* was initiated in April of 2003 and the contract between the FCO, the IDB and COPLADE lasted through early 2006. The budget was geared entirely toward TA, with no provisions for direct grants to targeted populations. The *demiregión* program's goals were rather broad, being to promote: (a) Oaxacan civil society (in response to inefficiencies of the state); (b) *aprendizaje*, or learning, defined broadly as the process through which new skills, information and technical knowledge are put into practice, reworked and embedded in participant's daily lives; (c) women's participation in decision-making processes; and (d), harmony between nature and society (FCO, 2002; Interviews, 2004). This type of TA was aimed at strengthening "productive organizations" (small community businesses, see below) that would contribute to "community development" (FCO, 2006). Administered by the staff in the FCO's head office, the *demiregión* program employed five field workers to identify local organizations (so-called *organizaciones de base*) eligible to receive TA and to coordinate the activities of experts from professionalized TA organizations (*organizaciones profesionales de apoyo*), who were contracted by the FCO to actually carry out the TA.

Demiregión defined its 'target population' numerically as well as through the invocation of social categories (such as gender and indigeneity). Specifically, the program was designed to benefit 20,000 people indirectly, 60% of whom are Indigenous[5] and work in farming and livestock and receive less than one minimum wage a day. The FCO reports that the program has helped strengthen many organizations engaged in activities as diverse as artisan and craft production, ecotourism services, and savings and credit provision (FCO, 2006).

Through participant observation we learned that in the everyday language of the head office staff, and in the language of the field workers and TA experts, the categories 'organization' and 'community' were continually conflated. Sometimes the intention was to claim an affinity, as when groups that gathered to receive TA were addressed as *'communidades'*, an ideologically loaded term which lays claim to a certain degree of rapport between the visiting professionals and Indigenous groups. Although in the FCO's published materials 'organization' and 'community' had more specific and distinct meanings, participant observation of the everyday, more informal discussions in staff meetings and with groups in various villages revealed that the terms were nearly always treated as synonyms. This slippage, wherein small groups are taken to represent whole communities, is widespread in Mexican political

[5] Indigenous identity in Mexico is typically ascribed on the basis of language, but Spanish-speakers can also self-identify as Indigenous. It is worth pointing out that Oaxaca is the most ethnically and linguistically diverse of Mexico's 31 states. There are over 200 Indigenous dialects spoken in the state and over 40% of Oaxaca's inhabitants speak at least one of these (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2007).

culture, and is, we argue, in harmony with the way neoliberal rationality tends to at once abstract and marketize social relations (see also Rankin, 2001; Rankin and Shakya, 2007). Further, as we show, the individual members of such organizations/communities are normatively structured as learners and entrepreneurs: subjects of a form of governmentality very much congruent with neoliberal rationalities of development, and yet also drawing upon longer-standing traditions of state corporatism and the patron-client relations of the PRI (see also Magazine, 2003). In rural Oaxaca, any engagements between NGOs and communities take place in the context of historic patronage relations fostered by the PRI. Such interactions were typically centered upon political networks (*camarillas*), coalescing around strong leaders (*caciques*) and entailed the trading of votes for favors; this is an embedded political economy that, as we show below, poses certain challenges to those now seeking to offer technical assistance.

4.1. Forging the social spaces of governmentality

The idea(l) of community that appears in documentation related to the *demiregión* program, and that was invoked daily by FCO staff working on the program, is part of a broader spatial calculus implied in the program's very name. The program was founded on a geographic strategy that identified and targeted five sub-regions of the state of Oaxaca: Valles Centrales, Sierra Sur, Costa, Chinantla, and Sierra Juárez. Unable to provide complete coverage of these diverse regions, the program's field workers were forced to focus on particular villages within each (FCO, 2006). The initial identification of regions and the targeting of sites within them appear to have been the result of pragmatic decisions made by the FCO's staff and the program's five field workers, employing existing networks of contacts. Through the *demiregión* program the FCO was able to offer the program's funders spatial reach into the more remote parts of the state, all the while keeping financial and managerial control in the urban center of Oaxaca City and the well set-up office of the FCO. The apparent devolution or dispersion of the program to the regions is in fact enabled by a highly concentrated and centralized organizational geography.

As a corollary, at the operational level the spatial strategy was not built up from the diversity among the regions – which is tremendous in economic, cultural, and biophysical terms – but rather was based upon the diffusion of a unitary model of TA determined in advance and implemented without much regard for local specificities. Field workers often reported that each of the five regions offered distinct challenges, pointing for example to the lack of formal organizations in many villages that could be targets of TA. In other cases field workers understood that delivering TA might worsen disputes within or between certain communities. Field workers noted that some regions required more work on their part due to the unique challenges they faced – from cultural and linguistic differences to variations in accessibility and available technology – and yet, funding apportionments were decided in advance rather than after having taken such issues into account. The field workers' complaints and suggestions were not addressed by the FCO's staff, however. Instead, the program's management ignored underlying issues of spatial difference and promoted a 'one-size fits all' approach with inflexible timetables and fixed budgetary allocations. Quite likely in line with funders' expectations, the directors in the FCO's head office insisted that all field workers follow the same procedures in every locale and file the same evaluations – thereby enforcing a standardization that, while potentially useful for cross-contextual data gathering, continually frustrated TA field workers who saw the need for different approaches in different settings. Thus, even though the name *demiregión* implies attention to local conditions, the program was executed in a way that treated very different (and quite distant) places as essentially the same, operating without regard to the specificities encountered by the field workers. This insistence on an abstracted, standardized, and invariable approach is a hallmark of calculative and managerialist practices in neoliberal development (Roberts et al., 2005). The persistence of an overall one-size-fits-all approach has frustrated even broadly sympathetic development practitioners – for example Joseph Stiglitz (2002).

Given the way in which toponyms connoting spatial difference end up being treated as aspatial categories, abstracted from the actual uneven and complex physical and social terrain of the state of Oaxaca, it should not be surprising to find that the term 'community' operated in the *demiregión* program as an abstracted, standardized signifier. In order to approach the notion of community and its role in the *demiregión* program, we need to begin with the program's emphasis on organizations.

In the lexicon of the *demiregión* program, TA is to be given not to individuals or families, say, but to *organizaciones de base*, or local, small-scale organizations that produce something. There is a variety of craft or artisan production in rural Oaxaca, not all of it commercialized (see Stephen, 1991). Under the FCO's program, however, organizations were assumed to be producing articles for sale rather than, for example, for distribution to a wider community as part of one of many possible noncapitalized or weakly capitalized systems of exchange (Gibson-Graham, 2002, 2006). To be eligible for TA under the *demiregión* program, a field worker had to verify that an organization met the market-oriented criterion – a step achieved in part through the field worker's own investigations and through the administration of a standard questionnaire. In completing the questionnaire, an organization's representatives were responsible for confirming: that theirs was a legal organization; that it sold a product; that it was not primarily a political group and was not affiliated with a political party; and that it had good relations with the community and engaged in environmentally sound practices (FCO, 2003).

Once an organization was judged to be eligible for TA under the *demiregión* program and had been reviewed positively at a meeting of program staff, a process known as the *diagnostico* (diagnostic evaluation) was begun. This first entailed the signing of an agreement with the FCO that led to a series of meetings between the fieldworker and members of the organization to determine the latter's needs. An agreed-upon plan for strengthening the organization (*plan de fortalecimiento*) was the outcome of these meetings, which in its later stages of formulation often involved representatives from organizations dedicated to offering TA of one kind or another (*organizaciones profesionales de apoyo* – helping or assisting organizations). The *demiregión* program kept a register of these professional TA organizations, so the FCO could match the needs identified for the *organizaciones de base* with the expertise offered by the *organizaciones profesionales de apoyo*. By enacting these kinds of linkages, the FCO was able to claim that an additional result of the *demiregión* program was the strengthening of civil society networks or of "institutional capacity" across the state.

Identifying organizations that met the criteria was, however, far from a simple task. This work consumed field workers for many days. For one, not every village was home to organized groups producing items for the market, nor was it always possible to find groups that did not espouse or demonstrate political party affiliations. And even when the sale of finished products was an objective, the individuals, friends, or family members who would get together to sew, for example, might not be formally set up as an organization, much less one with legal status. Further, field workers frequently pointed out that organizations that appeared to be viable on one visit had evaporated by the next visit or that meetings arranged with an organization would end up with no-one attending them or with only a few people (often hastily recruited relatives) coming along. Further, some groups were in competition with one another or otherwise not on friendly terms. The field workers had to work carefully to understand and navigate complex local political situations. These on-the-ground realities of the field workers' experiences point to the many difficulties they faced in identifying eligible organizations, a feature of the program that is not idiosyncratic. As Tania Murray Li reports in her study of 'community-based natural resource management' (CBNRM) programs in Southeast Asia, those implementing the programs found that "[i]dentifying 'on-the-ground' indigenous communities that fit the model presupposed by CBNRM is more difficult in practice than the simplified model would indicate" (Li, 2002: pp. 268–269).

Even when they could find an organization willing to participate in the program, field workers faced the difficult task of organizing and convening meetings of people who were very busy and often reluctant to, or unable to, leave their responsibilities to attend a meeting or workshop with no immediate tangible reward. When field workers could find potentially suitable organizations, they observed that it was tiring and frustrating trying to convince reluctant and/or skeptical organization members to become involved in the *demiregión* project (see below). Each of the five field workers on the *demiregión* program reported sometimes facing hostility or suspicion (see also Jackson, 1997) as local people, partly based on their long-standing experience with the PRI, expected a direct transfer of money or other tangible resources (such as houses or vehicles), from the NGO. When it became clear that all that was being offered was assistance of a technical sort, members would often become angry or simply lose interest. This is a very similar situation to that reported by Ahmad based upon interviews with field workers in rural Bangladesh: "All fieldworkers say that people think that if they become NGO group members or clients they will get money or material relief" (Ahmad, 2002: p. 187). In Oaxaca, with long established clientelistic relations between the PRI-dominated state and localities, the expectations of material benefits were quite reasonable (see Magazine, 2003).

In addition, the 'community' is far from a self evident feature of the social landscape. It is imbued with different connotations that are often, sometimes intentionally, confused. In Oaxaca, Indigenous or agrarian communities are defined by their legal ownership of communal land. They are also political entities, with recognized or de-facto autonomous decision-making power. Additionally, the term community can also denote people sharing characteristics, as in "the migrant community". Instead of working with these multiple meanings and entities, most of the field workers' efforts went into *constructing* community, in the specific form of organizations, as an object to which TA could be applied. Many of these organizations appear to have been forged through and by their interaction with the FCO, and did not exist as bounded entities outside of these encounters. Furthermore, and quite significantly, 'community' became coterminous with 'organization' which itself was understood as being 'productive' – in other words, primarily as a business enterprise. Foucault noted that this absorption of a social category (community) by an economic one (business/enterprise/firm) is a hallmark of neoliberalism. Lemke, interpreting Foucault's 1979 lectures (Foucault, 2007), points out that this absorption is part of a wider emphasis upon:

> ...consistent expansion of the economic form to apply to the social sphere, thus eliding any difference between the economy and the social. In the process, they transpose economic analytical schemata and criteria for economic decision making onto spheres which are not, or certainly not exclusively, economic areas, or indeed stand out for differing from any economic rationality (Lemke, 2001: p. 197; see also Berthoud, 1992).

Moreover, while organizations such as sewing groups are supposed to be businesses in the TA program, they are also constructed as socially cooperative. That is, it is

assumed that production is done by collaborative, communally or cooperatively-organized groups, rather than by an individual entrepreneur or a classic competitive capitalist firm. It is curious that this assumed (but unorthodox) model of business organization (and of development) is applied to the poor, in this case to predominantly rural people, often Indigenous, and often women, as if this population is somehow naturally suited to a more cooperative mode of economic life. A strikingly similar specification of 'community entrepreneurship' is also attached to a relatively poor and marginalized population of Maori and Pacific Islanders in New Zealand, as reported by Dupuis and de Bruin (2003). In both cases, the poor are assumed to be communal and inherently cooperative. The relationship between competition and cooperation is of course, variable and complex and, while the two cannot be assumed to be opposites, neither can they be assumed to be synonyms (see Collaredo-Mansfeld, 2002).

In any event, neoliberalism, through programs like TA as it was practiced through the making of community-organization-business in the countryside of Oaxaca, is a form of governmentality – of codifying and classifying people and places and of prescribing what ought to be done (productive enterprise as a social practice). It works to bring activities (notably crafts) that were hitherto at least in part outside the market into its logic.

Crucially, in the TA program under discussion, this is all based on the successful forging of certain socio-organizational forms and these in turn rely on people understanding community enterprise and deciding to behave as enterprising members of enterprising organizations (see Fairclough, 1991), effectively enacting the "generalization of an entrepreneurial form to all forms of conduct" (Burchell, 1996: p. 275). It is to the question of entrepreneurial subjects that we now turn.

4.2. Producing pedagogically ready, entrepreneurial subjects

In rural Mexico, political efforts to reform the countryside and its inhabitants have for decades been structured in terms of education. Under President Cárdenas (1934–1940) unions and *campesino* organizations were recognized and regularized and much effort was directed at what Marjorie Becker (1995) characterizes as the "re-invention of the Indian" in post-revolutionary times. She writes that Cárdenas called for:

> ...what amounted to the cultural transformation of the countryside. He mobilized a cadre – teachers, agricultural agents, rural political bosses. They were to overhaul land tenure arrangements, to dispel illiteracy, to remake campesino habits. In addition, they were to revise peasant assessments of the world – that amorphous realm of allegiance, hope, desire. Most importantly, Cárdenas called on his cadre to develop peasant acceptance of this human reconstruction. She goes on to observe: "The result was that the countryside was turned into a schoolroom. Far from another dowdy foray into the history of teachers instructing children in their first letters, Cárdenistas constructed lessons out of their own cultural perspectives" (Becker, 1995: p. 10).

Meanwhile, neoliberal development has its own strong connections with education, from attempts to privatize schooling to reforming and proliferating spaces of education. While we should not over-generalize, under neoliberalism, education is no longer conducted only in the (state funded) schoolroom. It is just as likely to occur in the corporate training facility, the NGO run workshop, the virtual private university, and so on (Mitchell, 1999; Robertson, 2005). Certainly, the TA sector has, in many countries, been much more dynamic than the formal state-run education system. For example, a recent OECD report states that in some countries now, expenditures on technical assistance, or what they call technical cooperation, exceed spending on education (OECD, 2005: Fig. 5.1).

It is this longstanding and now broadly diffused pedagogical attitude that current TA efforts in part build upon and tap into. Together with clientelistic PRI practices, patterns of so-called state corporatism in rural Mexico tend to make the arrival of experts with flip charts not all that surprising to village locals. The emphasis in the *demiregión* program on *aprendizaje*, or transformative learning, built upon this history. What is relatively new however, in terms of this history, is: the institutional format for the contemporary efforts at fostering *aprendizaje* (NGOs); the lessons taught (business, entrepreneurship); and, the more distanciated political economy wherein the direct material rewards for participating, are absent (see above and Magazine, 2003).

The actual delivery of TA in the *demiregión* program took place almost exclusively in the pedagogical realm, and in particular in the form of the *taller*, or workshop (see Fig. 1). Workshops were the outcome of all the diagnostic work and negotiations undertaken by the field workers. They tended to involve members of the targeted *organizaciones de base*, the field worker, and an 'expert' from one of the FCO's own network of *organizaciones de apoyo*. Typically *mestizos* or *mestizas* from the urban centers of Mexico (e.g., Tapachula, Veracruz, Mexico City), the 'experts' often had university degrees and experience in the state sector before either setting up their own NGO, or joining an NGO focused on delivering some type of TA on a contract basis.

While not the 'expatriate experts' examined by Kothari (2005), they occupy a similar structural position and enact similar practices, legitimizing their very status as experts. The claims to certain knowledge on the part of the experts serve to maintain the gaps between identities (expert and poor person) and spaces (urban and rural) they are purportedly designed to close. As Kothari writes of the expatriate development expert:

Nadia, a field worker on the *demiregión* program, and I arrive at a small *finca* outside the village of *San Jose del Progreso* in the Central Valley region of Oaxaca. We are greeted by a woman, her baby daughter and a series of chickens and pigs. We move a large table covered with groceries over to the side of the room and arrange chairs in a semicircle in preparation for the workshop. Eight women, some with children, come in and look for the table where all of the *comadres* normally gather for *café con leche* or sodas. Nadia greets participants and hands out pencils and small pads of paper before they are seated. The workshop leader, TereCarmen, arrives from the city of Oaxaca dressed in an elaborately hand-broidered blouse. After receiving various compliments and turning in circles for all of the women to see, she explains that she bought it from one of the cooperatives on the coast and soon these women will be sewing just like the *costeñas*. Several attempts at calling the women to order are necessary before everyone settles into their chairs and are handed Cokes. The lesson begins with a brainstorming session around elements of successful business practices. "What makes a good business?" asks TereCarmen. "If you make money" one woman says; the others either nod or giggle. "How do you know if you are making money? Do you subtract how much it cost to make the blouse after you sell it?" Various answers follow with the general consensus that most vendors just sell their clothes for whatever they can get -- because any sale is better than none.

TereCarmen refers to the flipchart in the center of the room and patiently explains that this is not so; you only have a business if you are making more than you are spending. She asks one of the women to imagine that it cost her 50 pesos to buy materials for the blouse. But, could she estimate how much time it took to sew one shirt? One of the less timid women said this was a difficult exercise because: "we sew after the food is made, sometimes we play with the kids and we stop when our husbands come home, so it is not really taking time away from our other chores." TereCarmen nods in agreement but insists on calculating and placing a value on the women's time. They agree that 30 pesos an hour sounds reasonable. Many of the participants have trouble adding and subtracting, but the workshop leader goes around the room assisting. Now that that the cost of producing the blouse is figured, the businesswomen can come up with a fair price for the customer.

TereCarmen proceeds through a series of bulleted points on her flip chart and later talks through one that reads "Personal Aspects of the Vendor" with a list of characteristics to be considered. These include: appearance, voice, mental and emotional attitude, disposition, ability to negotiate and humor. TereCarmen gives vivid, sometimes amusing examples. She says, for example, if you have had a fight with your husband because your neighbor says he was drunk in a cantina, you must resolve this before going to work. Or, if you are eating tacos on your blouses and drop crumbs, this does not send a good message to the customer. All the while, TereCarmen is trying to instill in the women that they are businesswomen and they are going to work, emphasizing a need for the separation of public and private space. She repeats that they are businesswomen running a group enterprise and that they are not businesswomen if they do not make money.

Her tone is congenial and TereCarmen's experience as an instructor is evident, but throughout the afternoon workshop many of the points are made in a lecture format eliciting little response from the participants and many women appear sleepy. For the participants, connecting their own experiences to the abstract concepts stressed at the workshop, such as their "market," the nature of "human," "material" or "financial" capital, and the "internal policies" of their organization, appears difficult or perhaps pointless.

After several hours, TereCarmen announces that following a short break the organization will gather for two hours of needlework classes. The women agree to re-convene but many report that they cannot stay for the full lesson as they have to go home and feed their husbands and children. Throughout the afternoon, several participants pulled MW and Nadia aside to lament the fact that each time there was a visit from the FCO no funds were distributed. Nadia explained (again) the way that technical assistance was administered, and the women replied that they understood that this was the way the community foundation worked, but they said, pointedly, that they wondered if there would ever be a possibility for some "real help." This exchange was a familiar one, for it was replicated on each occasion that MW accompanied FCO fieldworkers.

Fig. 1. Doing technical assistance: a workshop for seamstresses.

> This production of the "professional" development expert, identified as such not solely because of the extent and form of their knowledge but often because of who they are and where they come from, legitimises and authorizes their interventions by valorising their particular technical skills and reinforcing classifications of difference between, for example, the "developed" and "developing" worlds (Kothari, 2005: p. 426).

From their very person (the color of their skin, their facility with Spanish, their mode of dress, their hairstyles), to their equipment (late-model vehicles, laptops, cell phones, flip charts and pens), to their relations with others such as the field workers, the technical expert brings a considerable stock of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). All these qualities, plus his or her command of the technical and professional language of development and business, make the expert a distinctly powerful subject in the village TA workshop setting. The FCO's workshops were predicated on such social difference and the typical pedagogical techniques employed in the workshops served to reinforce, rather than question or breakdown, these unequal positionings (see Shrestha, 1995; McKinnon, 2004; McKinnon, 2005 for comparable accounts of the hosting of experts).

The conduct of the workshops was typically of the 'chalk and talk' variety with presentations given by the expert to the participants. Very little active learning was entailed and knowledge transfer rather than knowledge creation seemed to be the dominant goal (for an almost identical story from a study of a micro-enterprise program in the US see Ehlers and Main, 1998). This classic classroom set-up sometimes resulted in the participants being treated more like schoolchildren than adults. The participants were to learn to be learners, with their participation in the workshop regarded by FCO staff and the contracted TA experts as positive signs of a willingness to change and to contribute to the community (see Fig. 1).

But contribute how? The kind of learning promoted in the *demiregión* program was based on an entrepreneurial model quite far removed from the fostering of 'civil society' featured in the FCO's mission statement. The blurring between the worlds of civil society and business that lies in the tri-sectoral form itself appears to have diffused into the sort of marketized organizational form the *demiregión* program sought to strengthen, if not produce, in rural Oaxaca. Indeed, the program was typical of business school approaches to entrepreneurship that see it simultaneously as determined by inherent qualities of a person (or sometimes a family or an ethnic group) but also as something that can be taught (Greenfield et al., 1979). TA was in effect 'delivered' through the transmission of knowledge and skills from technical experts to the supposedly lacking, but potentially entrepreneurial, members of identified organizations in rural Oaxaca.

That a TA program such as *demiregión* should come to focus on promoting and teaching entrepreneurship is partly explained by the neoliberal focus on the development of human capital as a key to economic development. Even before, but certainly since, the publication of Gary Becker's *Human Capital,* development theorists and practitioners have recognized the potentially generative possibilities of investing in people (Becker, 1975; 2002; see also Birdsall, 2001). In the more applied world of TA, human capital as a concept has become caught up in an often confusing web of terms, including 'social capital,' 'capacity' and 'capacity development' (see Harriss, 2002). It has also become more firmly associated with civil society (specifically NGOs) and the private sector, leading some observers to note that human capital theory has been "rejuvenated in a privatized rather than statist or public form," which is to say, a neoliberal form (Peters, 2001: p. 61). Such shifts, together with the term's own confusions and confounding associations, tend to obscure the basic truth that:

> This capital is not capital like other forms, for the ability, skill and knowledge cannot be separated from the person who possesses them. This 'human capital' is made up of two components: an inborn physical-genetic predisposition and the entirety of skills that have been acquired as the result of 'investments' in the corresponding stimuli: nutrition, education, training and also love, affection, etc. In this model, the wage labourers are no longer the employees dependent on a company, but are autonomous entrepreneurs with full responsibility for their own investment decisions and endeavouring to produce surplus value; they are the entrepreneurs of themselves (Lemke, 2001: p. 199, discussing Foucault's lecture 14 March, 1979).

In the case at hand, the persons identified by the FCO for technical assistance were not exactly the autonomous entrepreneurs described by Lemke (after Foucault), for they had to be members of an organization, and could not qualify for assistance as individuals, adding a twist to the way neoliberal development is perhaps working differently in the parts of the Global South. As members of the organization, however, persons were expected to become "entrepreneurs of themselves" and avail themselves of opportunities to learn more about how to run a business or how to market a product, just two typical subject matters of TA workshops carried out under the auspices of the *demiregión* program (see a comparable account in Rankin and Shakya, 2007).

Characteristically, the FCO's workshops were designed to teach participants how to become successful businesspersons. TA experts, for example, offered tips on "how to make a sale." Effective selling is of course tied into the quality of the product (another topic often covered in workshop presentations), but it is also deeply imbricated with the construction of a certain kind of subject. Specifically, workshop participants were taught not to pressure

clients but to "make the client feel comfortable", to "speak moderately", and to be "professional and specialized" (Field Notes, 2004). Workshop leaders stressed that in addition to possessing a familiarity with all aspects of one's own merchandise as well as a working knowledge of the products of regional competitors, a good salesperson will exhibit an "anxiousness to learn" (see below and Fig. 1). By focusing on the knowledges, demeanors and attitudes deemed necessary to succeed as a businessperson, the *demiregión* program enacted a type of development that is fully geared to aligning persons with market criteria (Lemke, 2001: p. 199).

Such transformative aspirations are often confounded by the on-the-ground complexities and difficulties of participants' lives and circumstances. From our observations of the workshops delivering TA to groups in rural Oaxaca, and from the overall organization of the *demiregión* program, it is clear that these complexities are not fully taken into account. The figure of the entrepreneur is invoked, sought out, and 'made' without attention to the complex and deep social relationships within which any kind of entrepreneurship takes place (see Greenfield et al., 1979: pp. 4–10; Swedberg, 2000; Thornton, 1999; Ehlers and Main, 1998). Even general observations about the social embeddedness of markets everywhere, and the social nature of doing business and taking risks (what entrepreneurs do), have not been brought to bear in the practices of TA we examined (see Granovetter, 1993; Waldinger, 1995; Peck, 2005). This is a crucial oversight for, as many analyses by anthropologists and others have now demonstrated, in rural Oaxaca (and no doubt elsewhere), poor rural people attempting to develop productive enterprises for the market are immediately caught in production chains that link them to suppliers (of thread and cloth, for example), to middlemen (buying finished items of clothing, for example), and perhaps to customers (including relatively wealthy tourists) (Cook, 1986; Stephen, 1991; Ehlers and Main, 1998; Collaredo-Mansfeld, 2002; Chibnik, 2003). Key issues for entrepreneurs, such as access to credit or transportation, are caught up in such patterns of exchange (see Cook, 1986 for detailed analyses of weavers in Xaaga and brickmakers in Santa Lucia del Camino, both in Oaxaca, that demonstrate these points). Furthermore, these links are themselves deeply and historically overdetermined by gender relations, long-standing inter-village relations, inter-familial relations, relations between different ethnic/linguistic groups, and so on, all affected by changing patterns of out-migration. Acting entrepreneurially has to be understood within such specific changing social complexities.

5. Conclusion

How neoliberalism and development work to condition lives and how daily practices constitute neoliberalism and development are questions that preoccupy many scholars these days. Through this investigation of one program operated by one NGO in rural southern Mexico, we have attempted to show how technical assistance works to enact, albeit partially, a form of neoliberal development (Bondi and Laurie, 2005; Power, 2005; Ferguson, 2006: p. viii). It is a major vehicle for cleansing "civil society" of its oppositional political possibilities, rescripting it as the social realm in which communities are improved through human capital acquisition. In other words, in this case, civil society is fitted into a neoliberal mold through technical assistance.

The political economy of the TA program we studied is signaled by the fact that the TA experts, brought in to conduct workshops in villages, functioned like consultants. From the monies managed by the FCO for TA, they were paid travel and other expenses each time they came to a village in Oaxaca and ran a workshop. The financial flows of the TA program thus hovered above the village level, tantalizingly out of reach for the poor designated beneficiaries of TA, but sustaining a middle class, professionalized life style on the part of most of the visiting experts (see also Lofredo, 2000 and Fig. 1, above). The funds circulated only within the domain of donors, the community foundation including the field workers, and contracted development experts. The rural poor received workshops and advice rather than any direct transfer of money or some other form of capital. As we point out, this was a continual source of frustration to those enrolled in the TA program, and one often expressed to the field workers who were expected to act as brokers between the recipients of TA and the FCO but had very limited capacity to change the way the program's funds circulated (Field Notes, 2004; see also Mosse, 2005; Walker et al., 2007).

Initiatives such as the *demiregión* program are instances of a neoliberal governmental regime that also works by enacting a "program of conduct" (Foucault, 1991a: p. 75), the codes of which are taught in the village *taller*. Such a program sits uneasily alongside the complexities of people's lives in rural Oaxaca. The language of transformation, of microregions filled with successful community businesses populated and run by eager learners, intersects with "the complexity of particular social struggles" big and small, old and new, that condition people's everyday lives (Cooper and Packard, 1997: p. 3).

And yet the nature of these intersections is multifarious, and no particular result can be guaranteed. As Mosse (2005: p. 7) referencing Li (1999) notes, critiques of development programs risk missing "the political contests, the feigned compliance, the compromises and contingencies involved". So, while programs such as the one reported on here may be yet another chapter in the history of the 'instrument effects' of development in its neoliberal guise, they are also potential scenes of much negotiation and even of struggle. Indeed, as another part of our research in Oaxaca has shown, a group of Indigenous Zoque men living in the Chimalapas forest parlayed the knowledge gained through their previous experience with TA into one element of a highly effective campaign to maintain

control of their lands (see Walker et al., 2007). In that case, aspects of various technical assistance projects became one vector of empowerment that, when combined with gender privilege, political power based in indigeneity, and access to arms, enabled the Zoques to resist state and NGO efforts to implement an unwanted forest management plan (see Walker et al., 2007). Of course, when they were first implemented back in the 1990s, these TA programs might have been read by us as purely governmental techniques aimed at creating neoliberal development subjects (in this case, 'forest managers'). Thus we are reminded that resistance to the codifications and prescriptions of neoliberal development can take root and resurface in unanticipated ways, following complicated pathways toward reappropriation, recombination, redeployment, or even subversion.

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