

Summary

In the course of the 1990s, an unprecedented arena of political negotiation emerged for indigenous minorities (and majorities) within many Latin American countries as national constitutions were reformed to accommodate notions of multiculturalism and political multiculturalist initiatives multiplied.

To take the temperature of this political space, this thesis examines one expression of the surge of political multiculturalism; the tourism program Magical Villages (Pueblos Mágicos) launched in 2001 by Mexico's federal government. Through a focus on the participant town and mestizo municipal capital Cuetzalan (Puebla) and surrounding indigenous Nahua communities and through analysis of government and program documents, press releases, newspaper articles, institutional interaction, public space and ritual, tourism magazine texts, field notes, and interviews, the analysis tunes into the identity and power configurations that are produced by and in relation to the program.

Combining recent readings on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality and sociologist Erving Goffman's ideas on conceptual frames, the thesis shows how the Magical Villages program conducts and organizes political and social life in Cuetzalan by means of a translocal frame governmentality that introduces institutional conventions into the social field and urban setting. The thesis thereby highlights contradictory and counterintuitive views of political multiculturalism in contemporary Mexico (2001 to 2014).

While the Magical Villages Program is embedded in an emancipating desire to reduce social inequality through community empowerment strategies, the program contributes – as a majority-defined activity and social technology – to maintain and enforce existing divisions, hierarchies, and asymmetrical power relations between majority society and indigenous minorities. Accordingly, the thesis shows that in the wake of the multiculturalist surge in Mexico, what has taken place by and large is a reconstitution of the political field, rather than a political and societal reorganization.

One significant mode of redirection is what the thesis terms multicultourism; a strategy of government looking to steer the new space of negotiation by offering a multicultural national self-image that triggers new modes of national belonging and participation without confronting structural asymmetries. As a result, multicultourism emerges as a state-sponsored scramble for indigenous heritage that does not evidently place indigenous citizens in the empowered and profitable end of socio-economic relations.