

Article

# Community Development through the Empowerment of Indigenous Women in Cuetzalan Del Progreso, Mexico

Pamela Durán-Díaz <sup>1</sup>, Adriana Armenta-Ramírez <sup>2</sup>, Anne Kristiina Kurjenoja <sup>2</sup> and Melissa Schumacher <sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chair of Land Management, Technische Universität München, 80333 Munich, Germany; pamela.duran@tum.de

<sup>2</sup> Department of Architecture, Universidad de las Américas Puebla, 72819 Cholula, Mexico; adriana.armentar@udlap.mx (A.A.-R.); annek.kurjenoja@udlap.mx (A.K.K.)

\* Correspondence: melissa.schumacher@udlap.mx

Received: 23 April 2020; Accepted: 17 May 2020; Published: 20 May 2020



**Abstract:** Women are an underappreciated economic force who, when empowered by association with a female organization, can be a catalyst for development. To assess the status of Indigenous rural women, as well as the mechanisms and impacts of their empowerment, this paper presents a case study of a community development approach based on the Masehual Siuamej Mosenyolchicacauani organization in Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla. The methodology used is a mixed-methods approach involving a literature review of two regional instruments: The Federal Program “Pueblos Mágicos” and the Land and Environmental Management Program “POET” for Cuetzalan. It also includes geo-data collection from public sources, empirical data collection from open-ended interviews, and focus group discussions with key informants from the Indigenous organization. The research found that, despite an inclusive legal and institutional framework, weak policy implementation and certain federal programs tend to segregate Indigenous communities. Mechanisms such as cultural tourism and inclusive land management programs, capacity building initiatives, and female associations have proven useful for empowering women and have had positive socioeconomic impacts on the community. The research concluded that female Indigenous associations are a tool to empower rural women, grant them tenure security, strengthen their engagement in decision making, and consolidate them as key stakeholders in community development.

**Keywords:** community development; Indigenous women organization; empowerment

## 1. Introduction

The identity of Mexico can only be understood through the connection of Indigenous ancestry and the rural world. “The children of corn”, as Mexicans describe themselves, have strong bonds with the land that go beyond time, borders, languages, nations, and political parties. Nevertheless, despite the general perception of an identity deeply rooted in pre-Hispanic culture, Indigenous ethnicities are widely discriminated against in modern urban societies. In a country with more than 25 million Indigenous inhabitants [1] (one-fifth of the total Mexican population) and 68 local languages, Oxfam reports that 70% of these groups live in poverty, 43% of them face discrimination, only 8.5% reach higher education, 10% pay into social security, and 40.5% work informally [2]. Additionally, 51% of the Mexican Indigenous population live in rural areas, where, according to CONEVAL (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social), poverty diminished from 76.05% in 2008 to 74.9% in 2018. The same census recognized that 41.4% of Indigenous men have better quality of life than

Indigenous women [3]. In addition, CONAPO (Consejo Nacional de Población) reported that 23.2% of Indigenous people that speak a native language are illiterate, and 43.95% drop out of school between ages 6 and 25. As a comparison, one in four Indigenous women has no formal education at all, and one in five finishes secondary school; however, one in six men has no formal education and one in four finishes secondary school [4].

As an outcome, the typical portrait of a Mexican individual living in poverty is presented as a young Indigenous woman who lives in a rural area and speaks a local language. This portrait covers the five dimensions of discrimination—education, employment, gender, ethnicity, and material wealth [2]. Hence, there is a need to conduct a study to describe the status quo of Indigenous rural women in Mexico and the community development achieved by Indigenous female organizations.

Female peasants are responsible for 50% of food production in Mexico, albeit having unequal access to land and a consequential lack of access to public facilities, infrastructure programs, loans, and economic support essential for agriculture [5]. Women's labor is, thus an undervalued catalyst for economic and community development. Throughout the rural Mexican world, female farmers, artisans, and peasants participate as key stakeholders that amalgamate the sense of community and increase social awareness to improve local well-being. Notwithstanding the obstacles to improving the quality of life of Indigenous females in the Northern Sierra of Puebla, Nahua women stand out as triggers of community development.

This paper is a case study research project with a community development approach that uses spatial planning instruments to carry out gender studies on Masehual Siuamej Mosenyolchicauani ("Nahua women that work together" in Nahuatl, hereinafter Masehual), an Indigenous female association located in, and operating from Cuetzalan del Progreso (hereinafter Cuetzalan), Puebla. Masehual originated in 1985 and is one of the first social organizations created and operated by Indigenous women.

The relevance of the case study is based on the following factors: first, Cuetzalan is one of few Mexican municipalities that has achieved the integration of Indigenous autonomy with a land-use planning instrument for community development based on the Ecologic and Land Management Committee of Cuetzalan (Comité de Ordenamiento Ecológico Territorial Integral de Cuetzalan, hereinafter COTIC). This works as a counterpoint to homogeneous village renewal policies as "Pueblos Mágicos" [6]. Second, social organizations such as Masehual, created by female partners to support women's well-being rather than by institutional mandate, have been empowering Indigenous women for more than 30 years. The Indigenous common good and self-determination are achievable when they operate from biocultural roots, in contrast to the commodification of the Indigenous cultures that keep these people poor and illiterate but are attractive for tourism and social policies.

Indigenous organizations in Cuetzalan face multi-dimensional challenges, such as predatory capitalist neoliberal trends that transform identity and culture into merchandise for the global market. Accordingly, this paper questions the benefits of village renewal policies based mainly on competitive tourism and the homogenization of Mexican culture through the Federal Program "Pueblos Mágicos", which perpetuates the condescending approach of social policies. The result is a policy that segregates a vulnerable local population in their own environment. On the other hand, Masehual and its women have appeared as key detonators of socio-political and community development. Additionally, the community complements common good organizations making use of instruments for communal spatial planning, such as the Environment and Land Management Program for Cuetzalan (Programa de Ordenamiento Ecológico y Territorial, hereinafter POET) while dissenting land and tourism policies.

Therefore, this research contributes to the body of research on the ethnographic study of female Indigenous organizations, on the basis that Masehual is a key stakeholder that engages in the generation of socio-spatial cohesion and community development in Cuetzalan.

The municipality of Cuetzalan is used as a case study that presents distinctive conditions worthy of analysis—socio-spatial isolation due to its location, and Indigenous knowledge and biocultural heritage to kick-start the project, embedded in a context of marginalization and poverty. This follows

the four dimensions of community and land development—social (community), economic (local activities), political (government), and spatial (land). The following research questions consider these dimensions in the study area of Cuetzalan: (1) What is the status quo of Indigenous rural women in Mexico? (2) Which mechanisms are used to empower Indigenous women in the rurality of Cuetzalan? (3) What are the socio-political and economic impacts of empowered Nahua women in Cuetzalan? (4) What is the role of village renewal policies in community development?

To answer these research questions, the methodology of this case study research project consists of a mixed-method approach for geo-data and empirical data collection conducted in the study area of Cuetzalan. Specifically, we used a literature review of spatial planning instruments, geo-data from public sources published within a time framework from the origin of Masehual (1985) to date, and fieldwork consisting of observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with key stakeholders. This paper begins with a problem statement to contextualize Indigenous self-determination as an asset for social cohesion and community development. Secondly, it describes the chosen data collection methods and introduces the Masehual organization in Cuetzalan as the case study. Thirdly, we analyze the impacts of the legal framework of the Federal Program “Pueblos Mágicos” and the regional spatial planning program on the Indigenous socio-spatial organization. The results and discussion describe Cuetzalan’s development in terms of the female approach and explain the role of the Masehual organization in redefining the role of women in attaining a productive economy. By focusing on three statements linked to the research questions, this study aims to highlight the importance of female social organizations to preserving local identity in the face of global hegemonic culture. Finally, the research questions are answered, and in accordance with the example of Masehual in Cuetzalan, we conclude that the role of public policies should serve as facilitators of Indigenous female autonomy, for which we provide recommendations.

## 2. Indigenous Autonomy as an Asset for Social Resistance and Advancements of Land Rights

### 2.1. Problem Statement: The Struggle of Indigenous Groups to Secure Land Rights

“This community and the school could be explained through the concept of well-being, which for the Nahua people is not a matter of ‘having’ rather than ‘being and existing’. Nahuas from here cannot exist and cannot live without the other. The exaltation of the individual is made with the other: I am who I am while I am with you” [7].

Indigenous groups in Mexico are usually perceived as unruly social groups. Benton Zavala [7] states that, on the one hand, Indigenous people represent the glorious past of ancient civilizations; on the other, they are recognized as an inconvenient presence that is subject to marginalization, discrimination, exclusion, and poverty. The paradox lies in a morphing identity that is based on a venerated past but is forced to adapt to a standardized modern society ([8] p. 6). For that reason, López Bárcenas ([9] p. 117) stated that one of the historical claims of Indigenous people is the right to self-determination as a form of autonomy and self-government, grounded on the pre-condition inherited by all Indigenous groups in the American continent of being subject to colonial rulers. According to Bonfil Batalla [10], the colonists and rulers (from Europeans to *criollos* to modern governments) subjugated the natives by exploiting them and subduing them to the lowest strata of viceregal society.

It is worth mentioning that the concept of private property was introduced to Indigenous territories through the colonial process. For most native people, the land is conceived as a collective good attached to water and earth. For López Bárcenas ([9], p. 118), the idea of a collectively owned land infringes on the principles of private property, according to Viceroyalty and the State who, over centuries, introduced and formulated several laws and regulations as instruments to divide and grab the land.

In this sense, the *ejido* system of communal land has been an asset for Indigenous social resistance, especially after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the Agrarian Reform of 1920. *Ejido* land, as described by Schumacher et al. [11], is a land tenure system based on peasants’ and Indigenous communities’ land rights to farm and protect land resources through the collective ownership of land.

Afterward, the consolidation of neoliberal policies in 1990, together with the liberalization of the *ejido* and communal lands [11], led to a rise in Indigenous resistance movements such as the National Zapatist Liberation Army (EZLN). Similar to the goal of many other Indigenous organizations, the movement pursues the right to self-determination and to organize and rule the land as an integral common good.

This is the key factor to understanding the struggle of Indigenous people in being considered subjects of the law, a status that was not granted in the Mexican Constitution until 1992 with the modification of Article 4, which finally acknowledged the multi-ethnic conformation of the country. Since then, the Mexican Constitution has recognized and respected local languages, culture, traditions, resources, and social organization of autochthonous groups. According to López Bárcenas, “Indigenous movements exist for resistance and emancipation: resistance in order not to stop being *pueblos*, emancipation in order not to remain colonies” ([9] p. 166).

In addition to collective land possession, Indigenous organizations are based on the spirit of their culture, like Nahuas. In rural areas, communities are organized through rigorous disciplines based on agricultural activities and spiritual connection with *Tlali Nantli*, Mother Earth [7]. Hence, organizations such as Tosepan and Masehual are not only Indigenous but are grounded in peasant and autochthonous conditions that are essential for the production of foodstuff and social resistance. Consequently, the process of decision-making is based on consensus and the active participation of community members [9]. Furthermore, Aparicio Wilhelmi [12] stated that Indigenous organizations have a legitimate social claim and need in regions where the presence of the State weakens in the face of neoliberal and globalization trends. Moreover, the importance of the political autonomy of native people or *pueblos originarios* through the empowerment of collective groups lies in the likelihood of improving regional administrations.

In this context, the Nahua women’s association Masehual Siuamej Mosenyolchicauani was created in 1985 to generate jobs through the fair trade of Indigenous textile handicrafts that would mitigate migration to big cities and to the United States [13]. Ten years later, they started operating the hotel Taselotzin, a tourist infrastructure project to create employment and promote Indigenous culture, as well as to stimulate actions for environmental care [13]. The socioeconomic impact of Masehual in the community of Cuetzalan is a remarkable feature that will be further described and analyzed in this research paper.

## 2.2. Contextualization: The Bond of Women With Land and Water According to Nahua Cosmogony

The origin of Cuetzalan as a settlement dates back to 1475, in pre-Hispanic times, as an *altepetl* (water-hill in Nahuatl, referring to a socio-political entity) tributary of the Great Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire (1428–1521). According to Reyes García [14], the importance of *Altepetl* as an urban organization was defined by its symbolic significance: “the sea-soaked the soil through its veins and pipes, it roamed under the ground and the hills. The hills were full of water, as plenty of vessels or houses. Here, people have the custom of calling the villages where people live ‘*Altepetl*’, which means hill of water, or hill full of water, or water-hill. The *Altepetl* used to be represented by the pyramids, which emulated the hills, the ‘water generators’. For this reason, ‘artificial hills’ were ‘worshipped, and in their construction, all the subordinates participated”. Thus, as water is the origin of life and the mountains were seen as being full of water, they symbolized a connection with the gods and the origin of agriculture. Consequently, temples were constructed as artificial hills representing the links of life with water (subsoil), land (agriculture), and sky (the surrounding community life).

For the Nahua people of Sierra Norte of Puebla, native cosmologies are still present and confer a spiritual framework to community life. Although the earth is conceived to be female and the sky is male, there has always been a balanced composition and symmetry in the presence of men and women, revealing complementary organizing principles of Indigenous social and gender relations. Men and women are expected to live their lives as partners, much more so than as individuals ([15] pp. 1,4). Guided by this cosmological complementarity, women continued to own land, pay tribute,

participate in the local economy, and possess certain legal status during the Spanish Colony, although their rights were certainly affected by the Catholic Church and colonial principles of gender relations. Thus, complementarity is the concept to use when describing a system in which men and women hold distinct roles and responsibilities considered necessary for the well-being of their households and communities ([15] pp. 12–14).

Among the Nahua people of Sierra del Norte, social construction is based on understanding people as interdependent entities. Such interdependency is a continuous and permanent framework for mutual action that is not based on power relations or imposition. Social relations and values do not exclude non-human entities sharing the cosmos with human beings as they are an active part of its material and transformational cycles triggering effect ([16] pp. 75–76).

According to Nahua cosmogony, agricultural cycles of corn are framed by rituals dedicated to *yeyekatlame* or “airs”, who provide the weather conditions for crop growth. “The *yeyekatlame* carry out differentiated, complementary, and interdependent actions in order to achieve shared well-being with human beings. From a local stance, humans and different *yeyekatlame* inhabiting the universe help each other through the active exchange of labor and its products, with these being signs of mutual respect and effect. The *yeyekatlame* helps people survive, and, in exchange, the human community carries out the task of taking care of them” ([16] pp. 78,79).

Thus, the Nahua cosmic vision of life is connected with the surroundings, in which the sun, the moon, the earth, stars, mountains, valleys, caves, plants, animals, stones, water, and air are sacred and living beings [17]. Based on the concept of complementarity and community, the dual unity of feminine and masculine is fundamental for the creation and maintenance of the cosmos. Even today, the fusion of feminine and masculine in one balanced bipolar principle is a common feature of almost every Mesoamerican community ([17] p. 35). For instance, agricultural cycles are understood within the concept of time-duality of feminine and masculine, and the way that Nahua women deal with life and conflict can be described as “[t]heir philosophical background allows them both to resist impositions and to appropriate modern elements into their spirituality. Fluidity and selectivity in adopting novel attitudes and values speak of the ongoing reconfiguration of their world of reference” ([17] pp. 35–36).

From the Indigenous women’s point of view, places are connected to broader social and power relations based on the principles of respect, reciprocity, and obligation ([18] pp. 4,8). In this context, “the norms, laws, and systems of governance that guide these relationships at the level of the family, community, and human and non-human interactions are specific to place. [ . . . ] Men and women inhabit, experience, and belong to the world and, as such, are holders of knowledge. This knowledge and belonging to the world are based on the interconnections among the social, political, spiritual, economic, and natural spheres” [18]. Rocheleau et al. [19] suggested that despite men having privileged access to resources, Indigenous women have specific knowledge of resources vital for the survival of the household. Indigenous women’s knowledge expands beyond the daily activities commonly done by women to involve a system of inquiry involving processes of observing and understanding the protocols for being and participating in the world ([18] p. 9).

Nahua people from Sierra del Norte interact with, and relate to, water in an active interdependent way as actors in a system of reciprocity in terms of affection and respect ([20] pp. 75–76). According to McGregor [21], Indigenous people value water greatly, as it is considered to play the role of a source and supporter of life, and as such, it mediates interactions between living beings on Earth. Within the Nahua context of interdependence, women assume the responsibility of taking care of water, reinforcing water’s life-giving force, as water is perceived to be the blood of Mother Earth, a living entity with the same rights to live as human beings. Moreover, among Indigenous people, women have multiple and specific responsibilities toward the protection of water and its quality, and the development and dissemination of knowledge related to water and water management to younger generations. This framework denotes a “cultural understanding of one’s responsibilities to the Earth’s living, non-living, and spiritual beings and natural interdependent collectives” ([21] p. 606).

Nahua people from Sierra del Norte have linked water with femininity since the origin of water resources. The myth transmitted by oral tradition indicates that “the airs [*yeyekatlame*] were creating the world and playing. ‘We challenge you to break that hill’, they said to [the female air named] *Sipaketle*, as they shaped a hill with a cloud. Then they said, ‘Now, break it’. *Sipaketle* felt strong, and she went back to gather strength and threw herself to the hill to break it. However, being a cloud, she could not break it, she only went through it and crashed her head on the ground, making a big hole. In that hole, the sea was formed with her body. The elders say that each strand of her hair opened breaches on the ground when she sprouted at the top of the hill. That is where *ameles* come from—*ameles* are all the little water springs that we can find around here—forming streams. How many hair strands did *Sipaketle* have? How many water streams run through the surface of the Earth?” ([16] pp. 79–80).

There are four different expressions related to water in Nahua cosmogony: rain, spring, sea, and river; each of them is related to specific social practices of resource and heritage management. Therefore, productive activities are carried out within the framework of traditional knowledge of interpretation of nature [16].

McGregor states that “water finds significance in the lives of First Nations people on personal, community, clan, national, and spiritual levels. Water is understood as a living force that must be protected and nurtured: it is not a commodity to be bought and sold” ([21] p. 27). According to the Indigenous cosmological concept of harmony between the natural elements, the balance between men and women, and the collective responsibility to care for resources, women have a special relationship with water. Women, the Earth, and water have life-giving powers, which grants them special places in the order of existence ([21] pp. 27,28). For instance, when the government of the State of Puebla intended to build water supply pipelines to Sierra del Norte, the eldest members of the Nahua population resisted. They stated that the water pipeline would make people lose respect for water because of the lack of direct contact with its natural origins: streams, springs, wells, and women taking care of them. Nahua people argued that “water is sacred. Why would we want to pollute it? They [the government] tell the young people that they will install a water treatment plant later for the water to be clean again, but why? It is better not to pollute it directly; otherwise, the animals that live there will die, and there will be no more little frogs nor turtles, nothing! Water is not harming anybody, on the contrary, *she* helps us, and thus we should respect *her*” ([16] p. 86).

Nahuas from the Sierra del Norte fear that water would be spilled, polluted, and trifled away. They believed that water would abandon them, and they would, therefore, have no means to live. In this context, Indigenous autonomy is an asset for social resistance and is crucial for subsistence. Autonomy, understood as the power of ethnic groups to design their integral project of life, is the right to decide one’s own fate, taking into consideration the cultural past and current reality to foresee a sustainable future in accordance with customary practices [22]. Given the struggle of Indigenous groups to secure land rights, the suitability of their autonomy within the constitutional and institutional framework is indispensable for the survival of their culture and community.

### 3. Methods and Case Study

#### 3.1. Data Collection Methods

Mixed methods were used in this research for data collection. As for qualitative methods, the field research consisting of surveillance of the preservation state of Cuetzalan’s urban image and observation of the interactions of Indigenous people with the *tianguistas* (stallholders) of the Sunday market, was useful for describing the environment and interacting with the participants. A semi-structured, open-ended interview with Rufina E. Villa Hernández, co-founder of Masehual Siuamej Mosenyolchicauani organization and former Secretary of the COTIC Land Management Committee for Cuetzalan was conducted. This interview provided an insight into Masehual’s structure, vision, and role in women’s empowerment and improvement of their quality of life, as well as the role of women in the preservation of Nahua traditional knowledge and natural resources. In order to

assess the impact of the organization in Cuetzalan's community development, to identify the social and environmental roles of Nahua women in the community, and to understand the Nahua cultural standpoint, we carried out a remote focus group discussion based on an open-ended questionnaire with five female members selected from the Masehual organization and a single moderator.

Regarding the ethical standards required for research work involving Indigenous women, this research project was based on Anderson's [23] notion of the problem, in which the researcher, as an outsider, assumes the locally prevailing principles of respect, communication, and reciprocity. In this context, the Masehual organization, as a community of Indigenous Nahua women, regulated its communication with the media, local stakeholders, and policy makers. In our attempt to make the voice of Nahua women heard, while understanding and respecting their cultural practices and background, this research project complied with Masehual's ethical standards and procedures as signaled by their spokeswoman, Rufina E. Villa Hernández. She selected the participants for the focus group discussion and approved the questions asked in advance. As pointed out by Castle [24], it might be gauche to face the reality of contemporary Indigenous communities, particularly regarding the role of women as a part of such communities. In this paper, the voice of the community spokeswoman was taken as the guideline for the development of the theoretical framework in order to avoid the use of persistent stereotypes about women in Nahua communities and Indigenous beliefs.

A discursive analysis of public policy documents, such as government reports and programs, online newspaper articles, academic articles, and official government and community organization web pages, offered information on the objectives, vision, and challenges of the public and private initiatives implemented in Cuetzalan. The initiatives discussed and compared in this paper include those of Indigenous organizations, the Federal policy "Pueblo Mágico", and the COTIC Land Management Committee. Regarding quantitative data, raw geo-data from the governmental web pages SNIM (Sistema Nacional de Información Municipal), SECTUR (Secretaría de Turismo), CONEVAL, CONAPO, and INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía) were collected in order to ascertain the socio-economic status of Indigenous women in rural areas, contrast public and private economic investments in Cuetzalan after "Pueblo Mágico" certification, and assess the impact of the studied instruments and organizations on the population's quality of life.

### *3.2. Case study: Masehual Siuamej Mosenyolchicauani, the Nahua Women that Work Together in Cuetzalan "Pueblo Mágico"*

Cuetzalan del Progreso is a municipality in the State of Puebla with an area of 182 km<sup>2</sup> [25] that is located at the heart of the northern highlands of a mountainous landscape characterized by abundant endemic fauna and flora, scenic waterfalls, and humid weather. According to SNIM, 64% of the total Cuetzalan population is represented by Nahua and Totonaca Indigenous people, of which nearly 12% do not speak Spanish. Table 1 shows that women constitute 52% of the population, where the number of people who do not speak Spanish is nearly double. Moreover, they represent 68% of the illiterate population, and only 14.4% are economically active. Nevertheless, women are a hidden economic force that sustains a third of Cuetzalan's households [25].

**Table 1.** Overview of the status of women in Cuetzalan. Source: Adapted from SNIM (Sistema Nacional de Información Municipal) [25] and INMUJERES (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres) [26].

Overview of the Status of Women in Cuetzalan		
Total population	47,983	100%
Female population	25,067	52%
Population that speaks a native language	32,132	
Women that speak a native language	16,428	65.5%
Women that speak a native language and do not speak Spanish	3721	22.6%
Total population illiteracy (*)	6230	
Illiterate women	4238	16.9%
Economically active population	16,623	
Economically active women	3617	14.4%
Matriarchal familiar and non-familiar households		27%

Note: (\*) Population of over 15 years of age.

Cuetzalan is divided into eight districts, each with its own religious and civil authorities and community organization ([27] p. 70). The urban core houses 12.5% of the municipality's population and concentrates health services, government offices, infrastructure, hotels, tourist attractions, and trading activities [25]. As a result, it contains a level of social diversity that has enabled the emergence of strategic projects to benefit the Indigenous population, such as the establishment of the Indigenous Court in 2002 ([27] p. 1), cooperatives (e.g., Masehual), civil associations, and the Nahua traditional medicine module at the local hospital ([27] p. 67).

In terms of cultural diversity, the multi-ethnic interaction since the Spanish conquest in 1522 has been a driving force for the emergence of cultural hybridization between pre-Columbian and European-Catholic traditions [28]. This factor has led to unique cultural representations such as the church altars crafted with beeswax and flowers, awarded the *Tesoro Viviente Poblano* by the State of Puebla [29], and the *Voladores* ritual recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO [28]. Other natural and cultural attractions are cave systems, Yohualichan archeological remains, traditional ceremonies to honor natural cycles, textiles elaborated with the use of the waist loom, traditional medicinal knowledge, and the preservation of Nahuatl and Totonaca languages, the most widely spoken languages in the area. Otomi, Zapoteco, Mazau, Mixteco, Maya, Huasteco, Tepehua, Cuicateco, Cinanteco, Mazteco, Chol, Mixe, and Popoloca are languages that are also spoken in the region [25].

As a shelter of the regional cultural heritage, Cuetzalan is an invaluable repository of Mexican history and traditions. Therefore, after being raised to the category of the city in 1986, its urban core became a protected monumental area ([29] p. 18), which enabled the "Pueblos Mágicos" certification to be granted in 2002 [30]. Cuetzalan thus stands out as the first community in the State of Puebla and one of the first in Mexico to have achieved this certification due to its historical and cultural richness, described as "symbolic attributes, legends, history, transcendental events, and everyday life. That is to say, the magic that emanates from each and every one of its socio-cultural manifestations, which nowadays represents a great opportunity for tourism" [31]. Jacobo indicated that Cuetzalan's nomination as "Pueblo Mágico" was possible because it offers sufficient hotel infrastructure and opportunities for adventure tourism, in addition to its cultural richness and historical sites from pre-Columbian and Colonial periods [27].

Moreover, it offers visitors the opportunity to get in close contact with "Nahua culture through gastronomy, handicrafts like the *huipil*, [a decorated blouse typical of Indigenous costumes], and multiple events such as the coffee trade fair and the Saint Francis of Assisi's festivities" ([27] p. 72). A major tourist attraction is the traditional Sunday market, which takes place every weekend at the central square of Cuetzalan and along the main street. In the morning, Indigenous—mostly elderly—people arrive carrying their goods on their backs, many wearing typical clothing from the

Colonial period with pre-Hispanic features. Women wear *manta* (ordinary cotton fabric) blouses with colorful embroidery representing birds, flowers, and geometrical patterns ([8] p. 87). They match them with long, wide, white skirts held in place by a cloth belt, and they go barefoot. For festivities, women wear a *quechquemitl* over the *huipil*, a pre-Hispanic white gauze rhomboid garment to cover the torso, and a headdress consisting of approximately twenty purple wool cords rolled up in their hair. Women use colorful ribbons that hang over their shoulders and back, indicating their marital status. “If the ribbons hang over the *huipil*, they are single, if they are underneath the *huipil*, they are married” [8]. Men wear white cotton shirts, white pants tied at the ankles, and the traditional *huaraches* (rough leather sandals) ([27] p. 71). “An important feature is that only men wear *huaraches* because they are the ones who walk the longest distances, carrying their *tecomate* [a dry calabash used as a bottle or vessel] on their shoulder, full of water to quench their thirst” [32].

Despite the unequal conditions inherited from the Colonial structure, rural women have always been agricultural producers, although they are not being recognized as such. Their participation in the productive system has, however, major individual differences depending on their social class, life situation, family relations, age, and ethnic group. In general, women of Indigenous communities have greater engagement in agricultural production than mestizo or white rural women, yet this involvement depends on the crops cultivated, the type of assigned task, the frequency and form of contracting labor force, and the grade of mechanization of the work ([33] p. 67). Deere and León pointed out that the emerging right to own land under certain organizational conditions may reinforce the capacity and position of women in family and community negotiations and decision making [34].

In the case of Cuetzalan, civil organizations and Indigenous associations have been deeply concerned about the wealth of the community since the 1950s ([27] pp. 74,75). The most important organization, Tosepan, was established in 1980 as an outcome of the 1977 Indigenous Cooperative Movement to respond to the need to supply regional families with basic alimentary goods [35], offering the ability to develop the knowledge, defense, and management of the rights of local Indigenous groups.

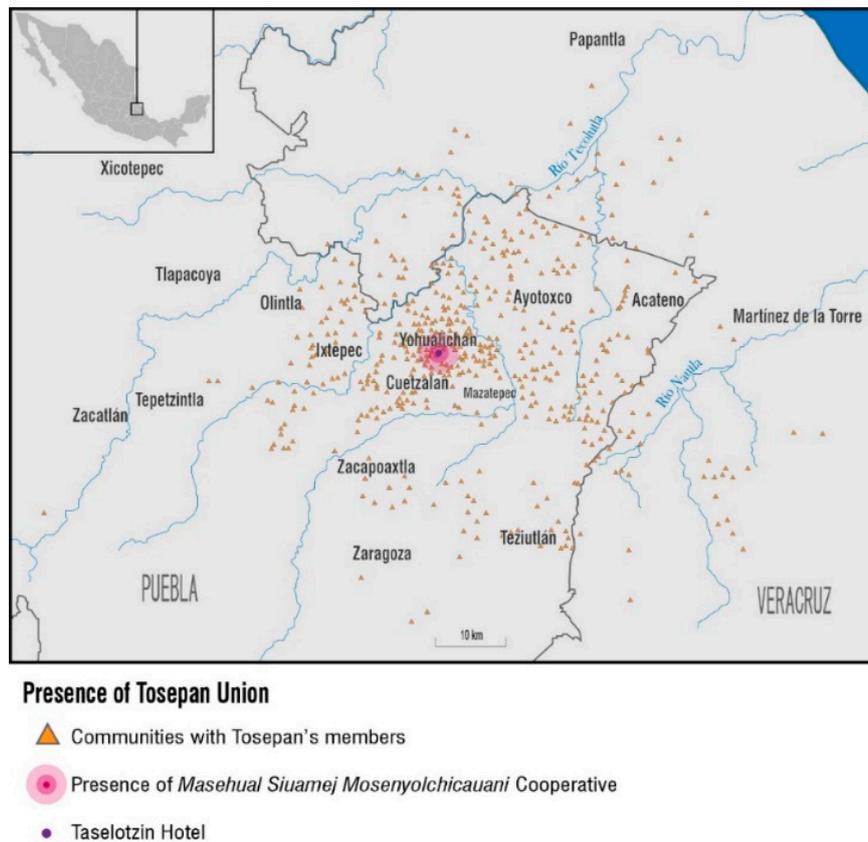
Figure 1 shows the presence of cooperatives throughout the northwestern highlands. This weighty network was achieved through actions, such as the “own communal policy”, steered by their members to increase the quality of life of Indigenous people, which were widely adopted by several communities in the region [35]. Nowadays, Tosepan incorporates eight regional cooperatives and three associations, each specialized in different areas. Currently, a total of 34,000 families are affiliated with the organization, mostly Nahuas and Totanacas, and it encompasses 410 local cooperatives from 28 different municipalities of the State of Puebla [35].

Tosepan’s philosophy highlights its commitment to increasing the quality of life of its members, preserving their cultural identity, and resources through the implementation of diverse working programs, according to the needs of each locality. It also promotes fair trade and organic coffee production, among other activities [35].

The aim of the cooperative is to contribute to a positive revalorization of the local Indigenous identity and culture, which is being reached through the implementation of projects such as Tosepan Kalnemachtilyan, a trilingual Nahuatl-Spanish-English primary school for Indigenous children [7]. Albeit undertaking a significant role in increasing the common good of Cuetzalan communities, at first, Tosepan failed to generate equal opportunities for women.

Subsequently, in 1985, the organization Masehual Siuamej Mosenyolchicauani was founded by Nahua artisan women from different communities of Cuetzalan, with the aim of triggering actions to dignify the lives of Indigenous women. Nahua women initially approached Tosepan in 1985 to take out a loan to kickstart the Masehual handicraft project. Masehual’s spokeswoman stated, “we decided to organize because we needed economic resources. We already knew how to craft our embroidered garments and to use the waist loom. When tourists arrived, they showed interest in our handicrafts” [36]. They remained affiliated to Tosepan until 1991, when Masehual became an independent organization exclusively for women, as “we needed a space of trust, where women would

feel entitled to speak out. If two *señores* were there, women did not feel confident enough to share their opinion” [36].



**Figure 1.** Presence of Tosepan’s collectives and Masehual Siuamej in Puebla and Veracruz states. Source: adapted from Habitat International Coalition – Latin America HIC-AL (2018).

By 1989, Masuehual had grouped 300 women from eight communities in the form of a commission to train their practical agricultural skills, such as horticultural production and the use of organic production techniques in communal kitchen gardens. Later on, the participating women implemented the transferred techniques in their own backyards and combined them with their traditional knowledge of herbal and medicinal practices when working with seeds, plants, and tinctures ([37] p. 139).

Masehual separated from Tosepan in 1991 for multiple reasons: First, Tosepan was a mixed organization, while Masehual was a female-only organization with its own counsel. Second, although Masehual women had their own activities and procedures, they were also obliged to participate in Tosepan’s meetings, which was overly demanding. Lastly, during the process of the formal registration of the Masehual Siuamej Mosenyolchicauani organization, they realized that they had not been formally associated with Tosepan since the beginning, which facilitated the process. However, the initiative of Masehual women to register their own organization shocked the *señores* of Tosepan [38]. The separation of these organizations generated the division of the Masehual Siuamej into two associations and led to the creation of Tosepan’s female cooperative under the name of Siuamej Sentekitini. Five communities and their 200 members continued to be affiliated to Masehual Siuamej, while the remaining three communities were absorbed by Siuamej Sentekitini ([37] p. 134).

In those years, exceptionally heavy seasonal rain impeded the sowing, harvesting, and trading of crops by men, and hence, family incomes shrunk alarmingly. Therefore, female members of the community began to produce and trade handicrafts through the newly founded Masehual Siuamej organization [39]. Besides solving economic emergencies, this collective of women soon engaged in

providing literacy instruction, sensitizing about gender issues and rights, and including women in political affairs and community decision making through COTIC.

#### **4. Literature Review: Institutional Framework for the Village Renewal and Indigenous Organization**

##### *4.1. Village Renewal through the “Pueblos Mágicos” Federal Program*

In 2001, the Ministry of Tourism SECTUR created the “Pueblos Mágicos” Federal Program, a distinctive certification for the protection, renovation, and valorization of the history, architecture, and culture of traditional Mexican villages. One of the main objectives of the program is the advancement of tourism as an economic development strategy for the community to improve quality of life, increase employment, and stimulate investments through the development of a structured but diversified tourism market in the country. In 2011, tourism contributed 8.4% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) equivalent of \$728,186.5 million MXN pesos ([40] p. 15). Hotel activity grew by 6.8% in the period from January to June of 2013 compared with the same period in the previous year ([40] p. 17), and the national supply of rooms for tourists grew by 1.4% from 2011 to 2012, with Puebla being one of the states with the biggest contribution to the increase in rooms available for touristic purposes ([40] p. 16).

By 2018, a total of 121 towns and villages were included in the federal program and awarded \$5.2 million MXN pesos each per year, meaning that there were a total investment of \$6 billion MXN pesos by mid-2018 [41]. For SECTUR, “Pueblos Mágicos” is a strategic tool to mitigate poverty and favor the development of those communities into attractive areas for the tourist industry [42]. The awarding of “Pueblos Mágicos” certification to the first batch of communities improved the quality of life of the inhabitants in many ways, especially through their integration with tourist sector services and infrastructure. However, the most recent nominations seem to have implemented less inclusive public policies regarding the local population. The first group of 27 certifications was granted between 2000 and 2006; from 2006 to 2012, the number of towns in the program increased to 54, and finally, 40 new villages were included from 2012 to 2018. According to the statistics of the National Council for the Assessment of Public Policy and Development, CONEVAL, the communities that received a nomination in 2012 gained immediate economic effects—over three years, poverty reduced in 23 villages but increased in 11.

Until 2010, the criteria for the nomination and preservation of “Pueblos Mágicos” were notably stricter than in recent years. The conditions stated that the candidate villages had to install a tourist service directory, perform an inventory of resources, preserve their attractions and historical monuments, provide information about connectivity, communication, and infrastructure, and create a tourist services development plan. Towards the end of 2012, with the notable increment in the number of nominations through a more lax selection approach, the “Pueblos Mágicos” certification was jeopardized by the newly selected villages that did not comply with the original criteria [41].

Cuetzalan received the first of seven “Pueblos Mágicos” certifications awarded to the State of Puebla, ensuring a subsidy from the Federal Government to restore the façades, streets, and urban infrastructure of the urban core and to enhance economic tourism activities. Although Cuetzalan received \$57.9 million MXN pesos from public funding from 2002 to 2012 and \$42.5 million MXN pesos from private investment between 2011 and 2013 [42], the level of poverty increased from “high” in 2000 to “very high” in 2010 [25], despite the exponential growth of domestic and international tourism, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Public and private touristic economic investment vs. social welfare in Cuetzalan. Source: Armenta-Ramírez (2020) based on SECTUR (Secretaría de Turismo) [42], SNIM (Sistema Nacional de Información Municipal) [25] and SEDESOL (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social) [43]. CONAPO (Consejo Nacional de Población).

Public and Private Touristic Economic Investment vs. Social Welfare in Cuetzalan (*)		
Public funding 2002–2012		\$57,918,208.35
Private investment 4th trimester 2011, 1st trimester 2013 and 3rd trimester 2013		\$42,580,000.00
Total amount		\$100,498,208.35
	Social welfare indicators	
Marginalization rank (**)	2000 High	2010 Very High
Migration (***)	648	1010
Population in poverty	NA	80.8%

(\*) Amounts in MXN pesos (\*\*) CONAPO classifies the marginalization rank as very high, high, medium, low, and very low (\*\*\*) Population over five years by birthplace divided by gender, 2000.

This data confirms Riffkin’s remark that only a small part of the economic wealth generated by tourism is evenly distributed among the local population ([44] p. 203). Jacobo revealed that the benefits derived from “Pueblos Mágicos” program mostly reach a limited group of Cuetzalan’s population as the village’s amenities, attractions, and infrastructure, such as hotels, restaurants, touristic events, and historical sites are concentrated at a few easily accessible sites, namely San Miguel Tzinacapan, San Andrés Tzicuilan, and Yohualichan ([27] pp. 72,73).

Hence, the federal program “Pueblos Mágicos” has been beneficial for Cuetzalan only in terms of the advertisement of touristic spots, but it has had multiple negative effects. A major issue is the non-continuity of urban and infrastructure projects. As each municipal administration manages the federal subsidy of 5.2 million per year [41] separately, unfinished works at the end of administrative periods are common. In addition, attempts to standardize “Pueblos Mágicos” have threatened endemic cultural values, as they attempt to turn each village into a generic place: “instead of enhancing the features of each site, it [“Pueblos Mágicos” Program] made them ordinary, making them lose their charm” [38]. In the case of Cuetzalan, the certification granted the cultural and environmental protection of the monumental area, but the village renewal program implied a homogenization of all nominated towns in order to unify the urban image, traditions, land uses, and socio-economic activities, even if it did not generate equal social and economic development.

Another deficiency of the program is that wealth is not perceived to be equitably distributed among the population. People who want to support their family economy but live uphill in remote communities with little or no access to infrastructure have to walk for hours each day to the local touristic sites in order to sell handicrafts and products ([27] p. 73). Although such efforts statistically indicate the activation of creative activity on the periphery of Cuetzalan, remote communities experience little or no enhancement in their quality of life. In this sense, “Pueblos Mágicos” and COTIC do not strive for a common aim.

Moreover, at some point, the policies of “Pueblos Mágicos” compelled local authorities to remove humble local Indigenous producers from touristic sites to soothe the urban image, adversely affecting the local family economy. “ This is something we do not agree with. It is the people of the communities whom the visitors want to see in our Pueblo Mágico” [38].

The “Pueblos Mágicos” program, when adequately managed, could be an engine for a comprehensive community development plan with socio-economic impacts on the tourism sector, the community, and the local administration. However, when local authorities are corrupt, they tend to make use of the grant for the profit of their own circles at the cost of the privatization of cultural

activities and built heritage, excluding local people—especially Indigenous women who have little or no representation in local committees—from the decision-making process.

#### 4.2. POET: Land and Environmental Management Program for Cuetzalan

The *Programa de Ordenamiento Ecológico y Territorial*, or the Land and Environmental Management Program for Cuetzalan (hereinafter referred to as POET) [45] integrates land management tools with Indigenous cosmovision and the biodiversity of the region. The instrument also acknowledges the threats of illegal logging and the destruction of forests and rainforests to favor electric and mining companies. The preparative studies conducted to trace the POET detected that, 150 years ago, more than 40% of Cuetzalan’s land used to be covered by cloud forest and 40% was covered by rainforest. In 2010, the cloud forest covered only 14% of the territory and the rainforest covered less than 0.81%. The instrument thus recognizes the vulnerability of ecosystems and culture to massive tourism policy, “Pueblos Mágicos”, which may infringe and destroy them. It, therefore, aims to reinforce “tourism with identity”, which benefits the local population rather than foreign capital. Strategically, several environmental policies for sustainable land use, forestry restoration, and environmental conservation were considered within the POET. In Cuetzalan, for instance, the land uses are divided into predominant, compatible, restricted, and incompatible land uses.

Endorsed by Mexican Environmental Law [46], POET established the following instruments for land use and ecological regulation: a spatial and ecological plan for Cuetzalan, a committee for spatial and ecological planning for Cuetzalan, administrative and technical working groups for the committee, and a commission for toxin and pesticide control. The main committee, COTIC, is secured by local authorities as an essential communication tool between the government and the community. Moreover, COTIC is a highly participatory committee in its conformation, as 80% of its representatives belong to the community [47]. Since POET’s formulation in 2010, a wide range of academicians, planners, and locals have acted to protect Cuetzalan’s ancestral living conditions, economics, natural resources, and landscape and territorial planning, with the aim of guiding land use towards sustainable development. COTIC has two working groups: one administrative and one technical. The Assembly elects the structure of the committee, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** COTIC (Comité de Ordenamiento Ecológico Territorial Integral de Cuetzalan)/COEC (Comité del Ordenamiento Ecológico Territorial de Cuetzalan) Legal Structure. Source POET [46].

STAKEHOLDERS	LEADER(S)	ROLE
FEDERAL	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources	Representatives
REGIONAL	Ministry of Environment	Representatives
LOCAL	Cuetzalan Major Committee Partner	Council President Secretary
COMMUNITY	Municipal officers for tourism, education, agriculture, economy, etc. Community members from each district Citizen members of the rural development council Citizens from each productive sector—tourism, coffee plantations, agriculture, agro-industry, cattle, handcrafts, health, infrastructure, etc. Citizen members of social organizations registered at the committee (18) Independent citizens elected by the committee (6)	Representatives
ACADEMY	Academics from the Autonomous University of Puebla BUAP	

COTIC is also the custodian of POET, and it is the strongest instrument that the community has, to regulate productive activities, environmental impact, and human settlements, according to sustainable land use.

## 5. Results and Discussion: Contextualization of Indigenous Rural Women's Rights and Roles

### 5.1. First Statement—Women Are Segregated in Rural Areas

When analyzing the position of women in Indigenous communities, we must consider that the pre-Hispanic principle of a complementary social organization was replaced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by a Colonial patriarchal framework that designates the positions of Indigenous communities and women as being lower in the social hierarchy and *criollos*, the Catholic Church, and the State are the main rulers and landowners. “The sectors that are invisible to history are practically the same as those that are invisible to economics. These invisibles are of the greatest importance, and the fact that they remained unseen for such a long time is no accident. The reasons lie in our cultural traditions and evolution. That is to say, the evolution of the Western Judeo-Christian cultural branch. The undeniable fact is that humans—particularly men, as I also indicated by the account in Genesis—were placed above nature.” ([48] p. 34). The effects of males' control over nature and women are evident in the exclusive male right to privately own land, the division of labor, and the high rates of domestic violence. “The mandate was not to integrate, which would have induced humility; the mandate was to subdue, and as such it could stimulate nothing less than actions and emotions of arrogance and disdain towards the environment, as well as towards those humans who were weaker or less prone to engage in games of power and domination” ([48] p. 36).

Under such conditions, it is difficult for women to be recognized as legal landowners; hence, the legal right to arable land has been one of the main issues of female inequality in Indigenous Nahua communities [34]. Geo-data indicates that 37.1% of women work between 40 and 48 h per week and 12.2% work more than 48 h per week, and even though they represent 29% of the national labor force and account for 50% of the food production, 40% are not able to report an income of their own. Moreover, “six out of 10 rural women live in poverty, the most lacerating expression of inequality” [26].

Since 1917, the Mexican Constitution has granted equal rights to men and women in Article 4: “all people, men, and women, are equal under the law. This article also grants all people protection to their health, a right to housing, and rights for children. Everyone has a right to an appropriated ecosystem for their development and welfare” [49]. However, evidence of this occurring is lacking. In customary practices, women's participation in decision making regarding land use and distribution is nearly null [34]. For instance, Mexican history provides evidence that the redistribution of land by the State in the 20th century through agrarian deals excluded women, mainly favoring male farmers, who were the heads of their families, with the right to vote in *ejido* and community assemblies. “The Agrarian Law is limiting because it is written in masculine terms. There is no specific article that states that women can hold property rights. It does not clearly establish how women can acquire land by simply living in a community or *ejido*. While it is true that women can inherit the land, it can only happen when their husbands die” [50].

In the case of Cuetzalan, in a focus group discussion, participants described the life of Nahua women before the creation of the female organization:

1. “Life used to be harder, with fewer opportunities, I worked in the fields” (Y.S.H., 48 years old).
2. “I used to work in the fields, I planted corn and beans, and could go to school. I learned to embroider at 11 years old by watching my mother doing it” (J.M.N.C., 51 years old).
3. “I was one of the few who got permission from my parents to continue studying until my teenage years” (C.A.L., 41 years old).
4. “Before Masehual, there were no opportunities for women, nor capacity building. We could not go out alone, although the community always supported us” (Y.C.S., 68 years old) [51].

These insights into the quotidian life of Indigenous women in rural areas in Cuetzalan portray the segregation to which they are subject to, despite being part of the workforce. The livelihood of barefoot economics, as described by Max-Neef [48], is a result of certain structural traditional inter-relations between work and the owners of the means of production.

## 5.2. Second Statement—The Feminization of Rurality through Social Organizations Empowers Women

Legal instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, articles 14, 15 and 16) [52], signed and ratified by the Mexican state; the Mexican Constitution (articles 1 and 4) [49]; the General Social Development Act (article 3) [53]; and the Sustainable Rural Development Act (articles 6, 15, 118, 144, and 154) [54] establish criteria for gender, ethnic, and social equity, specifically dealing with the rights of rural women to ownership of land, inheritance, and property access, which are not strictly observed during the implementation of public policies. In effect, women are overlooked in rural areas in favor of customary practices. As a result, while 51.5% of the *ejido* population are females, only 21% are the *ejidal* landowners, and less than 11% are members of representation bodies [50], such as the *ejido* commissariat. This phenomenon is replicated across the country in different types of communal land tenure, where it is a specific requirement for women to be married in order to earn the right to request a plot of communal land. As an outcome, only 1.3 million of the 4.9 million agrarian landowners in Mexico are women; in other words, 73.46% of rural property is owned by men [55].

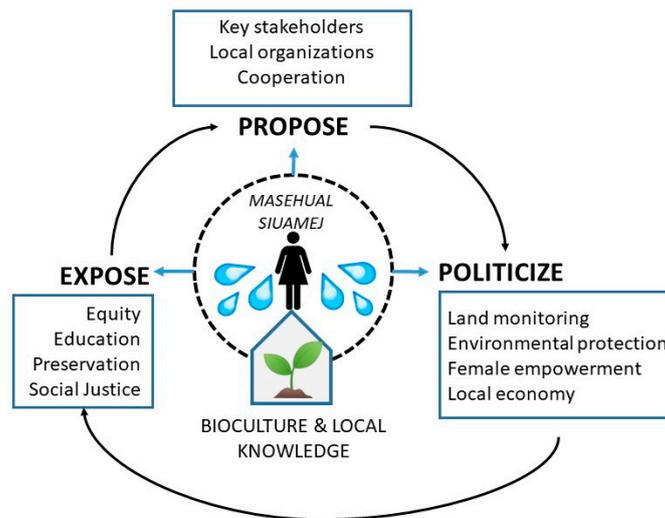
Still, female empowerment may occur as a result of the absence of a male partner [37]. In the case of Nahua communities, many of the women in a leading role are widows, single, divorced, or separated. Some of them also act as representatives of their absent husbands, who chose to migrate to Mexican metropolitan areas or to the United States ([56] p. 97). In the absence of men, some Nahua women tend to assemble in female cooperatives as a strategy to face economic crises that, after all, tender an opportunity to change female social roles at the community level.

In view of weak policy implementation, the female association is crucial for equal rights to be exerted and enforced, including land rights. “When I was 24 years old, I ‘dared’ to go to Cuetzalan, since women were not allowed to go alone, and I went there to sell my textiles. That is when I heard about the organization [Masehual], so I approached them to ask for support. Masehual changed my life because I gained independence as a woman” (J.M.NC., 51 years old) [51]. Hence, the emergent participation of women in economic activities, rural production, and land management generates transformational relational processes in the form of female collectives or groups of individuals. The women involved believe in their capacity to make favorable changes, in their right to make decisions about their own life, and in their potential to trigger wider social changes ([37] p. 110).

“Our organization has been our school, where we have learned the value of our Indigenous culture, to value ourselves as women, to feel that we are capable of achieving success, and to stop feeling inferior for being Indigenous women. Being Indigenous women is something to be proud of” [57].

Their increasingly visible participation in the community has also prompted changes in practices related to gender roles and hierarchy ([37] p. 111).

As a key stakeholder, Masehual is an exemplary case of what Marcuse [58] defined as strategic actions for social change and critical planning: expose (analyzing the problem), propose (planning and working with stakeholders for community development), and politicize (taking action, social organization, monitoring, and accountability) [59]. As represented in Figure 2, Masehual is the receptor of biocultural and local knowledge, in which women “water” the community and bring wealth through working with local organizations, investors, families, local producers, and key stakeholders. The role of Nahua women in taking care of water resources is essential for the sustainability of the community and their culture; thus, in this case, the empowerment of Indigenous women ensures environmental protection, land monitoring, and local economic development.



**Figure 2.** Transformation of gender roles through empowerment in the context of Masehual. Source: Schumacher (2020).

Tapia Villagómez affirms that the empowerment of rural Indigenous women in Mexico has been recently strengthened due to the urge to satisfy families' basic needs, thus activating a change in the traditional gender role that regards them more as caregivers rather than economic providers. This phenomenon is known as "feminization of the rurality" or "feminization of agriculture" [39], in which the attained economic security empowers women to make decisions regarding the future of family resources, namely land.

Furthermore, Tapia Villagómez discerns three dimensions in the processes of empowering Indigenous rural women: (1) progress in understanding the woman as a person, (2) progress in recognizing the organization to which they belong, and (3) transformation in the relations they establish with other members of their family [39]. "A significant achievement was convincing our husbands to allow our daughters to go to school, and to teach our sons to do the laundry, sweep the house, and clean their room. Therefore, the tasks are equally distributed" [36].

These three dimensions lie in the core of Masehual cooperative, where the dignity and plenitude of women go beyond providing economic security through the production of traditional handicrafts: the sorority envisions a global project that integrates culture, environment, health, human rights, and the sense of belonging [38]. What is initially understood as a small contribution to the family economy drives the emancipation and transformation of female roles in the Cuetzalan society and economy. The empowerment of Indigenous women of Cuetzalan through the holistic approach of Masehual has been perceived as successful by the female community because their voices are heard once their basic needs are met and surpassed, once they are educated on their rights, and once they recognize they are striving for a common cause.

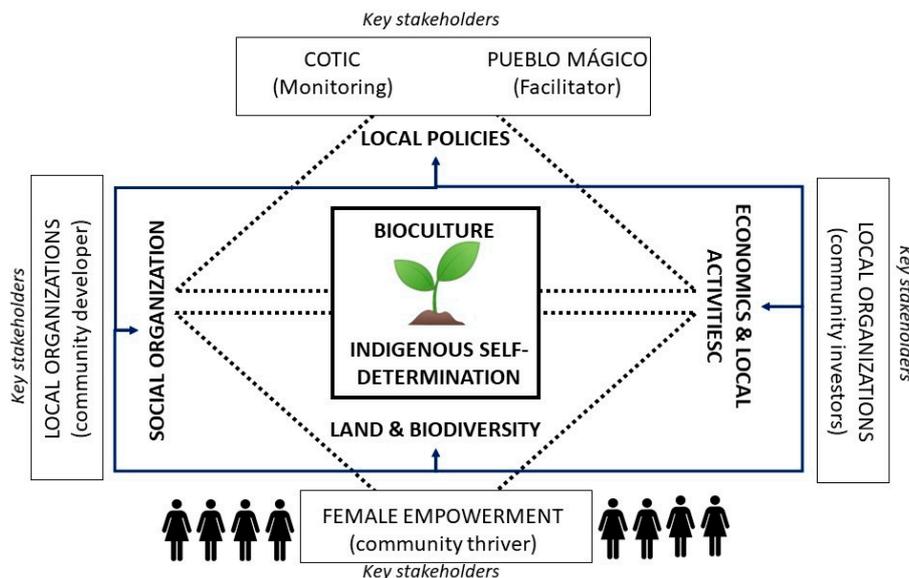
### 5.3. Third Statement—The Empowerment of Indigenous Women Is a Catalyst for Development

To date, Masehual has gathered 100 women from six different communities to work on four main projects: the production and sale of handicrafts, herbalism, the Indigenous Women Care House (hereinafter, CAMI), and the management of the Taselotzin hotel. Each project contributes to the enhancement of members' quality of life through fair trade, housing improvement, and education on female and Indigenous rights, health care, environmental care, sustainable development, and the preservation, care, and dissemination of traditional ancestral knowledge [38].

In the focus group discussion, a 41-year-old craftswoman, an expert in *jonote* basketry weaving, stated, "When I joined Masehual, I lost the fear of speaking and participating" (C.A.L.) [51]. "I am proud of Masehual because we are women, and we are working together".

The co-founder of the organization stated, “I am proud of Masehual because women in the community have learnt to speak out, to participate, and to make decisions for the common good” (Y.S.H. 48 years old). A 61-year-old waist loom artisan who joined Masehual in 1985 pointed out, “I initially feared for the future of my children, we had no resources nor opportunities, but being part of the organization allowed me to sell my handicrafts and get ahead” (M.P.M.M.).

As shown in Figure 3, bioculture and Indigenous self-determination set the frame for equity among key stakeholders in Cuetzalan, in which Masehual is a nexus between local investments and community development.



**Figure 3.** Bioculture and Indigenous self-determination frame for Cuetzalan. Source: Schumacher (2020).

CAMI evolved from initial handicraft workshops to training on human rights and how to support victims of domestic violence. CAMI’s work in education about women’s rights and health care is especially significant, considering that, although Spanish is the official language in Mexico, 72.51% of people in the state of Puebla speak Nahuatl, including 32,132 people in Cuetzalan [1]. The rate of teenage pregnancy is considerably higher among Indigenous language speakers than among non-Indigenous language speakers, as shown in Table 4. Mexico has the second-highest rate of teenage pregnancy (women under the age of 20 years of age) worldwide, with a rate of 74 out of 1000 women. Among Indigenous women in Cuetzalan, this rate reaches 85 out of 1000 [26]. This phenomenon is presumably linked to marginalization, and a lack of access to formal education in Indigenous communities.

**Table 4.** Fertility rate. Source: CONAPO [4], INMUJERES [26].

Female Fertility Rate in 2015 Indigenous Language Speakers vs. Non-Indigenous Language Speakers in Mexico	
Average number of live-born children for women who speak an Indigenous language	3.1
Average number of live-born children for women who speak a non-Indigenous language	2.2
Teenage pregnancy rate at the National level (15–19 years old)	74 births/1000 women
Teenage pregnancy rate in Indigenous language speakers (15–19 years old)	82.8 births/1000 women
Teenage pregnancy rate in non-Indigenous language speakers (15–19 years old)	61.4 births/1000 women

Masehual was the first organization in Cuetzalan to empower women through capacity development, encouraging their commitment, and active participation in family and community decisions. For the members of the organization, it was also an opportunity to learn to read, write, and speak Spanish, as a contribution to their empowerment. Consequently, women also engaged

profoundly in defense of their territory, the preservation of their traditional knowledge, and the transformation of communal dynamics. Masehual has thus given women a voice to be heard in the regional decision-making process, engaging them in the defense against invasive infrastructure and mining projects in their lands. They have instead promoted the use of alternative renewable energy sources to reduce electric and mining mega-projects. Masehual, as a gender-capacity building project that enhances the creation of local businesses for women, is deeply rooted in Nahua's traditional vision of Mother-Earth. Likewise, it is embedded in the strong bond women feel with the land: "it is us, the women, who suffer the damage to land, the same land that gives us our daily sustenance. It harms us when water is polluted because it is us, the women, who collect the water [ . . . ]. It is us, the women, who want to keep our lands clean, healthy, free of disease" [38].

The establishment of the eco-tourism hotel Taselotzin ("what the earth produces" in Nahuatl) in 1997 as a collective project by Masehual is an accomplishment that endured difficulties related to the rights of Indigenous women to own land [11]. The hotel operates both as a touristic enterprise and as a center for environmental education for the local population ([12] p. 141). In this context, the feat of acquiring the land to build the hotel could not have been possible as individuals—the land is owned by the organization. "This was a collective dream; we wanted to buy our land to build our huts" [36], stated a 51-year-old female peasant representative of the neighbor village Chicuelyaco who joined Masehual in 1991. The customary structures, endorsed by the groups in the power of the city council, challenged and slowed down the process towards tenure security but finally succeeded with the support of municipal authorities [60].

Hotel Taselotzin is a catalyst for the local economy through the consumption of products of 10 local organizations, sold in the compound. It also provides work opportunities to men and women who are not members of Masehual organization, for instance, through the maintenance work that is constantly needed at the hotel [38]. In 2001, the business model of Masehual was awarded the National prize for the most successful company led by women. It stated, "Transparency is very important to earn the trust of our members" [36].

Being initially formed as a cooperative of female artisans, Masehual uses Hotel Taselotzin as a platform to display and sell their handicrafts and to promote their traditions. "We have different types of handicrafts, like basketry made from the vegetable fiber *jonote*; regarding embroideries, we make napkin sets, tablecloths, blouses, *huípiles*, all hand embroidered. In the waist loom, we fabricate *rebozos* and scarves. Additionally, if anyone wants to see how we do our handicrafts, a group of associates from different communities will gladly come to show it. [ . . . ] We tell the story of our traditions through the textiles and embroideries that are displayed everywhere at [Hotel] Taselotzin" [57]. Through the preservation of their language, garments, and know-how, Nahua women safeguard the permanence of their identity; the motifs that represent the biodiversity of the region through birds such as *elotot* (corn bird), *chiltotot* (red bird), and *huitzilin* (hummingbird), and geometric patterns that symbolize ferns and snakes, are deeply rooted in the Nahua cosmovision. Moreover, in 2017, the women of the association released a collectively written book, "*Hilando nuestras historias*" ("Spinning our stories" in Spanish) [61], where they tell their stories and experiences using embroidery as the narrative thread to explain Indigenous sorority.

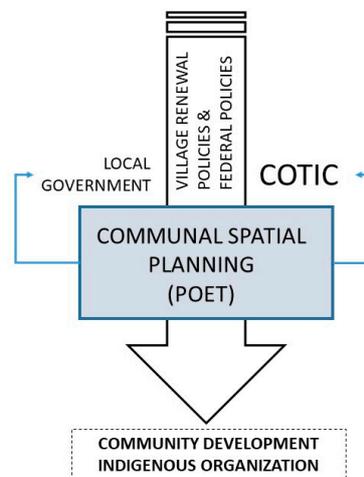
In 2010, Masehual was listed in the Indigenous Touristic Network (RITA), a civil association that seeks the sustainable promotion of Indigenous touristic services as an effective way to preserve environmental and cultural heritage, driving community development with respect for, human rights and the specific rights and identity of Indigenous communities [62], which aims to accomplish the integral and dignified development of Indigenous touristic services.

The economic impact of Masehual's projects benefits 45 families in the region. "The objective of the organization is for women to have decent living conditions, and we are achieving it because we see beyond the economic part, we also consider our Indigenous culture, our environment, our health, our human rights" [36].

#### 5.4. Fourth Statement—Village Renewal Policies Should be Facilitators of Community Development

The general aim of “Pueblos Mágicos” is to improve the quality of life of the local population through tourism, but the work of women in Cuetzalan suggests that this vision falls short in terms of equality, empowerment, and sustainable development. Masehual leverages the advertisement of Cuetzalan as a certified “Pueblo Mágico” and takes it to the next level to boost the local economy, empower Indigenous women, preserve traditional knowledge, and spread the local culture. They, nevertheless, defend their territory and counter questionable “Pueblos Mágicos” initiatives and mining and electric projects.

One of the main critiques of the Federal program is that it operates vertically, instead of transversally engaging the community in the decision-making process. Figure 4 portrays that cultural tourism programs such as “Pueblos Mágicos”, when adequately managed, could be an engine for community development, impacting the local community and administration beyond the touristic sector. However, *Pueblo Mágico* seems to work against the COTIC since the Federal vision of a homogeneous Indigenous culture does not prevent excessive tourism and exploitation of natural resources.



**Figure 4.** Transversal framework for village renewal policies in Cuetzalan. Source: Schumacher (2020).

COTIC, where the leaders of Masehual actively participate, is an exemplary case in which the impact of Indigenous female organizations goes beyond the aim of selling handicrafts to tourists, as the Federal Program “Pueblos Mágicos” narrowly intended. Nahua traditions and cosmovision are consolidated as the cultural, environmental, and social basis to counter the corporate vision of federal policies. Moreover, Tosepan and Masehual are key community developers that share a collective vision of well-being, and when their traditions and ecosystem are threatened, their actions are more socio-political than merely economic.

In Table 5, “Pueblos Mágicos” Federal Program, and COTIC, as the operative instruments in Cuetzalan, are described in order to visualize the spectrum of positive and negative issues of village renewal policies.

**Table 5.** Positive and negative aspects of the “Pueblos Mágicos” Program and POET (Programa de Ordenamiento Ecológico y Territorial). Source: Schumacher (2020).

ISSUES	“PUEBLOS MÁGICOS” PROGRAM		POET	
	POSITIVE ASPECTS	NEGATIVE ASPECTS	POSITIVE ASPECTS	NEGATIVE ASPECTS
ECONOMY	Federal Program that grants resources to the community and infrastructure investment.	Focuses mainly on attracting tourism.	Integration of different stakeholders and community members.	Does not have economic support from the Federal Government.
	Grants incentives for economic development.	The infrastructure investment is focused on touristic areas and not on other sectors of Cuetzalan.	Guides stakeholders in the decision-making process when new investment projects reach the community.	Does not provide direct economic incentives for the community.
PATRIMONY	Operates as a caretaker of built heritage.	The protection of built heritage is only granted when there are enough Federal resources.	Local caretaker of built and intangible heritage and natural resources.	Legal and death threats against members of COTIC, especially by mining, fracking, and infrastructure projects.
REGULATION	Regulates urban image.	The improvements to the urban image are only granted when there are sufficient Federal resources.	All new development and infrastructure projects must be approved by COTIC. The operation rules of the program are clear and comprehensive.	Regulations established by the POET are not always well received by majors and local authorities.
POLICY	Invest in the national and international advertisements to attract tourism.	The commodification of local culture and vertical decisions from the Federal Government to define Indigenous culture.	It incentive the creation of COTIC.	Some individual projects oppose to POET regulations, thus achieving a unanimous stakeholders’ agreement with COTIC is challenging.
	The local government manages economic incentives.	Corruption and suspicious use of allocated economic resources.	POET is the only legal mechanism of land management and protection of natural resources.	It has not been updated since its publication in 2010.
SOCIO-SPATIAL	Delimitates an impact area of the program focused on the historical core.	The protection and delimitation of the “Pueblos Mágicos” area is not fit-for-purpose.	POET is the only permanent program that helps to improve local land management.	Insufficient instruments to integrate informal housing and urban planning over natural reserves.

Citizen participation is the key to identifying local needs and reacting accordingly through policy-making and implementation. Thus, clear, consolidated communication between stakeholders, including Indigenous and female organizations, is essential for village renewal policies to enhance community development.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In Mexico, Indigenous female peasants are the most vulnerable group to marginalization and poverty, despite their significant contribution to National food production and the workforce. The causes of this are the contextual inequalities in rurality, in which a fair legal framework clashes with weak policy implementation, a lack of enforcement, and customary discriminatory practices. Under such circumstances, Indigenous women's associations in Cuetzalan del Progreso empower women and strengthen community development and cultural identity through economic emancipation and education on women's rights. Moreover, they challenge the patriarchal scheme and thus change the role of women in society, which activates their participation in local committees and *ejido* Assemblies as stakeholders.

This case study of Cuetzalan provides an example of the community development that can be achieved through the empowerment of Indigenous women. The use of a mixed data collection method, involving both statistical and empirical material through a literature review and open-ended interviews and focus group discussions was adequate to understand and describe the process where community members take collective action to solve common problems and to answer the research questions depicted below.

1. What is the status quo of Indigenous rural women? Indigenous women face particular challenges in exerting their rights. This means that more than 10 million women live in conditions of poverty attributable to the socio-political and cultural context in which they are embedded and due to the patriarchal dependence networks, that they are forced to rely on for survival. A lack of access to land prevents them from producing food for self-consumption and trade, building a house, and achieving autonomy. It also obstructs their participation in decision making processes at the *ejidal* assemblies. This statement does not imply, however, that their contribution to farming is insignificant. On the contrary, women represent 34% of the workforce and are responsible for half of the country's foodstuff production.
2. Which mechanisms are used to empower Indigenous women in the rurality? There are legal instruments to empower Indigenous women in the rurality, such as the Mexican Constitution, the General Social Development Act, and the Sustainable Rural Development Act. They state that men and women have equal rights, recognize Indigenous autonomy, and seek social and gender equity throughout the development of rural actions and programs. Nonetheless, Nahua customary practices are weakly implemented, and thus, women's rights are under-rated. In Cuetzalan, under a patriarchal structure that neglects women's needs, worth, voice, and right to vote, Indigenous women have recovered their Nahua identity and cosmogony by uniting in the form of female associations. These mechanisms of self-empowerment, such as the Masehual organization, address the immediate needs of their members via capacity building, biocultural management, and tenure security with a sustainable rural development approach that has direct positive effects in the community. This vision ensures the sustainability of the project in the long run. As a result, the members participate more actively in decision making through COTIC. Cuetzalan is an exemplary case in which social resistance, respect for traditions, changes in roles, and the determination to succeed can result in inclusive programs, instruments, and mechanisms.
3. What are the socioeconomic impacts of empowered Indigenous women in Cuetzalan? In the case of Masehual, the empowerment of Indigenous women in the rurality has contributed to community development in terms of promoting female participation in the *ejidal*, communal, and land management assemblies, engagement in the COTIC, sustainable development, human rights, women's rights, economic opportunities, education, inclusiveness, equality, and identity. Training the local women to improve their agricultural, artisanal, and management skills is perceived among the participants as having direct positive effects on the household economy and social cohesion. Masehual stands as an exemplary case in which, despite social and legal

marginalization, the empowerment of Indigenous female farmers has led to social, economic, environmental, and cultural growth for the community.

4. What is the role of village renewal policies in community development? The “Pueblos Mágicos” program tried to homogenize Indigenous culture through urban image and economic incentives. The vertical approach of the Federal policy is not complementary to Cuetzalan’s bioculture. Therefore, land management instruments like POET and groups like COTIC act as transversal monitors of the program. Therefore, the “Pueblos Mágicos” program fell by the wayside as it was limited to promoting touristic spots without facilitating community development. Cultural tourism could act as a catalyst for multi-dimensional development rather than bringing only economic growth if it is respectful towards the environment, cultural heritage, and local common good. Federal programs that foster cultural tourism projects, such as “Pueblos Mágicos” and POET, have had both positive and negative effects on the regional land management approach and economy. Although the programs were not formulated specifically to empower women, Indigenous female associations have taken part. As a prime example, the Taselotzin hotel successfully manages to integrate Indigenous traditional knowledge and global tourism demands through fair trade; moreover, its success proves that tenure security can lead to social cohesion and that sustainable projects can be profitable.

This research concludes that the empowerment of Indigenous women through female associations like Masehual boosts community development at multiple levels. Non-inclusive public policies, programs, and structures fail to identify women as key stakeholders who could introduce better agricultural practices, improve housing conditions, enhance environmental conservation, advance health coverage, and perform efficient resource management. In order to attain equal rights and preserve the authenticity of Indigenous rural communities, local authorities should protect cultural diversity and provide equal opportunities, conditions, and security for younger generations to preserve their ancestral roots, typical clothing, and local languages. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that the function of Indigenous and female associations is not to substitute local authorities, but rather, to be the voice of peasant-Indigenous families.

Our recommendation for further research is to replicate the scenario of Cuetzalan in other contexts. A broader scope could be strategically used to understand the impact of female empowerment on Mexican rurality with a particular focus on Indigenous women, based on the indicators of Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Target 5.5—“Ensure full participation in leadership and decision making”; Target 5.A—“Equal rights to economic resources, property ownership, and financial services”; and Target 5.C—“Adopt and strengthen policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality” [63]. Hence, aligning the parameters of the global agenda with the geo-data of Mexican rurality could provide a wider picture of the current situation. To do so, we suggest the following:

- (1) Study tenure security and landuse changes making use, among others, of the guidelines for Tenure Responsive Land Use Planning [64] and remote sensing;
- (2) Conduct household surveys as a data collection method to determine and compare the household economy based on agriculture and cultural tourism managed by men and women;
- (3) Carry out an assessment of the quality and quantity of the crops and hostelry services managed by men and women.

The role of social organizations is to provide a place of solidarity. Along the same line, community development should be grounded on inclusive mechanisms and policies, as the empowerment of women, Indigenous people, and other vulnerable groups will only lead to the improvement of the quality of life of all members of society.

**Author Contributions:** All authors have read and agree to the published version of the manuscript. Conceptualization, M.S., P.D.-D. and A.A.-R.; methodology, M.S., P.D.-D., and A.K.K.; software, A.A.-R.; validation, M.S., P.D.-D. and A.K.K.; formal analysis, M.S., P.D.-D. and A.A.-R.; investigation, M.S. and A.A.-R.; resources, M.S. and A.K.K.; data curation, P.D.-D. and A.A.-R.; writing—original draft preparation, M.S., P.D.-D. and A.A.-R.;

writing—review and editing, P.D.-D.; visualization, M.S. and A.A.-R.; supervision, M.S.; project administration, M.S. and P.D.-D.; funding acquisition, P.D.-D. and M.S.

**Funding:** This work was supported by the Dean’s Office for Research and Graduate Studies from Universidad de las Américas Puebla (UDLAP) and the Technical University of Munich (TUM) in the framework of the Open Access Publishing Program.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors would like to thank Rufina Edith Villa Hernández, Yolanda Salvador Hernández, Cristina Álvarez López, María Petra M. Martínez, Juanita María Nicolasa Chepe and Yanira Contreras Segura for their time and openness regarding sharing their experiences at Masehual organization. We would also like to express our gratitude to Walter Dachaga, Lorna Pugh, and the MDPI English editing service for their comments and suggestions when proofreading this paper.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. INPI. *Indicadores Socioeconómicos de los Pueblos Indígenas de México 2015*; Gobierno de México: Mexico City, Mexico, 2017.
2. Solís, P.; Güémez, B.; Lorenzo, V. *Por mi Raza Hablará la Desigualdad. Efectos de las Características Étnico-Raciales en la Desigualdad de Oportunidades en México*; Oxfam: Mexico City, Mexico, 2019.
3. CONEVAL. *Medición de Pobreza 2008–2018*; Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social: Mexico City, Mexico, 2018.
4. Consejo Nacional de Población. Infografía de la población indígena 2015. 2016. Available online: [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia\\_INDI\\_FINAL\\_08082016.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia_INDI_FINAL_08082016.pdf) (accessed on 13 December 2019).
5. Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres. *Las Mujeres Rurales Producen Más del 50% de la Producción de Alimentos en México*; INMUJERES: Mexico City, Mexico, 2019.
6. Tlali, T. El ordenamiento territorial ecológico de Cuetzalan, una herramienta para la defensa del territorio ante megaproyectos. *La Jornada de Oriente*. 17 June 2014. Available online: <https://www.lajornadadeorient.com.mx/puebla/el-ordenamiento-territorial-ecologico-de-cuetzalan-una-herramienta-para-la-defensa-del-territorio-ante-megaproyectos-el-caso-del-proyecto-de-pemex> (accessed on 13 December 2019).
7. Benton Zavala, A.M. Paisaje Lingüístico en Tosepan Kalnemachtilyan: ‘Lecturas’ sobre educación intercultural y revitalización. In Proceedings of the Conference “XIV Congreso Nacional de Investigación Educativa”, San Luis Potosí, Mexico, 20–24 November 2017.
8. Bernkopfová, M. *La Identidad Cultural de los Nahuas de la Sierra Nororiental de Puebla y la Influencia de la Unión de Cooperativas Tosepan*; Karolinum Press: Prague, Czech Republic, 2014; p. 34.
9. López Bárcenas, F. *La Autonomía de los Pueblos Indígenas de México*; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, La Revista la Universidad de México: Mexico City, Mexico, 2019; pp. 117–122.
10. Bonfil Batalla, G. El concepto de indio en América: Una categoría de la situación colonial. *Boletín Bibliográfico Antropol. Am.* **1977**, *39*, 17–32.
11. Schumacher, M.; Durán-Díaz, P.; Kurjenoja, A.K.; Gutiérrez-Juárez, E.; González-Rivas, D.A. Evolution and collapse of ejidos in Mexico-To what extent is communal land used for urban development? *Land* **2019**, *8*, 146. [CrossRef]
12. Aparicio Wilhelmi, M. La libre determinación y la autonomía de los pueblos indígenas: El caso de México. *Boletín Mex. De Derecho Comp.* **2009**, *42*, 13–38.
13. Quién hay detrás del Hotel Taselotzin? Available online: <http://taselotzin.mex.tl/frameset.php?url=/actividades.html> (accessed on 25 February 2020).
14. Reyes García, C. *El Altépetl, Orígen y Desarrollo: Construcción de la Identidad Regional Náuatl*; El Colegio de Michoacán: Morelia, Mexico, 2000.
15. Sousa, L. *The Woman Who Turned into a Jaguar, and Other Narratives of Native Women in Archives of Colonial Mexico*; Stanford University Press: Redwood City, CA, USA, 2017.
16. Velázquez Galindo, Y.; Rodríguez González, H. El agua y sus significados. Una aproximación al mundo de los nahuas en México. *Antípoda. Rev. De Antropol. Y Arqueol.* **2019**, *69*–88. [CrossRef]
17. Marcos, S. Mesoamerican women’s Indigenous spirituality: Decolonizing religious beliefs. *J. Fem. Stud. Relig.* **2009**, *25*, 25–45. [CrossRef]

18. Kermoal, N.; Altamirano-Jiménez, I. *Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Place*; Athabasca University Press: Edmonton, AB, Canada, 2016.
19. Rocheleau, D.; Thomas-Slayter, B.; Wangari, E. *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experience*; Routledge: London, UK, 1996.
20. Whyte, K.P. Indigenous women, climate change impacts, and collective action. *Hypatia A J. Fem. Philos.* **2014**, *29*, 1527–2001. [CrossRef]
21. McGregor, D. Anishnaabe-kwe, Traditional Knowledge and Water Protection. *Can. Woman Stud.* **2008**, *26*, 26–30.
22. Anaya Muñoz, A. Los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas, Un Debate Práctico y Ético. *Renglones* **2004**, *56*, 6–14.
23. Anderson, K. Notokwe Opikiheet-“Old Lady Raised”: Aboriginal Women's Reflections on Ethics and Methodologies in Health. *Can. Woman Stud.* **2008**, *26*, 6–14.
24. Castle, E.A. Keeping one foot in the community: Intergenerational Indigenous women's activism from the local to the global (and back again). *Am. Indian Q.* **2003**, *27*, 840–861. [CrossRef]
25. Sistema Nacional de la Información Municipal (SNIM). 2015. Available online: <http://www.snim.rami.gob.mx> (accessed on 9 December 2019).
26. Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres. Sistema de Indicadores de Género. Gobierno de México. 2015. Available online: <http://estadistica.inmujeres.gob.mx/formas/fichas.php?pag=2> (accessed on 13 December 2019).
27. Jacobo Herrera, F.E.; López-Levi, L.; Valverde, C. Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla. Un pueblo mágico organizado por sus habitantes. In *Pueblos Mágicos, Una Visión Interdisciplinaria*; Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: Mexico City, Mexico, 2015; pp. 67–86.
28. Secretaría de Turismo. Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla. SECTUR Gobierno de México. 2014. Available online: <http://www.sectur.gob.mx/gobmx/pueblos-magicos/cuetzalan-del-progreso-puebla> (accessed on 28 October 2019).
29. Fundación Humbert para el Desarrollo Social y de la Biodiversidad A.C. *Asamblea Preliminar de Información a las Comunidades del Municipio de Cuetzalan de Progreso*; Municipio de Cuetzalan: Puebla, México, 2009.
30. CONEVAL. Lugares para visitar: Los Pueblos Mágicos. 2012. Available online: [https://www.coneval.org.mx/Informes/boletin\\_coneval/marzoabril2012/pueblosmagicos.html](https://www.coneval.org.mx/Informes/boletin_coneval/marzoabril2012/pueblosmagicos.html) (accessed on 28 October 2019).
31. Secretaría de Turismo. Pueblos Mágicos. Gobierno de México. 2014. Available online: <http://www.sectur.gob.mx/gobmx/pueblos-magicos/> (accessed on 28 October 2019).
32. Escalante, P.; Staples, A. El Colegio de México. Sección de obras de historia. In *Historia de la Vida Cotidiana en México*; El Colegio de México: Mexico City, Mexico, 2005.
33. Sánchez Gómez, M.J.; Goldsmith, M.R. Reflexiones en torno a la identidad étnica y genérica, Estudios sobre las mujeres indígenas en México. *Política y Cult.* **2000**, *14*, 61–88.
34. Tovar-Hernán, D.M.; Tena Guerrero, O. Mujeres nahuas: Desapropiando la condición masculina. *Culturales* **2017**, *5*, 39–65. [CrossRef]
35. Unión de Cooperativas Tosepan. Breve reseña histórica. Tosepan. 2016. Available online: <http://www.tosepan.com/> (accessed on 30 October 2019).
36. Alcalá, E. Masehual Sihuamej: Mujeres Indígenas Que Resisten, Trabajan y se Apoyan Juntas. 2018. Available online: <https://luchadoras.mx/masehual-sihuamej/> (accessed on 11 May 2020).
37. Martínez Corona, B. *Género, Empoderamiento Y Sustentabilidad: Una Experiencia De Microempresa Artesanal de Mujeres Indígenas*; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro Regional de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias: Cuernavaca, México, 2016; pp. 109–150.
38. Villa Hernández, R.E. Semistructured interview about Masehual Organization. [interv.] M. Schumacher and A. Armenta-Ramírez. 2020.
39. Tapia Villagómez, I. *Emprendimiento Femenino Rural Indígena: El Hotel Taseoltzin, Cuetzalan, Puebla*; Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla: Puebla, México, 2017.
40. Secretaría de Turismo. *1er Informe de Labores 2012–2013*; Gobierno de México: Mexico City, Mexico, 2013.
41. Puga, T. Pueblos Mágicos... pero pobres. *El Universal*. 29 October 2018. Available online: <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/cartera/pueblos-magicos-pero-pobres> (accessed on 29 October 2018).
42. Secretaría de Turismo. *Inversión Turística Privada Y Pública Cuetzalan*; Gobierno de México: Mexico City, Mexico, 2014.

43. Secretaría de Desarrollo Social. Pobreza y rezago. Entidad: Puebla. Municipio: Cuetzalan del Progreso. Clave 21043. Unidad de Microrregiones, Cñedulas de Información Municipal. 2010. Available online: <http://www.microrregiones.gob.mx/zap/rezago.aspx?entra=zap&ent=21&mun=043> (accessed on 29 October 2019).
44. Rifkin, J. *The Hydrogen Economy: The Creation of the Worldwide Energy Web and the Redistribution of Power on Earth*; Tarcher/Penguin: New York, NY, USA, 2002.
45. Ayuntamiento del Municipio de Cuetzalan del Progreso. *Programa de Ordenamiento Ecológico Local del Territorio del Municipio de Cuetzalan del Progreso*; Municipio de Cuetzalan: Cuetzalan, Mexico, 2010.
46. Cámara de Diputados. Ley General de Equilibrio Ecológico y la Protección al Ambiente. *D. Of. De La Fed.* **1998**, 18.
47. González, A. El ordenamiento de Cuetzalan, una herramienta de defensa comunitaria. *La Jornada del Campo*. 17 February 2018. Available online: <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2018/02/17/cam-cuetzalan.html> (accessed on 2 May 2020).
48. Max-Neef, M. *From the Outside looking in: Experiences in Barefoot Economics*; Förlaget, N., Ed.; Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation: Stockholm, Sweden, 1982.
49. *Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Artículos 1 Y 4 [Capítulo I]*; H. Congreso de la Unión 25 Legislatura, Mexico: Mexico City, Mexico, 1992.
50. FAO. Mujer Rural y Derecho a la Tierra. In *Situación General de las Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas de México*; FAO: Mexico City, Mexico, 2017.
51. Masehual Women. Focus group discussion with five representatives from Masehual Sihamej Mosenyolchicauani. [interv.] M. Schumacher and P. Durán-Díaz. [trans.] Pamela Durán-Díaz. Cuetzalan. 9 April 2020; Telephone interview.
52. United Nations Human Rights. Articles 14, 15 and 16. In *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*; United Nations Human Rights: New York, NY, USA, 1979.
53. *Ley General de Desarrollo Social, Article 3*; H. Congreso de la Unión 25 Legislatura: Mexico City, Mexico, 2018.
54. FAO. *Ley del Desarrollo Rural Sustentable*; FAO: Mexico City, Mexico, 2017.
55. Registro Agrario Nacional. *Datos Geográficos de las Tierras de Uso Común, Por Estado*; Gobierno de México: Mexico City, Mexico, 2018.
56. Rodríguez Blanco, E. Género, etnicidad y cambio cultural: Feminización del sistema de cargos de Cuetzalan. *Política y Cult.* **2011**, 35, 87–110.
57. Villa, H.; Rufina, E. *Mujeres Masehual, Deshierbando el Machismo*; La Coperacha: Mexico City, Mexico, 2017.
58. Marcuse, P. Whose right(s) to what city? In *Cities for People, not for Profit*; N. Brenner, P.M., Mayer, M., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2012; pp. 36–53.
59. Schumacher, M. Peri-urban Development in Cholula, Mexico. Ph.D. Thesis, Technische Universität München, Munich, Germany, 2016.
60. Hernández-Loeza, S.E. La participación en los procesos de desarrollo. El caso de cuatro organizaciones de la sociedad civil en el municipio de Cuetzalan, Puebla. *Econ. Soc. Y Territ.* **2011**, XI, 95–120.
61. Masehual Siuamej, M. *Hilando Nuestras Historias. El Camino Recorrido Hacia Una Vida Digna/Ibero Puebla*; Cecilia Ramón, F., Ed.; Instituto de los Derechos Humanos Ignacio Ellacuría: Puebla, Mexico, 2017.
62. Red Indígena de Turismo de México (RITA). 2013. Available online: <http://www.rita.com.mx> (accessed on 10 February 2020).
63. United Nations Development Program. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Goal 5*; United Nations: New York, NY, USA, 2015.
64. Chigbu, U.E.; Chigbu, U.E.; Haub, O.; Mabikke, S.; Antonio, D.; Espinoza, J. *Tenure Responsive Land Use Planning: A Guide for Country Level Implementation*; UN-Habitat: Nairobi, Kenya, 2016.

