Social Movement Organizations and Collective Action in Mexico: a Comparative Analysis of Urban and Rural Cases. Jeffrey Beasley, University of Kansas.

This paper will analyze the concept of social movement strength largely from a collective action perspective. Focusing on the interaction between the movement organization and individual participants at one level, and between the movement organization and its political and economic context at another, I will argue that the methods which a movement organization uses to mobilize participants, in conjunction with the availability of those resources and competition from the state, will greatly affect the strength of the movement. I begin by briefly situating the theories of collective action in the broader field of social movement theory. This will be followed by an empirical section which compares the two cases of social movement organization in three categories: 1. the goals that each movement claims to have, 2. the collective actions that participants in the movement regularly perform in order to obtain those goals, and 3. the methods each movement organization uses to mobilize participants in a collective manner.

The cases I will compare were chosen, in part, because of the different contexts in which they occur. The *Asamblea de Barrios* (AB) is an urban group that works for affordable housing in Mexico City and the *Unión de Comuneros Emiliano Zapata* (UCEZ) is a rural organization based in the state of Michoacán that helps peasants resolve land disputes and obtain basic services. The paper concludes with a discussion of the importance of the use of selective incentives to the study of social movements.

Social Movement Theory and Collective Action Theory

Ironically, perhaps, the most influential theory of collective action to emerge during the turbulent 1960s was one which was inherently skeptical about the possibility of individuals working together to achieve a common goal. Mancur Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965) argued that individuals do not rationally participate in collective action unless the benefits of their participation outweigh the costs. Participation in large groups occurs only rarely because the benefits received by individual participants is only an average of the total benefits received by the group. The average individual benefit is inversely related to the size of the group. Participation in a mass organization is, therefore, rarely a rational choice.

Social movement theorists in the 1970s and 1980s were particularly concerned with overcoming this dilemma: If collective action is so difficult to achieve, they asked, why do people participate in social movements at all? Resource Mobilization scholars such as McCarthy and Zald (1973;1977) argued that social movements consisted of more than just aggregations of angry citizens and they argued for an approach which included both individuals who participate in, and groups who lead social movements. A well organized social movement organization can overcome collective action problems, they argued, by convincing people that they represent their interests.

On the other side of the Atlantic the New Social Movement scholars of Europe presented a structural approach to the understanding of groups involved in current movements dealing with the environment, peace, and nuclear power. These groups, they argued, stand outside of the traditional channels of political discourse and, therefore, represent new historical, cultural, and political meanings (Habermas 1981; Offe 1981, 1985). These theorists argued that new social movements arise in response to the

expansion of the state into areas of life that were at one time considered private (Cohen 1985).

The recent work of Sidney Tarrow and others have attempted to link the medium-level (group) and macro-level (structural) levels of analysis with their concept of "political opportunity structures." Where the Resource Mobilization school views social movements as specific organizations and the New Social Movement theorists view them as an outgrowth of the social structure, Tarrow sees them as a combination of the two: forces which both act and are acted upon. In his own words, movements are defined as:

> collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities (1994, pp. 3-4).

Tarrow (1989) argues that social movements are shaped by structurally based "opportunities" which either allow them to act or constrain them. He mentions several possible variables which could be used in the analysis of political opportunity structures. Among them: the degree of openness of a polity, division within the political elite, government tolerance for protest, and the policy-implementing capacity of the government. Herbert Kitscheldt (1986) has operationalized political opportunity structures as "the degree of openness of a regime to new demands" in his comparative study of anti-nuclear power movements. He argues that the degree to which a regime is open to the demands of new groups greatly affects the size and tactical strategies of a given social movement.

While conceptually promising, political opportunity structure has proven to be a difficult variable to operationalize in empirical studies. It's difficult, for example, to understand what the term "open regime" signifies in practice. Does it refer to a regime that adheres strictly to democratic processes of decision making or simply a government that is open to discussion of a particular issue? Opportunity theorists are often, therefore, subject to the temptation of defining their concept *post-hoc.* The danger of selection bias is also present as opportunity theorists select cases in which protest has occurred and then begin their search for the structural opportunities which made protest possible. Studies which look at cases where protest has not occurred are rare.

Conceptually, the theoretical focus upon political opportunities has proven dissatisfying because it 1. denies the agency of movement organizations by portraying their success as almost entirely dependent upon outside forces and 2. treats as unproblematic the ability of movement organizations to mobilize individuals. In theories of political opportunity, movement activity is treated as a dependent variable, thus leaving opportunity theorists unable to explain why movement organizations take advantage of opportunities at certain times and not others and also denying the possibility that movement organizations affect the nature of existing opportunities and even create their own.

It is my contention that the question of why movement organizations behave the way they do needs to be addressed by a theory that includes both movement agency and structural change. By collapsing state-movement relations into a single variable, opportunity theorists have inadvertently denied the existence of a number of interesting questions.

Collective action

A theory which encompasses both movement and regime agency may be found, interestingly enough, in recent studies of collective action. Most social movement theorists have written off Mancur Olson's "collective action problem" as an unimportant puzzle for a number of years, but Mark Lichbach's recent work on rebellion (1994, 1995) makes a convincing argument for it's ability to illuminate the interaction that occurs between states and dissidents.

Like Olson, Lichbach seeks explanations for collective action in individual cost-benefit analysis. He argues that the potential for individual participation in collective action is reduced by a number of factors: 1. the individual costs of participation in dissident behavior (especially in politically repressive environments) are often high while the benefits of participation, are low, 2. the outcome of a mobilization is not affected by the participation of a single individual, and 3. the benefits achieved by a mobilization are independent of the participation of a single individual. Speaking of the individual costs of participation, Lichbach says that: 1. the individual often has the option to choose from more than one group which he can join, 2. people have other demands on their time which are often more pressing than group participation (participation in a demonstration can cost the individual a day's wage, for example), and 3. apart from "opportunity costs," participation is potentially very dangerous for an individual because he may be imprisoned, tortured, or even killed.

The primary goals for movement organizations are, therefore, to 1. lower costs and raise benefits for potential participants and 2. overcome the "free rider" problem by distributing greater benefits to individuals who actually participate in collective action. Leaders need some way of rewarding participation and punishing inactivity. Lichbach focuses upon groups' use of selective incentives to overcome collective action problems, arguing that dissident group leaders ensure participation by controlling resources and parceling them out to members according to their contributions. These incentives may come in the form of material goods such as a piece of land, a house, government supported credits, or basic utility services.

In Lichbach's theory, the state and protest organizations are involved in a struggle over solutions to the collective action problem. Movement organizations attempt to raise benefits by gaining access to more resources which they can give to members. The state, in turn, attempts to limit these organizations' access to resources and raise the cost of individual participation through the use of repression. The state, of course, has the upper hand in this kind of contest because it has control over more resources as well as a monopoly on coercive power. An interesting question within Lichbach's framework, therefore, is when and why are dissident organizations able to gain access to collective goods and solve collective action problems?

Empirical results:

A. Organizational goals

Asamblea de Barrios

The *Asamblea de Barrios Ciudad de México* (AB)[1] was numerically and politically the most important social movement organization to emerge from the aftermath of the massive earthquake which greatly damaged much of Mexico City on September 19th and 20th, 1985. Citizen's groups quickly formed in response to the housing crisis that resulted from the devastation and managed to make significant gains in the following two years. Led primarily by the *Coordinadora Única de Damnificados* (CUD), these groups were able to resist the government's project to replace much of the damaged housing in the center of the city with commercial and financial construction (Barquera 1989). During this time, such groups managed to define the housing debate taking place in the city by organizing a series of large mobilizations and cultural events and eventually participating in the administration of government and international funds designated for the reconstruction and repair of damaged housing.[2]

The AB was formed in the spring of 1987 by activists who had worked with CUD and saw potential in broadening the housing movement to include people who, though not directly affected by the earthquake, suffered from the ongoing housing crisis in the city. The AB emerged from this wave of activism with a broader vision that aspired to incorporate more areas of the city within the movement and translate that movement into political power which would force the democratization of urban housing laws and ensure a stable flow of housing credits for the city's working poor. The AB's initial mobilizations, designed to gauge people's interest in such a project, proved to be much larger than the leadership had expected (personal interviews). More than 4,000 families were represented in the AB's first meetings, and this number quickly increased to over 15,000 by mid-summer (Asamblea de Barrios 1991). The AB soon became a lead organization in a broad popular front calling not only for new housing credits but also for protection against illegal evictions, the timely provision of basic services, and credits for the repair of decrepit

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[1]The *Asamblea de Barrios* has experienced important structural changes in recent years which I will not address in this paper. Specifically, the organization has divided twice over differences in the political views and leadership styles of the members of the political committee. There are now at least three manifestations of the Asamblea de Barrios currently operating in Mexico City. My fieldwork is based on observations and interviews with two of these organizations: the *Asamblea de Barrios Ciudad de México* and the *Asamblea de Barrios Patria Nueva.* The basic tasks and work of these two organizations are identical at the CDB level, although they do differ in their leadership styles. The AB *Patria Nueva* is an institutionally more sophisticated organization that relies much more on routinized operations while, on the other hand, the organizational style of the AB *Ciudad de México* is much more centered on the actions of a few strong leaders. At the highest level of the organization, my study focuses almost exclusively on the AB *Patria Nueva* simply because they granted me more interviews and greater access to information. The AB *Patria Nueva* is the only descendent of the original organization that still works with the AB's core institution: the AB Housing Institute (IVAB), a group of architects and professionals that work solely on the process of housing design and construction.

[2]For an excellent discussion of citizens' response to the earthquake and the development of this movement's most influential organization the Coordinadora Única de Damnificados (CUD) see Haber 1992.

housing. This front, while still based primarily in Mexico City's historic center, included groups from the city's outer regions such as Xochimilco and Iztapalapa.

Politically, the AB has aligned itself with the center-left opposition in Mexico, first joining the broad coalition of organizations backing the campaign of Cuautémoc Cárdenas in his 1988 bid for the presidential election and later becoming an important organization allied with the center-left *Partido Revolucionario Democrático* (PRD) and managing to obtain political posts in the city assembly and national legislature (Haber 1992). The four original leaders of the AB represent the convergence of a cross-section of major currents within the urban movement (personal interviews).

Although essentially a housing organization, the AB's stated ideological goals present a broader vision that goes well beyond the limits of its material goals. The primary aim of the AB is to force government officials to recognize their own responsibility in guaranteeing affordable housing to all citizens. The most commonly cited justification for this is article four of the Mexican Constitution which states: "Every family has the right to have the benefit of dignified and decorous housing. The law will establish the instruments and necessary supports to accomplish this objective" (quoted in Haber 1992). In addition to this, the AB has frequently contributed its support to other struggles such as anti-poverty campaigns conducted by groups in other cities, campaigns for AIDS education, human rights campaigns, campaigns against nuclear power, and, more recently, demonstrations in support of peace in Chiapas.

Unión de Comuneros Emiliano Zapata

The *Unión de Comuneros 'Emiliano Zapata'* (UCEZ) is a campesino organization that was founded in 1979 to promote the resolution of land disputes in the rural state of Michoacán. Unlike the AB, the UCEZ did not form out of pre-existing social movement organizations nor did it appear in the midst of a strong movement already in progress. It was created, rather, during a series of meetings among communities in Michoacán that would eventually come to form the core membership of the organization (Zepeda 1986). Communities that attended these early meetings found easy solidarity in their recognition of similarity of the land disputes in which they were involved.[3] They were primarily indigenous communities whose communal lands were being threatened by large agricultural businesses, mining companies, or private landholders (Zepeda 1986).

Territorially, the UCEZ's base is far larger than that of the AB, and this certainly affects its style of organization and the kinds of activities in which it engages. The UCEZ's initial growth period occurred over a period of a few years rather than a few months. The first three years of the organization were marked by a series ever larger mobilizations occurring in the state capital, Morelia, as well as the member communities themselves. Estimates of how many communities were involved in the mobilizations of the UCEZ's peak years (early- to mid-1980s) vary greatly depending on the source.

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[3]An illustrative example of how the UCEZ grew in the early years can be seen in the story of Carlos Ramos. Carlos came to Morelia in the early 1980s to seek legal advice from the UCEZ on behalf of his community, Aquila, near Tecona, Michoacán which was fighting the encroachment of the HISLA mining company onto communal lands. "When I came to Morelia," he says, "I saw that there were a number of communities experiencing the same conditions as ours." Carlos later attended the Univesity Michoacana Sán Nícolas de Hidalgo in Morelia and became an advisor to the UCEZ. He is currently a coordinator for the Comité Nacional "Plan de Ayala," a national campesino organization once affiliated with the UCEZ. (Personal interview).

Movement leaders estimate the number of participating communities to be 350, while scholars who have studied the UCEZ place the number of communities simultaneously involved in the organization during its peak years between 80 (Zárate Hernández 1991) and 150 (Zepeda 1986).[4] In the mid-1980s the UCEZ received consistent support from around 12 core communities and about 100 secondary communities that would participate in full force only if the particular issues being addressed by the organization affected the community directly (Zepeda 1986).

The UCEZ's motto: "Today we struggle for land and also for power," neatly summarizes the group's purpose as both a campesino and a political organization, but the actual ideology of the organization is somewhat more complex and inseparable from its goals. The newsletters and fliers produced by the organization reveal a fairly consistent set of objectives: 1. land, 2. indigenous rights, 3. democratic and communal control of property and the means of production, 4. public services and government-sponsored credit, and 5. rural women's rights (see Zepeda 1986; *Comunidades,* 1-6; and CNPA/UCEZ 1983). At the core of UCEZ ideology is the creation of their own social identity as *comuneros*. The term *comunero* refers to the practice of working the land collectively, but in UCEZ literature the term is used interchangeably with the word *indio*, or Indian. The category manages to cover-up a wide range of economic and ethnic differences within the group and is, thereby, designed to facilitate collective action (Zepeda 1988; Nava 1987).[5]

Unlike the AB, the UCEZ rejects the notion of strategic or even a tactical alliances with a political parties. The concern over being coopted or manipulated by a political party is so strong that the UCEZ has even refused to participate to the wave of *Cardenismo* so prevalent in Michoacán. This decision has been a source of tension between the leader, Efrén Cápiz Villegas--who rejects the formal political process--and many in the group's second-tier leadership who feel that the benefits of allying with a leftist political party would give the group more political clout (personal interviews). Affiliations are regularly forged, however, with other independent organizations. Perhaps the most nationally influential of these was the Comité Nacional Plan de Ayala (CNPA) a national campesino organization that the UCEZ helped found in 1979. Since this time the UCEZ has forged links with other national organizations, the most recent being the autonomous left umbrella organization the FAC-MLN.

B. Collective actions needed to obtain goals.

Social movements are based on collective actions--that is, actions carried out by groups of people who are trying to obtain a common good. The literature on social movements primarily speaks of the origins, identities, or goals of particular social movements without mentioning the specific nature of the work they do. My goal in this section is to show that social movement work can involve a wide variety of collective

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[4]Several hundred communities have been involved in the UCEZ at one time or another throughout the history of the organization. However, these more conservative estimates about the number of communities working together at the same time are probably more accurate given the general pattern of participation.

[5]The label "comunero" obscures the fact that there are many different types of production and ethnic categories within UCEZ communities (Zárate Hernández 1991). Some communities actually do farm communally, although many include private property or engage work for larger larger entities. Michocán is also an ethnically mixed state and a large number of the member communities in the UCEZ are *mestizos*.

actions that range from the extraordinary, e.g. major mobilizations, to the routine and ordinary, e.g. weekly meetings or the maintenance of group facilities. Each of these types of activities is essential to the growth and perpetuation of a social movement. The collective nature of these activities makes them difficult to achieve. Yet these activities--both ordinary and extraordinary--are essential to movement power and influence.[6] The following section describes the collective actions that each of the organizations engages in in order to obtain and maintain power.

AB

Before the specific activities of the *Asamblea de Barrios* can be adequately portrayed, some discussion of how the organization is structured is necessary. The original structure of the AB consisted of a several central committees such as the political commission, the housing commission, the legal commission, and the finance commission and two types of base organizations: 1. the original neighborhood organizations such as Peña Morelos, Guerrero, and Pensil which existed prior to the AB and from which the organization drew its original leadership, and 2. groups of housing solicitors who either came to the organization as a group or were brought together after joining. By 1989, the AB had adopted a two-tiered structure in which most housing groups became integrated into neighborhood organizations called *comités de defensa del barrio* (CDBs), or neighborhood defense committees. The CDB committee structure mirrors that of the overall organization except in cases where unique functions need to be fulfilled. The general organization does not have a sports committee, for, example, but the CDBs which have soccer teams do (personal interviews). CDBs hold weekly general meetings and work autonomously on matters affecting the local community such as defending people in the neighborhood from eviction or administering breakfasts for schoolchildren. Leadership, however, is chosen centrally by the political committee and political actions are usually only carried out in conjunction with the rest of the organization.

Decision making is fairly centralized in the AB. Throughout the group's various organizational changes, the most important decisions have been made by members of the Political Committee in consultation with CDB leaders and others with close ties to the central leadership. Over the years this decision making power has become somewhat less concentrated (personal interviews). Between 1987 and 1992, the political committee consisted of the four founding leaders. It has more recently expanded to include newer leaders. By 1995 the number of people sitting on the political committee had risen to nine and included leaders from the larger CDBs. The AB has also added a representative council that includes representatives from each CDB and meets weekly to discuss decisions made by the political committee. This organization, while possessing no formal power to override decisions made by the group's leaders has become a lively forum for the criticism and questioning of the group's direction and policies.

[6]The question of how and when a social movement has power (i.e. the power to obtain a collective good) is one that remains to be answered within the literature. Sidney Tarrow argues that movement power comes in part in the ability of a movement to threaten disruption without incurring violent repression from the state (Tarrow 1994, 113). Others argue that movement power can be seen more locally in the self-determination and autonomy of a particular group or community (Fox 1995), (Ramirez Sáiz 1991).

The guiding philosophy among the group's leadership is that strength of the organization depends upon the consistent participation of people at the grassroots level.[7] The types of collective action carried out by the Asamblea de Barrios (listed in Table 1) can be divided into the three categories: 1. committee work (at the general or CDB level), 2. participation in the housing groups, and 3. attendance at political demonstrations and marches.

Committee work.

There are a number of posts to be filled among the committees at the general organization level and attendance at these meetings, especially that of the political committee and the representative council, is necessary for the proper functioning of the organization. These high-level committees do all of the planning for organization-wide events such as the inauguration of new housing projects, mobilizations, celebrations, educational courses, and the handling of group finances. Many of these same committees are mirrored at the CDB level and their level of activity varies throughout the organization.

Most housing solicitors belong to at least one of the committees at the CDB level. Each CDB has committees dealing with finance, housing, legal issues, women, education, press and propaganda, maintenance, as well as ad hoc committees designed for special events or the particular needs of the community. The amount of work these committees do varies with their importance to the routine functioning of the CDB as well as the willingness of their members. The finance committee, for example, which is in charge of the collection of dues and the disbursement of resources to pay for events and materials, is quite active, while the maintenance committee only meets when its services are necessary.

The housing process

Most of the work that the AB does centers around the development and administration of housing projects. An overwhelming majority of participants in the movement are part of one of the hundreds of housing groups which range in size from a few dozen to over 300 members. The process of realizing a project can be divided into several stages, each requiring the participation of members from every family that is soliciting housing in the project[8]: 1. the formation of groups of housing petitioners, 2. the acquisition of land on which to build, 3. the urbanization of the land (i.e. the provision of basic services such as water, electricity, and sewage), and 4. the construction of housing (IVAB document). These steps are not always followed in the same order (steps three and four, for example, are often reversed) and the duration of the process can vary according to numerous factors. All projects have in common, however, the fact that their completion requires the cooperation and participation of a group of people over a period ranging from two to as many as eight years.

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[7]The phrase most commonly used by AB leaders is *nivel del base* which can be translated as "rank-and-file membership" or "grassroots level." The phrase is used respectfully among leaders and manages to avoid the pejoritive nature of the former or the preciousness of the latter terms.

[8]The urban movement in Mexico refers to this process as uses *autogestión;* a broad term that carries both practical and political significance. In its practical usage the term refers to the performance of self-help work "of a non-political nature" by local actors (Ramírez Sáiz 1993). In movement flyers and pamphlets however, this term often takes on political significance and is used interchangeably with the words "self-government" and "self-determination".

Although the difficulties that each group will face along the way (i.e. disputes within the group, trouble securing promised funding from government crediting agencies, problems obtaining services) vary, it is possible and perhaps illustrative to speak of a typical AB project. Housing groups are either formed independently or created by AB leaders.[9] Solicitors who join the organization in pre-formed groups are commonly residents of the same building who wish to enlist the AB's help in purchasing the decrepit building they live in, destroying it, and building a new one. At this early stage, the group is expected to elect leaders and open a common bank account in which they can begin saving the money that will allow them to buy the land and begin making payments on new construction. Simultaneously the group begins the process of trying to obtain credits from a government housing organization such as FONHAPO or FICAPRO for the purpose of obtaining the land and constructing new housing.[10] This process often involves handling legal disputes with landowners about the price of the property, demonstrations outside of the offices of government offices, and a series of meetings with housing agency representatives. Although the loan may be guaranteed by a government agency, the financing of housing construction cannot begin until each solicitor has paid the required down payment. This stage is can get bogged-down as the entire group either waits for the poorest members to pay their down payments or decides, as often happens, to offset this cost with their own contributions.

The housing group must also plan for the construction of the building and the "urbanization" of the property (i.e., the establishment of services), which involves a number of meetings with architects, utility agencies, and construction firms. The AB helps with this process by giving advice and organizing informational workshops which help the housing group get through each stage of the procedure. Housing groups are also responsible for guarding their site during the construction phase. Materials can easily be stolen from construction sites costing the solicitors money and forcing them to wait longer until construction is completed. For this reason, solicitors are regularly expected to perform guard duty overnight during the construction phase.

Protest

The AB frequently participates in mobilizations, often exceeding more than one per week. In the organization's early years it could regularly turn out 5,000 or more participants in city-wide demonstrations coordinated by the *Movimiento Urbano Popular* (MUP). In recent years the numbers of participants have tapered off somewhat, although the AB leadership maintains an active slate of protest events and often works with other housing organizations to coordinate actions. The types of protest in which the group engages can be divided into three categories: 1. local protest carried out by local CDBs in order to, for example, prevent the eviction of tenants in the neighborhood or support certain housing groups in their negotiations with government crediting agencies, 2. citywide protest related directly to housing issues, and 3. citywide or nationwide protest in support of a larger "cause" such as peace or denouncing government repression. The first and second categories of protest are the most common. Citywide protest often stems

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[9]The government's housing assistance favor groups of solicitants over individuals. People who attempt to get housing as individuals are often neglected and, if they do get assistance, have little say over where they will eventually be located.

[10]Of the AB participants that I interviewed on the subject, each felt that that his/her group's chances of obtaining housing credits were improved by joining the AB.

from specific demands for housing credits or the resolution of bureaucratic holdups in the administration of funds. A typical demonstration of this sort will begin at the Federal District's administrative offices and migrate to the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

UCEZ

The structure of the UCEZ has remained fairly constant throughout the history of the organization. At the head of the organization is Efrén Cápiz Villegas, a long-time political activist and agricultural lawyer. Cápiz has consistently been the primary focal point of decision making within the organization. He is surrounded by a fluctuating group of advisors who help coordinate actions and assist the group with legal and other professional advice.[11] The group is also divided into a central organization, i.e. the activists living in Morelia, and a number of local councils based either on the indigenous commune system or ejido lands. The organization has experimented with a permanent committee structure similar to that of the AB but most of the committees created--with the exception of the finance committee--have been temporary and based primarily the group's current needs. The UCEZ is somewhat less institutionalized than the AB and it lacks the work routine that the housing process gives to the urban organization. This lack of structure and routine makes the UCEZ's decision making process much more subject to immediate conditions as well as the will of its central leader. Various tasks need to be performed in the UCEZ--the formation of delegations for national conferences and the organization of mobilizations, for example--but these are usually only planned at the last minute.

Legal proceedings

If the UCEZ has a central activity on par with the AB's housing process, it is the constant struggle to resolve legal disputes involving individual communities and outside threats such as private landholders or encroaching private interests. The UCEZ has, however, been somewhat less successful than the AB at incorporating group participation due to the complex nature of the legal process. Legal disputes are often solved in meetings with bureaucrats or in formal trials--activities that are heavily reliant on the actions of a few experts. One of the UCEZ's most successful innovations, however, has been to make the legal process in Michoacán more transparent for campesinos. The UCEZ insists that all meetings with government officials be held in the open and its leaders encourage members to attend all such meetings and trials. This openness is also educational for campesinos participating in the movement.

Ultimately, however, the legal process is distracting for the movement leaders who, because of their expertise, must commit more time to it than to other activities such as organizing protest, education, and cultural events. When a trial or a meeting comes up, the only people needed to participate are the legal experts and a delegation from the community or communities being affected. The overall organization is left, meanwhile, without solid leadership.

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[11]This group of advisors was more influential in the mid-1980s than it is today; due, in large part, to a falling-out that occurred between Cápiz and some advisors who wanted the group to support the Cárdenas presidential campaign in 1988 (personal interviews).

Meetings and conferences

Meetings occur at both the organization-wide as well as the local levels. The general assembly meetings take place once a month in Morelia and serve primarily as a forum for the exchange of information between communities, the formation of delegations to perform special functions, and the planning of demonstrations and other events. These meetings are more significant for their consciousness-raising activities than for their level decision making or planning (Zepeda 1986; personal observation). The bulk of the meetings is taken up by presentations in which each community reports on the problems it is currently facing and the other representatives give them advice or make plans for solidarity actions. The general assembly meeting is often the springboard for organization-wide collective actions. Demonstrations are usually planned for the days immediately following the meetings, since it is otherwise quite difficult to get so many members together in one place.

Community-level meetings occur as often as necessary, more often when the community is involved in a dispute. During times of activism the community will elect officers, work to solve inter-community disputes, plan local mobilizations, and participate in local educational or cultural events. For communities that already work together communally, UCEZ work is only a part of the work that they already do.

The UCEZ also participates frequently in local and national conferences on such matters as human rights, indigenous rights, or in political conferences involving other independent organizations. The UCEZ will send a delegation of all who are willing and able to go. The size of these delegations varies with the number of people who are residing in Morelia at the time of the conference and the amount of money available to pay for travel expenses. These conferences can occur quite frequently, sometimes as often as twice monthly.

Protest

Local protests involve marches to the houses of local government officials, sit-ins in public plazas, the taking of local offices, or even land occupation.[12] At times the distinction between a local community event and a political event is difficult to make. Traditional festivals in UCEZ communities often take on a political flavor if the community is involved in a dispute with an outside threat (Zárate 1991). Even funerals for slain *compañeros* can become an impetus for UCEZ-related speeches or banners.

Protest, however, is never entirely local--part of the strength of the UCEZ is its ability to support local mobilizations with (sometimes large) delegations from communities throughout the state. The biggest enemy of many UCEZ communities may be a local land-owner or *cacique* whose major weapon is his influence over local judges and law-enforcement (Harvey 1991). These power elite, while dominant locally, may potentially be intimidated by the size and political influence of the larger movement. It is this ability to mobilize people from distant communities to support each other that gives the UCEZ its power over local bosses.

The majority of UCEZ mobilizations target the Michoacán state offices located in Morelia. The most common type of mobilizations include marches from the offices of the

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[12]The government and media call this last practice "land invasion" while the UCEZ refers to it as "recooperation." Each term obscures the fact that the ownership of the land is legally in dispute.

UCEZ into downtown Morelia, taking the street in front of the *Palacio de Gobierno* or the foyer of the *Palacio de Justicia*, demanding to have an audience with a government official about unresolved demands and, if the audience is not obtained, having a sit-in. Variations on this type of protest can range from cultural activities such as street theater to hunger strikes. These mobilizations are most likely to occur when delegations of several communities are in Morelia to resolve a legal dispute or in reaction to increased repression against UCEZ members.

Mobilizations that target federal offices in Mexico City are less frequent because of time and money costs. They also often require coordination with other campesino groups or political organizations. National mobilizations were much more frequent during the time of the UCEZ's affiliation with the CNPA in the early 1980s. During that time the UCEZ would participate regularly in national meetings of campesino organizations and help to organize mobilizations that brought representatives of hundreds of rural communities to Mexico City from around the Republic (Harvey 1991). National mobilizations are quite costly--money must be raised to send people in cars or buses to Mexico City and pay for their housing and meals. For this reason they tend to over-stretch the UCEZ's already tight budget.

C. Solutions to collective action problems.

The above section shows that each of the organizations studied here rely on collective action not only for protest mobilizations--the activity we most readily associate with social movements, but also for routine tasks which are central to the continuance of each group. How is collective action possible in these cases? Collective action theory tells us that the manner in which collective action problems are solved is important to understanding how a group functions. Each of these groups is striving for a collective goal and each, to a greater or lesser extent, has been able to reach its goals over time and distribute goods to its followers. They have done this, furthermore, by continually attacking the "free-rider" problem inherent in such movements. While the goals of the movements are influenced by ideological perspectives--e.g., the AB emphasizes the constitutional right of all Mexicans to housing and the UCEZ emphasizes the right of communities to the land--each of these organizations has, I would argue, established means of ensuring the participation of its members that goes well beyond the promise of meeting collective ideological and material goals. In the following section I will describe the methods that each organization uses overcome the collective action problem through the distribution of selective incentives.

AB

AB activism can be divided into three categories (from Greene 1991). At the highest level are the full-time activists who comprise the membership of the Political Committee. They are responsible for running their neighborhood CDBs and for making major decisions about the direction of the group as a whole. Second tier, or mid-level, activists are those who take responsible positions on committees in their CDBs or the AB in general. The majority of AB participants, however, are "base-level" members who participate by attending CDB and committee meetings and by coming out for mobilizations. It is the participation of this last group that will be discussed here.

The primary public good that the AB provides is, of course, new housing. Nearly all AB members join the group with the expectation that they will become part of a

housing project. The AB leadership makes this collective good into a selective incentive for participation through a fairly simple process of organization and records-keeping. Each new member of the AB is expected to do two things upon joining the organization: become a member of a CDB committee and begin participating in meetings and organized mobilizations. The CDB is responsible for monitoring each member's participation levels, which is usually achieved through the "passing of the list" at the end of every meeting and every demonstration. At the CDB meetings, members are repeatedly warned that if they do not participate in meetings and marches they will be removed from their housing projects. There is no set number of marches or meetings that the members must attend so it is not possible for a member to reach a quota and quit participating. Members' participation levels are, rather, judged in comparison to the rest of his or her housing group. Those members who have the best participation records are allowed their first choice among the dwellings in their project.[13]

AB leaders make no secret about the passing of lists, and some CDBs even post the participation records of each of its members. People are warned well ahead of time when their lack of participation is jeopardizing their chances of receiving housing. Still, AB leaders have ambiguous feelings about the list system and this has caused some minor disputes between those in the leadership who believe it is a necessary form of control and those who would rather participation be voluntary (personal interviews).

UCEZ

The public goods provided by the UCEZ are, at first glance, similar to those provided by the AB--land, services, government credits, defense from exploitative private interests--but, upon closer look, there are some considerable differences. Once the AB has obtained the housing credits for a project it can be assured of participation from the people involved in that housing group at until the project is complete. UCEZ communities, on the other hand, are often involved in long-term struggles for land that they may never obtain. The community may lose heart after a series of setbacks and either withdraw from the organization or simply give up trying. The UCEZ leadership is also often too overworked by the top-heavy legal process to be able to devote time to struggles for other public goods (Zepeda 1986).

The UCEZ's success is highly dependent on their ability to solve a two-tiered collective action problem occurring simultaneously at the general and base levels of the organization. The success of a particular mobilization, for example, relies on how many delegations are sent by local organizations to attend the event. Unlike the AB, the UCEZ does not have a standard method to encourage collective action; rather, each community has its own way of operating. This partly explains why there is such variation in the level of participation each community can provide.

Participation in UCEZ-wide events is not regulated directly as it is in the AB. Member communities are required to attend monthly meetings and asked to send delegations to assist other communities in their struggles, but the penalties for not participating are never explicitly stated as they are in the AB. Lists are passed during meetings and one could guess that community leaders feel they would get more attention from Cápiz and the other legal advisors in the movement if they participated more, but this

[13]This inter-project ranking of participants is not a formal policy within the AB as far as I know, but it is something that is, among base-level participants, widely believed to exist.

is difficult to prove. During the organization's peak years in the early- to mid-1980s the UCEZ had a larger team of legal advisors and could more-easily manage several cases at one time. Mobilizations during this time were quite large because they consisted of many communities who were being helped by the organization and perhaps a hundred more who hoped to be helped (Zepeda 1986).

Participation at the local, or community, level in the UCEZ is certainly made easier to encourage because of pre-existing communal work patterns[14] and affective (i.e. family or friendship) relations. Affective relations alone, however, do not guarantee participation in the movement. Indeed, recent anthropological studies have shown that personal ties within communities involved in political struggle are as likely to cause conflict and factionalism as they are to promote cooperation.[15] The solution to community collective action problems resides in the ability of the leadership of that community to "leave-out" those who do not participate in UCEZ activities. People who refuse to participate may be referred to as "los de fuera," "los que dan favor al rico," or "los contrarios" (Zárate Hernández 1991, p. 120; personal interviews). For this reason, what the UCEZ calls a "community" is often only the faction of a pre-existing community that is cooperating with the larger organization (Zárate Hernández 1991, p. 120). In many UCEZ communities, participation is measured through the passing of lists.

Among UCEZ core communities, the UCEZ hierarchy may come to replace the traditional church and civil power structures. In the community of Santa Fe de la Laguna, for example, people in official positions were judged according to their previous work in the movement (Zárate Hernández 1991, p. 120). Political positions within the community, therefore, became an additional public good and an incentive to participate.

Analysis and conclusions: collective action theory and the study of social movements.

The preceding pages describe the goals of two social movement organizations, the collective actions they engage in to obtain those goals, and their methods for solving collective action problems. Using this information, I will discuss how an understanding of the process of overcoming collective action problems can advance our understanding of social movements.

The methods that organizations such as the AB and the UCEZ use to reduce the costs of participation are essential to the emergence and perpetuation of social movements, but they comprise only one part of the picture. Social movements do not organize in a vacuum and their existence needs be understood in the context of how they manage to 1. gain access to scarce resources and 2. compete with the state and other political organizations over the solution to collective action problems (Lichbach 1994; Lichbach 1995).

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[14]Many of the groups within the UCEZ are communities that work together to do various things. Most importantly, they farm and distribute the money (or crops) communally. If they share property in common besides land, such as tracters, trucks, farm implements, they must guard it and maintain it in common. The community of San Bartolo had to have nightly guard duty to make sure its forests were not exploited by others. This type of work has existed in some form or another "since time immemorial". (personal interviews).

[15]For case studies of UCEZ communities see for example Zárate Hernández 1991; Zárate Hernández 1992; and Zárate 1996.

Access to resources.

Because social movement organizations struggle to overcome collective action problems by raising the selective benefits of participation, their success is partly determined by the availability of those resources. Changes in the law, changes in the economy, and changes in the political climate can all have an effect on whether and to what degree movement organizations have access to resources. This point can be illustrated with a few examples from the case studies.

The UCEZ was able to take advantage of a changes brought about by the 1971 *Nueva Ley de la Reforma Agraria* which allowed campesino communities to present themselves as viable legal entities for the purposes of bargaining with the state, controlling natural resources, and soliciting credits for farming and the production of crafts (Zárate Hernández 1991). This became a basic document for the UCEZ's legal struggle for control of communal lands. Conversely, however, more recent changes in agricultural laws have hurt the UCEZ's legal arguments. In 1992, changes were made to Article 27 of the Mexican constitution that made it legal for ejiditarios to sell their lands to private interests. This creates a potential atomizing effect by raising the short-term benefits of not participating in collective action. UCEZ communities find themselves decreasingly capable of implementing negative sanctions on those who do not participate.

The early successes of the AB were due, in part, to an increase in the availability of national and international funding in the years following the earthquake of 1985. The majority of the AB's projects were initiated during this period of time and have tapered-off somewhat in the face of Mexico's ongoing economic crisis as well as the government's tight budgetary policies and cutbacks on social spending. In recent years, agencies such as FONHAPO and FICAPRO have cut back on their programs to assist the working-poor in Mexico's urban areas (Casa y Ciudad 1995), and this is certainly a major concern of the AB as it scrambles for ever more scarce resources.

Competition with the state over the solution to collective action problems.

While social movement organizations attempt to lower the cost of participation in collective action through selective incentives, the state may try to 1. raise the cost of collective action through increased repression, or 2. create competition for the dissident organizations by coopting collective action through selective payoffs (Lichbach 1994). It is important, therefore, when attempting to understand social movement success over time, to look at changes in the amounts of repression and also at the various attempts by the state to coopt the movement.

The UCEZ has certainly been subject to more repression over the years than the AB. AB members are occasionally threatened or assaulted by the police or right-wing organizations, but this has been rare and the fact that their meetings are still held in the open shows that they are fairly free from concern. UCEZ members on the other hand have often been subject to strong waves of repression at both the local and state levels. Members of the organization have been jailed, beaten, and killed by law enforcement, local powers, and opposing groups. Newspaper reports show that the repression was especially strong during the mid-to late-1980s--a time when the UCEZ became less open and more defensive and its leader Efrén Cápiz was forced to go underground (Zepeda 1991). Repression at the local levels forces the group to set aside its larger goals of gaining land and changing government policy and focus on defending its members. Harvey (1991)

cites repression at the community level as a factor that debilitated the national campesino movement in the mid-1980s.

The state may also try to compete directly with social movement organizations through the creation of rival groups. This is especially true of the Mexican state which has a tradition of trying to coopt all sectors of society within the ruling party since the time of Cardenas' presidency. The PRI has, in fact, attempted to create groups which would rival the AB's and other organizations' neighborhood groups (Haber 1991). A more recent challenge to opposition groups has been the Solidarity program created under the Salinas administration to directly target selected urban and rural regions for state funding. A number of studies have speculated that the Solidarity program was designed, in part to demobilize opposition groups. It has even resulted in the strengthening of PRI organizations in some areas (Craske 1996).

Conclusion

This paper looked at cases of social movement organization in two very different contexts and discussed the degree to which each of them engage in practices aimed at solving collective action problems in order to reach movement goals. I believe that the concept of the "collective action problem" is complementary to existing social movement theory and may even help to make its conceptualization more precise and amenable to empirical analysis. The concept of political opportunity structure can, for example, be redefined in terms of collective action theory with little difficulty. Political opportunity can be seen as a continuous variable that describes a dissident organization's relative ability to overcome the collective action problem. Political opportunity would, therefore, include both the political environment in which dissident organizations operate and the ability of these organizations to invent solutions to obtain resources and avoid repression for its members. In this view, political opportunity is not something which is graciously provided by the regime in power, but is, rather, a result of the negotiation between regimes and dissident organizations over solutions to the collective action problem.

In a recent review article, Sidney Tarrow makes the argument that collective action theory needs to be tested with empirical work on contentious politics. "Given the homologies between the two approaches and their obvious complemtarities...more scholars should take up Lichbach's challenge and attempt to confront them." (Tarrow 1996, p. 880). This paper represents a preliminary attempt to do just that. Much more work, however, needs to be done before we begin to see the fruits of this confrontation.

Table 1. Categories of collective action: Asamblea de Barrios

1. Protest
-Demonstrations at the city government offices: (DDF, Asamblea de Representantes, Department of Housing)
-Demonstrations at national offices: Los Pinos, FONHAPO, Palacio del gobierno, Camara de diputados
-Protest in solidarity with other causes: FZLN, EZLN prisoners, student's struggle to keep from getting sent to other parts of the city for higher education.
-Defending evicted tenants
-Making visiting functionaries feel welcome (or unwelcome) when the pass through the neighborhood.

2. The housing process (Run by CDBs and by the larger organization)
-Forming, maintaining and governing group housing projects. This constitutes a long-term project which involves drawing up plans, securing government credits and (sometimes private loans-?), opening and maintaining a bank account, paying a down payment, group visits to government housing agencies (sometimes of a conflictual nature), the guarding of communal property, and getting services (this may also involve protest).

3. Committee work
-Committee work: housing, women, education, justice, maintenance, government, treasury.
-Education: literacy programs for adults, presenting information on historical figures
-Maintaining records of the CDBs intake and expenditures.
-Collecting information about housing laws, options, etc. and reporting back to the directors of your project.
-Health advice and services.
-Breakfasts for children.
-Fiestas: anniversaries, primera piedras, innauguraciones.

Other work
-Soccer teams (Carlos Fonseca)
-legal counsel
-organizing street sellers
-political work surrounding the elections

Table 2. Categories of collective action: UCEZ

Protest
-Community-level protests (marches to the local government, the taking of local offices)
-Demonstrations in Morelia. Taking the street or the plaza. Taking over government offices in the state government building or the Dept. of Justice. Hunger strikes.
-Demonstrations in Mexico City (usually done in conjunction with other groups).

Meetings
-Meetings of the local community or ejido organizatoin.

-Monthly meetings of delegates from each community in Morelia
-Yearly anniversery celebration.
-Delegations sent to local conferences on campesino or indigenous issues.
-Delegations sent to national conferences (usually held in Mexico City).
-Delegations sent from one community to another to promote assist with organizing or the promotion of cultural events.

The legal process
-Delegations sent to Morelia to attend trials, meet with movement legal experts, and meet with government functionaries.

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