Original Scientific Article UDK: 316.774:004.738.5]:616.98(72)

https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v18i1.4

Lourdes Arizpe

National Autonomous University of Mexico,
Mexico City, Mexico
ixel2015@gmail.com

Perceptions of the Impact of Covid-19 in Tepoztlan, Mexico: A Focused Ethnographic Study

Abstract: This article analyzes the transformation of Tepoztlan, a rural community in Mexico, as the Covid-19 pandemic changed people´s perceptions about their lives and future prospects, and deepened their connections to global networks. A focused ethnographic study revealed how women led the movement to close the town to outside visitors and, through negotiations and community decisions, how the town eventually opened up again, highlighting the impact on employment. Data from a statistical survey undertaken during the first peak of Covid-19 infections in 2020 showed the reactions of young women and women heads of households to the impact of the pandemic that, in their own words, "takes away our freedom of action", while men of all age groups were deeply worried about economic futures. Unexpectedly, the re-opening of the town brought an influx of post-pandemic tourism that was seized by aggressive and illicit powerful groups as an opportunity to take over the town. Managing the risk of inadvertently providing information that may be used by such groups poses a dilemma for present-day anthropologists.

Keywords: Covid-19, social perceptions, focused ethnography, Tepoztlan, Mexico

Introduction

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the spread of the virus SARS-CoV-2 and the associated disease known as Covid-19 a "pandemic" (WHO 2020). Unexpected, unprecedented and certainly uncharted, the Covid-19 pandemic has effectively created surprising new questions about the future lives of human societies in an already endangered planetary biosystem. It also placed many anthropologists in the front lines, conducting rapid assessment studies of how local peoples were perceiving the pandemic and enacting strategies to mitigate its impact on their lives. At the same time the pandemic has created a new layer of global understanding, as tattered as it still is, and has tightened global interactions of many kinds. This paper examines how the

Covid-19 pandemic has been perceived in Tepoztlan, an iconic town in central Mexico, and points to how it has enhanced and amplified its global interactive networks.

Current research about the Covid-19 pandemic in the social sciences has shown that unlike other illnesses, such as the Spanish flu, there has been no "typical pattern" in the evolution of the virus in different regions of the world. This has made it difficult to define the analytical paths to keep up with the course of this contagious illness and its long-term impact on societies. It is clear that the Covid-19 virus will be active for many years to come and will be altering the culturescapes of all societies. While it has created specific problems with ethnographic research methods, anthropological research must move very quickly to keep up with unfolding events.

Analyzing people's volatile perceptions of the pandemic in the early stages and the very interesting ways in which they tried to fill the gaps of understanding and knowledge as they adapted to confinement and beyond, was inherently dangerous because conducting interviews or a survey would have meant risking infection. To avoid this issue our research became a focused ethnographic study, a method developed in applied anthropology for rapid assessment projects as explained further on. Additionally, some kind of comparative information was needed to help local groups, town assemblies hastily organized by the Ayuntamiento (local government), or other local and regional actors in their efforts to immediately provide basic medical services. Thus, we decided to carry out a short survey to collect data on how people were perceiving the impact of Covid-19 in their lives, disaggregated by age, gender, basic economic activity and educational level conditions.

Our focused ethnographic project was carried out from April 2020 to April 2022 as explained in the methodology section. The core team, all of us living in Tepoztlan, was made up of an anthropologist, Lourdes Arizpe, professor at the National University of Mexico; Dr. Isis Saavedra, lecturer at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana; a young Tepoztecan political science graduate, Esau Bello Campos, and several other young Tepoztecan students. A mathematician, Leopoldo Núñez and a statistics expert, Sara González, both academics of the National University of Mexico living in nearby Cuernavaca, helped us conduct the survey during the first peak of the pandemic in Tepoztlan in November 2020. We published the first paper based on the results of this survey in Spanish in July 2021 (Arizpe et al. 2021). A short paper reporting on our focused ethnographic project was presented in Panel 45. "Anthropological Perspectives on the Covid Pandemic: Impacts on Society, Culture, Public Policy and Governance, and Lessons for the Future" during the 2021 International Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in Yucatan, Mexico in November 9–13, 2022.

Tepoztlan, Robert Redfield's 1930 iconic model of the "small community", was transformed decade after decade from an isolated Nahuatl-speaking indigenous community to a thriving traditional market offering indigenous crafts and tourist visits to the pyramid atop mountains as a new "Pueblo Magico" – Magical Town – the title it received from a 2010 government program. Then came the Covid-19 pandemic. The Tepoztecan women were the first to immediately set up road barriers to stop the influx of merchants and visitors from April to September 2020. Given certain strong pressures, these barriers were opened up in September 2020, after which Covid-19 infections increased notably throughout 2021 and early 2022.

In cultural terms, during the first ten months of the pandemic, from March to December 2020, Tepoztecans were still trying to grasp the nature, ramifications, impacts and significance of the virus and the pandemic in their lives. Evidence in ethnographic interviews showed they were deluged by misinformation, conspiracy theories and contradictory medical expertise, amplified through fearful word-of-mouth interpretations circulating in the town and beyond. By the end of 2020, digital sources of information had become prevalent as government, local Tepoztecan activists, civil organizations, women's groups and ethnic assemblies rapidly expanded existing Internet sites or created new ones. Additionally, foreign and national residents and visitors to Tepoztlan brought their own communicative webs which became entangled with local ones.

Recent Social Science Studies about the Covid-19 Pandemic

During the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic most social science studies tried to describe what was happening in communities and regions as the contagion spread around the world. As mentioned, many of them found that there were no "typical patterns" in the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic. In Latin America and the Caribbean, studies indicate that the regional heterogeneity led to very different policies and impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. A few were successful in coping with it, such as Costa Rica, Uruguay and, early on, Chile, while others suffered high levels of infection as in Brazil and Mexico, and devastating consequences as in Peru (Ruiz Guerra 2021, 10).

According to the research presented in Ruiz Guerra's edited volume, *Pandemia Covid-19 Lecturas de América Latina,* confinement in some of these countries led to the closing of many income-generating activities and generally of the economies, with catastrophic scenarios for the future in several countries. Also, intrafamilial violence increased with the added burdens of home

schooling and medical care falling on the shoulders of mothers and young women. Some governments provided services and remedial social and economic programs to communities, while others strengthened the authoritarian tendencies of the political parties in power. Others went further still and diluted or dismissed the health recommendations proposed by regional and international multilateral institutions (Ruiz Guerra 2021).

In the introduction to a special issue of *Bulletin of Latin American Research* on "Covid-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean", Jasmine Gideon (2020) highlights that, given the high level of poverty and inequality in the region, the impacts of extended lockdowns as implemented in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru were exacerbating the situation. Gideon notes that among other social costs of the pandemic, it has had a highly detrimental impact on gender equality, observed in time-use surveys as women have taken on the burden of additional unpaid care work generated by the pandemic. She reports that in Chile and Mexico, calls to emergency helplines for women were reported to have increased by more than 50 percent.

Tepoztlán Transformed

In 1925 Robert Redfield set up Tepoztlan as a model of the "small community" which became famous as anthropologists began to describe villages the world over in the same terms. By 1948 his student Oscar Lewis showed that, far from isolated, Tepoztlan was already connected to the larger towns as well as Mexico City through agricultural production, commerce and increasingly, education and outmigration. His book, *The Children of Sanchez*, in fact traces the itineraries and lives of a Tepoztecan family in Mexico City whose semi-urban way of life he described as the "subculture of poverty", a new byproduct of capitalist urbanization and industrialization. Later on, his original concept was turned upside down by Charles Valentine (1968) as the "culture of poverty" that was, in fact, a hindrance to capitalist development.

In the following decades, expansion of transport and trade further connected Tepoztlan to national development trends, although the town firmly kept its Mesoamerican Nahua roots, its strong community ties, and their selective acceptance of specific economic development projects.

Two important studies, *Tepoztlán, a Chronicle of Rebellion and Resistance* (*Tepoztlán, crónica de desacatos y resistencia*) by Ana María Rosas (1997), and "The Building of an Environmental Movement in México, the Golf Club in Tepoztlán, Morelos" ("La construcción de un movimiento ambiental en México. El club de golf en Tepoztlán, Morelos") by Mario Garcia Velázquez (2008), give

an account of how Tepoztecans mobilized against the project to build an elite golf club supported by a group of rich local and foreign investors and backed by the state government. Among their main objections, Tepoztecans declared that they refused to become servants of rich people who would be stealing their limited water supply at a very low cost and fought against the army at the two entrances to the town.

In 2010 Tepoztlan became one of the few towns in Mexico included in the government tourist project of "Magical Towns". Although this kind of New Age, ecological and mystic tourism existed previously, Mario Alberto Velázquez García and Helene Baslev Clausen, in their study "Tepoztlán, an Economy of Intimate Experiences" ("Tepoztlán, una economía de la experiencia íntima"), published in 2012, use the concept of "intangible cultural tourism" to describe how a historical agrarian village had become a world tourist destination offering unique intimate personal and collective experiences.

By 2017, Alfonso Valenzuela Aguilera in his article "Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Real State in Tepoztlan, Morelos" ("Patrimonio, turismo y mercado inmobiliario en Tepoztlán, México") described how Tepoztecan entrepreneurs have been able to capitalize on their culture and traditions by offering visitors a variety of guided ecological tours, historical narratives, picturesque landscapes and a market that has conserved their culinary traditions and offers plenty of bars that attract the younger crowd. This theme is analyzed further on in this text.

Covid-19 in Tepoztlan: Negotiations and Community Decisions

In March 2020 the first Tepoztecans involved in trying to limit the arrival of outside visitors who could be infected by Covid-19, were women heads of households from several barrios. They closed down the two entrances to the town and held their ground, even against the "Hell's Angels" motorcycle groups, who were furious because they had rented a house for the weekend and kept going up and down the highway creating a cacophony of sounds with their exhaust pipe echoing off the mountains of the "Mystic Valley" of Tepoztlan.

The Tepoztecans then demanded that the 'local government' (Ayuntamiento) take steps to organize these sanitary barriers so as to limit contagion. And they were successful. In a radical action of the local government, led by the very active mayor, Rogelio Torres, assemblies were held to organize the closure of the town to trade, tourism and, as local statistics had it, robbers coming in from

neighboring towns. The local government took into account the will of the majority of the people, negotiated with groups that opposed the barriers and was successful in setting up effective sanitary restrictions from March 2020 to September 2020. Only Tepoztecans and permanent residents were given a permit to go in and out of Tepoztlan.

Our study showed that people´s mobilization was decisive for the control of the pandemic especially in the first stages of 2020 and in subsequent years, as the local government tried to keep pace with sanitary measures. However, Tepoztecans who were involved in commercial activities such as market vendors, shopkeepers, artisans, as well as owners and workers in hotels and hostels, restaurants, bars, and tourist services, demanded that restrictions be lifted so that they could continue with their economic activities which are vital sources of income and occupation. Organized groups then negotiated a regulated opening of the local economy to ease the plight of many families, a decision which was taken in the community assembly.

The barring of all visitors came to an end in September 2020, when, after many proposals and decisions debated in the Town Council, the decision was made to open the flow of visitors while enforcing strict sanitary health and hygiene protocols proposed by the community. All negotiations had been skillfully led by the outstanding major of the town at that time, Rogelio Torres. He provided many relief packages and programs for families and also had the ability to ask Tepoztecan migrants in the U.S. to send remittances for their community. Tepoztlan then became the first town in the region to offer their people the Pfizer vaccine in March 2021. Sadly, at the beginning of 2021, Rogelio Torres died of Covid-19.

Covid-19 in Tepoztlan: Lethality and Employment

Figure 1 shows the official statistics of recorded Covid-19 deaths from April 2020 to March 2021 in Tepoztlan. Significantly, according to municipal records, the closure of Tepoztlan from April 2020 to September 2020 kept the number of deaths attributed to Covid-19 below the national average for Mexico during this period. But as visitors began to flow in, by December they had risen to 33 and then soared to 60 in January 2021, and 84 in February 2021. Mortality then dropped to 18 by March 2021, and rose concomitantly with the region – the state of Morelos – during the rest of the year.

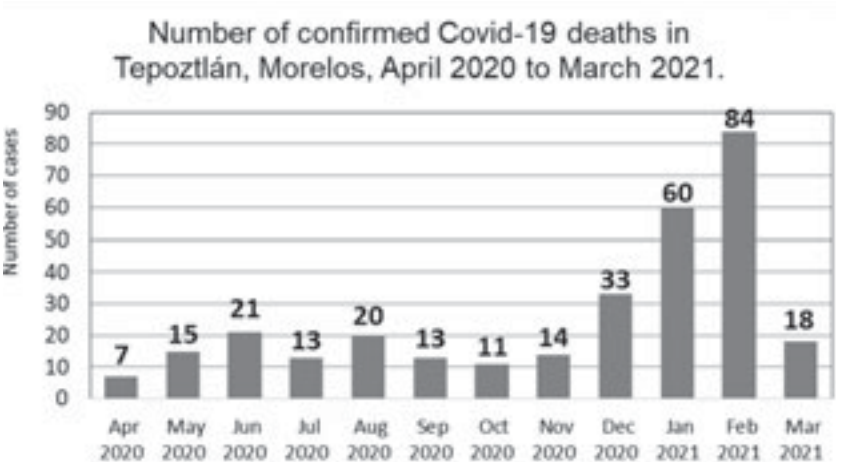

Figure 1. Official statistical record of Covid-19 deaths in Tepoztlan

These figures do not fully describe the lethality of the Covid-19 pandemic then or even subsequently. Our own ethnographic fieldwork showed that there were other deaths during those months that neither local doctors nor doctors from formal hospitals and clinics were able to diagnose as caused by Covid-19. Also, deaths by Covid in a family created a stigma for the families, so they were explained in terms of previous illnesses. For example, in the first months of the pandemic, a 27-year-old young woman who died suddenly was diagnosed as having previously developed a fatal renal illness and, also, an elderly man was diagnosed as having died due to cardiac arrest. At the time there were no diagnostic tools to indicate whether Covid-19 was the actual cause of death in cases of co-morbidity.

However, as day after day the bells tolled, it became evident that Covid-19 was to blame. One example stands up. In a well-known family three prominent brothers died in quick succession until their own mother publicly admitted that they had been infected by Covid-19. After that, the stigma attached to deaths attributed to Covid-19 was brushed aside.

Figure 2. Chinelo Dancers accompanying their Dance partner to the cemetery

The Municipal government, thanks to the leadership of Rogelio Torres and with effective support from the national government, had been very active in handing out food at lower prices than those of the market. It also provided agricultural subsidies for farmers so they could continue to produce maize and other staple foods, and pigs and chicken so that women could set up their own production. The local government kept records of the incidence of Covid-19 in each barrio (neighborhood), sanitized local public transport and installed sanitary filters and checkpoints for visitors to town (Tapia Uribe 2021, 252). At the national level, the federal government was providing a monthly stipend for elderly people over the age of seventy, which was the key to their sustenance. The families also received a modest monthly stipend which became very important for them during the pandemic.

As one of the results of all these programs, and unlike what happened in other towns in the region, employment did not fall abruptly in 2020. Research by distinguished economist Norma Samaniego shows statistics from the National Institute of Social Services indicating that formal jobs recovered to levels prior to the pandemic (Samaniego 2020). Employment in Tepoztlan fell during the first months of 2020 but then returned to its previous level and even increased as outside residents who had usually spent only weekends in Tepoztlan decided to spend the months of confinement in this town instead of in Mexico City. Thus, there was a surge in demand for personal services (cooks, child minders, gardeners, security guards and other jobs in the homes), as well as for products in local markets and for transport (taxi and bus services).

Figure 3. Fluctuations in employment in Tepoztlan

Implementation of a Focused Ethnographic Study: Survey on Perceptions of the Impact of Covid-19

In recent years, the reappraisal of ethnography as a research method has led to a proliferation of concepts that allows for a more precise application of its techniques to the social and cultural terrain in which ethnography is to be applied, as well as to the particular phenomena under observation. Targeting the disarray of perceptions that developed early in the spread of Covid-19 would have required a multi-situated ethnography (see for example, Arizpe 2019) or else making a decision to carry out a situated (i.e., single-sited) ethnography. We took this second course, but an added consideration was necessary to further select the types of perceptions which would be taken into account.

An academic fellowship in the 1980s at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex had allowed the author of this paper to participate in early discussions on rapid assessment methods which were urgently needed to advance the use of applied anthropology research in development projects in Third World countries. Robert Chambers (Chambers 1974, 1983) helped develop a worldwide research community that we all participated in for the next decades. Other researchers, especially medical anthropologists and physicians such as Sandy Gove and Gretel Pelto then applied the term "focused ethnographic studies" to target key behaviors and understandings for medical emergencies such as children´s pneumonia. (Gove and Pelto 1994). Focused Ethnographic Studies (FESs) were further developed and sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO). This was the general research model used as background for the specific focused research survey.

Additionally, in my own previous fieldwork research, related to the utterances mentioned by informants on deforestation in the Lacandon rainforest, I had explored the concept of "perceptions" (Arizpe 1993). Settlers coming from non-forested environments who migrated to the rainforest, and who spoke various indigenous languages, as well as, of course, Spanish, used ready-made terms to refer to what I, as an anthropologist – funded by the National University and the World Bank – was talking about when I mentioned "deforestation". Thus, I used "perceptions" to refer to the words or concepts that settlers were just beginning to put together to refer to what they then understood as "deforestation". Further along, during fieldwork, I incorporated a broader analysis to take up "conceptions", that is, the concepts settlers had now developed, in their own understanding, to refer to the cutting down of trees and undergrowth to prepare the land for cultivation which was their main concern. This methodological consideration is only mentioned here to explain why the ethnographic survey we conducted refers only to "perceptions" and not to "conceptions" or to the socio-psychological term "social representations".

Two months before we carried out fieldwork, two of us in the team had participated in a seminar on the Covid-19 pandemic, hosted by a local NGO and

sponsored by the local bus company, owned by a Tepoztecan family. The aim was to provide their 90 bus drivers with basic information about Covid-19 and its forms of transmission so they could convince bus passengers to use masks. Our interaction during that seminar gave very important insights into the strong resistance of many people to wear masks, men especially, which sometimes led to actual fist fights. It also gave information on the plight of passengers having to contend with demands to change their behavioural patterns in the absence of clear, evidential explanations to legitimize these demands. The disarray grew, as was evident, due to blatant misinformation and disinformation about the spread of the illness through all means of communication.

Finally, conditions for carrying out a statistical survey, when the spread of Covid-19 in Tepoztlan was at its first peak of infection – in November 2020 – were dangerous for the team, who wanted to avoid infection. This meant that many of the ideal considerations of statistic experts could not be applied under such restrictive conditions. In fact, as we had to knock on doors, since no one was out in the streets, and many people refused to open the door, let alone answer the questions in our two-page survey, we had to adapt to their decisions.

Nevertheless, our aim in this research project, supported by local activists, was to collect at least some comparative data to help plan citizen strategies, organize medical support and direct local government efforts. To this end a first step was to gather basic evidential data on how people of different age, gender, basic economic activity and educational level conditions perceived the impact of Covid-19 in their lives. So, we ventured forth into the deserted streets, with people scurrying rapidly back to their houses and sometimes refusing to answer any questions we asked.

The "Survey on Perceptions of the Impact of Covid-19" was planned for 100 persons, given the inherent safety risks for those conducting the survey and the limited resources – self-finance only – we could count on. In the end 117 people agreed to be interviewed in their homes including 15 people who had recovered from the Covid-19 infection in previous months. The sample was chosen on the basis of convenience sampling**,** a non-probability sampling method where units are selected for inclusion in the sample because they are the easiest for the researcher to access (Lavrakas 2008). This can be due to geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or willingness to participate in the research. In the case of our survey, we chose certain streets in different barrios (neighborhoods) to knock on all doors. Of course, we had to respect the choice of some people who refused to even open the door to their houses to answer the questionnaire at the peak of the pandemic. This technique is specially used to take into account conditions of risk or danger for those applying the questionnaires as well as accessibility of the physical setting.[11]

[11] In fact, sometime later we realized that at least three of us had actually caught the virus but were able to continue working.

People interviewed in the 7-day survey had the following characteristics: There were 51 men and 66 women. In terms of age-groups, 29.1% were 20 to 35 years old, 25.6% were 36 to 50 years old, 23.9% were 52 to 64 years old, and 21.4% were 65 or older. As for educational levels, people with higher education tended to be more willing to answer the questionnaires and so 33.6% of them were recent university graduates, 24.1% had high school levels, 23.3% had studied the first year after primary school, and 19% had studied at least one year of primary school.

In the following pages only a few of the main answers given in the questionnaires will be cited, with the explicit aim of providing contrasts in terms of the socio-demographic characteristics of the survey sample. Only a few of the very rich commentaries collected during the survey or in broader ethnographic settings will be included. All expressions in quotes were given by informants and translated into English by the author of this article.

"The Pandemic has Especially Hit the Economy"

In general, the main response to the question of "how has the Covid-19 pandemic affected you?" in the survey made reference to jobs and the economy. Among men of all ages, 39% said that referred to disruption of their work and income-generating activities. A farmer explained that "the pandemic has hit especially in the economy. I stopped selling my corn in the market and now I am only selling it to the miller or to women who send for it but it´s bad, my sales are way down". Another young man, working with his family by cultivating flowers for the market said bluntly "in farming, when the pandemic struck, it ruined us. In May we had to throw out all the flowers we had cultivated". Another young man gives a broad view of what was happening, saying the greatest impact came from "the uncertainty of the situation, the disinformation about the dangers of the possible effects of the virus, the fear...disinformation kills, one doesn't know how to act, what actions to take, who to ask for support, it is very exasperating". A special case was that of three brothers who were deported from the U. S. after they were infected with Covid-19. One of them tells the story: "(after I got infected by Covid-19) I didn't finish my job and so I was not paid my full salary. They just about hurried us away when they were given (our) results of the (Covid-19) test and the farm did not answer on account of the medical insurance because they put up a lot of restrictions and didn't make themselves responsible, in case anyone died and could not be repatriated to Mexico. I was very angry because they did not let us defend ourselves and, well, here (in Tepoztlan) there is no work". Upon their arrival in Tepoztlan, an incipient revolt began among their neighbors, who wanted them to leave. But they stayed on because other neighbors protected them.

"(The Loss of) Liberty of Action Because Things Are Now Done with Fear"

Importantly, the survey showed that, in general, the percentage of women who said the greatest impact came in terms of their family income, their jobs or commercial activities was exactly the same as that of men, 39%. However, a very significant contrast in perception is that 20.6% of the total number of women described the impact of the pandemic as a loss of liberty – una pérdida de Libertad – in terms of having to take on additional care, domestic or educational work, while only 7.8% of men referred to this. In the words of one 55-year-old woman the pandemic caused a loss of "liberty of action because things are now done with fear, with having to take care when one crosses another person, one takes care not to brush against another person, not to touch the things that are not in the house. It is living with doubts all the time!". Time and again, women described their situation as not being able to go out of their houses because they had to take care of sick members of the household or to supervise the new schooling of their children via television, or to take in the healthy members of another family or kin while those who had taken ill were in confinement. Women of all ages also repeatedly mentioned new additional domestic tasks that had to be taken up which no longer allowed them to carry out street vending or working as day labourers in agricultural fields. Women older than 65 gave similar responses. What has changed with the pandemic? The answer of one of them was: "Everything. Being cramped in the house, having the stress of not being able to go out. We are afraid of getting infected and the money is now not enough".

"I Cannot See my Friends"

This answer summarizes many of the responses given by younger women between the ages of 20 and 35. Of all gender and age groups, they gave the highest percentage of responses referring to the need to go out to meet others in social settings. One young woman, exasperated by the situation, cried "everything in my daily life changed, everything, from academic and cultural, to leisure activities. I stopped seeing my family living in other houses, or friends. I don´t go to parties or meetings. And my personal hygiene (changed), I hate using the mask, although I am getting used to it. In general, I think the worst thing has been having to be locked up, the incapacity to do something about what is going on in the world, my projects for work". The interviews of these young women show that the confinement, in particular, represents a huge setback for the new educational, economic and social participation of young women supported by recent government programs in Mexico and by feminist organizations. Another important response in this age group are the anguished expressions of young mothers. One of them openly acknowledged that she has been very affected emotionally by the

pandemic and that she is very aware of this especially in her children when she exclaimed "being locked up is killing them and all the family".

"I am Afraid of Getting Infected Again"

As part of the survey, we interviewed 15 people by August 2020 who said they had been ill with the Covid-19. Two thirds of them were men, and more than half of them were under the age of 36. Most women who had been infected were 36 to 50 years old.

Most of those infected had been actively working or studying outside their homes. Interviews indicated that many of the young men had been infected while working in the central markets in the nearby cities of Cuernavaca, Cuautla, or Mexico City. In the case of younger men, a few of them acknowledged that they had been infected because they refused to wear masks. In actual fact, in Tepoztlan, the use of masks was only enforced by authorities and the police by December 2020.

All those who had been infected talked mainly about the uncertainties surrounding their illness and were very afraid of getting sick again. One woman said "they say that I can get Covid again in three months and I am very, very fearful because it felt horrible. For two days I thought I was going to die.... I don't want to go through this again because it is very expensive, the oxygen, x-rays, medicine cost more than a thousand (pesos)".

The Expansion of Post-Confinement Tourism

The "Magical Town" publicity of the 2010 federal government program for Tepoztlan had increased tourism to Tepoztlan but it literally went beyond expectations after confinement. The number of visitors doubled after the end of 2020, notwithstanding the sanitary procedures implemented by the local government during the pandemic.

At this time both the national and the international tourism industry moved in. One example of the site called "Mexperience" shows the kinds of tourist trends that were given priority: "This region of Mexico is rich in natural energy sources – with nearby volcanoes, fertile vegetation, rivers and lakes, waterfalls, and springs of mineral water. It's no wonder then that Tepoztlan is one of the top places in Mexico visited by people seeking alternative therapies, Aztec steam baths, healing, and health rejuvenation. It's also well-known as the place in Mexico where most UFOs are sighted" (Mexperience.com/travel/colonial/tepoztlan).

Indeed, in the eighties a series of photographs were up for sale of, purportedly, unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and books with titles such as *Tepoztlan,*

Celestial Aerodrome which we all read avidly. It told the personal story of young woman who had been "taken" by aliens to outer space. Since then, no recent reports of such sightings have been mentioned but the legend lives on. A far more credible account variously interpreted by physicists, is that Tepoztlan lies on certain Earth coordinates linked to other magnetic sites around the world. It is no wonder that astrologists, formal Buddhist and Yoga practitioners and New Age happy young people, have populated Tepoztlan over the years.

In an attempt to organize the surge in visitors and tourists, the municipal government set up a school for young Tepoztecan guides. Many new and imaginative activities have been offered: tour to the ancient pyramid, panoramic hiking, tour of volcanic tunnels, rock climbing, trekking to waterfalls and river basins, horseback riding, tours in four-wheel motorcycles, trip to the "Portal of Energy", healing with indigenous hot baths "temazcales" and all kinds of massage, Buddhist and Hindu rituals, and a tour of Tepoztecan history and legends which takes place only at night.

In spite of this, damage to the forests and rivers has increased, with important risks related to wildfires, such as the one in early March 2021 when large tracts of forest land were devasted in the high ridges of the Tepoztlan mountains. This came to a head in May 2022 when the municipal government banned forest trekking and closed access to the pyramid atop the mountain.

Figure 4. Prevention of Covid-19 flying poster in Tepoztlan, saying: "You take care of yourself, we will take care of everybody."

As visitors and tourists began to pour into Tepoztlan, in unprecedented numbers, the local government did all they could to enforce sanitary precautions. Posters all over Tepoztlan read: "Coronavirus Covid-19 Prevention". To our visiting friends: Please remember the following: 1) use masks, 2) wash your hands, 3) keep a safe distance from others, 4) do health checks, 5) refrain from drinking. You take care of yourself; we will take care of everybody".

All the above has led to a notable expansion of tourism and international connections of all kinds, strengthened by the use of digital and cellular communications. In this paper, however, please note that we will disclose no more information about these trends for the following reason: it has become clear, in the last two years, that some very powerful real-estate developers, large-scale commercial firms as well drug syndicates are now trying to take advantage of the conditions of weakness in many places to take over protected forests and resources illegally. Mexico has one of the highest rates of assassination of local activists and indigenous leaders who are defending their lands and natural environments. In the last two years in Tepoztlan the struggle of local activists against outsiders who are illegally selling off lands in the Nature Reserve has upscaled to armed confrontations. Under such conditions no more information will be disclosed in this ethnographic study that Tepoztecans themselves are not willing to provide, a situation which anthropologists must now take into account in their ethnographic studies.

The popular Carnival "Chinelo Jump" of Tepoztlán, which was to have taken place on 17–19 February, 2023, was canceled given that the mayor did not provide basic security services. On the first day of the Carnival, the streets were besieged by drunkards and brawling visitors, two houses were robbed, and a woman was stabbed. On 18 February, representatives of the barrios and of dancing troupes announced they would not participate given "insufficient security conditions".

Conclusions

The total impact of the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be understated after analyzing the experience of Tepoztecans in the two years of 2020 to 2022: the town, their culture, their perception of possible futures was transformed. Several major changes became immediately apparent: (1) the shift in the primacy of information arriving from the outside, as opposed to the rich cascade of diverse cultural interpretations seeping down from various historical cultural backgrounds on the inside; (2) the abating of the authority of elders in sustaining ethical and cultural standards and the rise of virtual sources of influence; and (3) the sudden shift to intangible ways of understanding coming from remote virtual settings as

opposed to face-to-face, direct emotional and social interactions. These are the majors shifts that must now be taken up as the next challenges of anthropological and sociological theories.

The value of the anthropological perspective cannot be overstated. By focusing on one village/town with its own intellectual history, cultural genealogy and dynamic as a hub of interactive networks, anthropology is able to assess the full impact during and after the pandemic. A new theme for research is how the perception that these same processes are happening to other peoples around the world will have on the world views that are emergent in the new Anthropocene age. It would seem that all previous notions about multiculturality must now be revised to explore new ways of "living together", especially in cities and new rurality, more closely defined by the dynamic of the Anthropocene than by historical distillations of cultural loyalties.

The Sars-2 Covid-19 pandemic is a very visible phenomenon but in actual fact it mirrors broader, equally devastating, processes of climate change and economic and political transformation that we are living through at this time. We urgently need to develop more incisive ways of explaining and at the same time transforming human lives in this century.

References

Arizpe Lourdes, Fernanda Paz, and Margarita Velázquez. 1996. *Culture and Global Change: Social Perceptions of Deforestation in the Lacandon Rain-Forest*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press. (In Spanish: *Cultura y cambio global: Percepciones sociales sobre la desforestación en la selva Lacandona*. CRIM/UNAM).

Arizpe Schlosser, Lourdes. 2018. *Culture, International Transactions and the Anthropocene*. Heidelberg: Springer-Macmillan. (In Spanish: *Cultura, transacciones internacionales y el Antropoceno*. 1st. Edition. CRIM/UNAM, MAPorrúa).

Arizpe, Lourdes, Esaú Bello, Sara González Gutiérrez, Leopoldo Núñez Fernández, Isis Saavedra Luna. 2021. "Encuesta de percepciones sobre la pandemia Covid-19 en Tepoztlán, Morelos (México)." *Korpus21* 1 (2). https://doi.org/10.22136/korpus21202134.

British Academy. 2022. *The Covid Decade: Understanding the Long-Term Societal Impacts of COVID-19*. Report of the British Academy on COVID-19 and Society. London: British Academy. https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-understanding-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/.

Chambers, Robert. 1974. *Managing Rural Development: Ideas and Experiences from East Africa*. Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

Chambers, Robert. 1983. *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. Essex, England: Longman Scientific and Technical Publishers; New York: John Wiley.

Dent, Alexander S., Joshua A. Bell, and Joel C. Kuipers. 2022. "Cellular Ambivalence in a Digital Age." *Anthropology Today* 3 (1): 18–20. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467–8322.12698.

Gideon, Jasmine. 2020. "Introduction to COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Bulletin of Latin American Research. Special Issue. COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean* 39 (S1): 4–6. https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.13218.

García Velázquez, Mario. 2008. "La construcción de un movimiento ambiental en México. El club de golf en Tepoztlán, Morelos". *Región y Sociedad: Revista de El Colegio de Sonora* 20 (43): 61–96. https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/102/10204303.pdf.

Gobierno de México. 2021. https://www.gob.mx/salud/documentos/datos-abiertos-152127.

Gove, Sandy and Gretel H. Pelto. 1994. "Focused Ethnographic Research Studies in the WHO Programme for the Control of Acute Respiratory Infections." *Medical Anthropology* 15 (4): 409–424.

Hale, Thomas. 2022. "We've Found One Factor that Predicts Which Countries Best Survive Covid." *The Guardian*, 24 March 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/24/countries-covid-trust-damage-pandemic.

Lavrakas, Paul J. 2008. *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Mexperiencie. Mexperience.com/travel/colonial/tepoztlan.

Redfield, Robert. 1930. *Tepoztlan, a Mexican Village: A study of Folk Life*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press.

Revista de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. 2020. "Diario de la pandemia." Número especial. Marzo-junio 2020. https//www.revistadelauniversidad.mx/releases/b5012a11/especial-diario-de-la-pandemia.

Rosas, María. 1997. *Tepoztlán, crónica de desacatos y resistencia.* (*Tepoztlán, a Chronicle of Rebellion and Resistance*). México, D.F.: Ediciones Era.

Ruiz Guerra, Rubén, ed. 2021. *Pandemia Covid-19 Lecturas de América Latina*. México: UNAM.

Samaniego, Norma. 2020. Empleo y COVID-19. México: UNAM. http://www.pued.unam.mx/export/sites/default/archivos/SUCS/2020/r170620.pdf.

Tapia Uribe, Medardo. 2021: "Habitabilidad de las viviendas y entorno urbano durante el Covid-19. Cuernavaca y su Zona Metropolitana." In *Habitabilidad, entorno urbano y distanciamiento social: una investigación en ocho ciudades mexicanas durante Covid-19,* edited by Alicia Ziccardi, 231–253. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Velázquez Garcia Mario Alberto and Helene Baslev Clausen. 2012. "Tepoztlán, una economía de la experiencia íntima." *Latin American Research Review* 47 (3): 134–154. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/latin-american-research-review/article/tepoztlan-una-economia-de-la-experiencia-intima/0AA0B5916307D44C9596EE5995A0ECE1.

Valentine, Charles A. 1968. *Culture and Poverty: Critique and Counter-Proposals*. Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press.

Valenzuela Aguilera, Alfonso. 2017. "Patrimonio, turismo y mercado inmobiliario en Tepoztlán, México". ("Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Real State in Tepoztlan, Mexico"). *Pasos: Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural* 15 (1): 181-193. https://doi.org/10.25145/j.pasos.2017.15.011.

Weinberg, Liliana. 2021. "El Ensayo en tiempos de coronavirus." *Revista de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*. Número especial. Diario de la pandemia. 3 (26): 15–22. https://dsp.facmed.unam.mx/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/COVID-19-No.26–07-El-ensayo-en-los-tiempos-del-coronavirus.pdf.

World Health Organization (WHO). 2020. "Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic." https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19.

Ziccardi, Alicia, ed. 2021. *Habitabilidad, entorno urbano y distanciamiento social: una investigación en ocho ciudades mexicanas durante Covid-19*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Lourdes Arizpe
Nacionalni autonomni univerzitet Meksika, Meksiko
ixel2015@gmail.com

Percepcije uticaja kovida-19 u Tepoctlanu, Meksiko: Fokusirana etnografska studija

Ovaj članak analizira transformaciju Tepoctlana, ruralne zajednice u Meksiku, u periodu kada je pandemija kovida-19 promenila percepcije ljudi o njihovim životima i budućim perspektivama, i produbila njihove veze sa globalnim mrežama. Fokusirana etnografska studija otkrila je kako su žene predvodile pokret zatvaranja grada za spoljašnje posetioce i, kako je grad putem pregovora i zajedničkog odlučivanja kasnije ponovo otvoren, pri tom ističući uticaj ovih procesa na zapošljavanje. Podaci iz statističke ankete koja je sprovedena tokom prvog vrhunca infekcije kovidom-19 u 2020. godini, pokazali su reakcije mladih žena i samohranih majki na uticaj pandemije koja, po njihovim rečima „otima našu slobodu delovanja", dok su muškarci svih starosnih grupa bili duboko uznemireni zbog ekonomske budućnosti. Neočekivano, ponovno otvaranje grada dovelo je do naglog porasta turizma nakon pandemije, koje su agresivne i nezakonite grupe iskoristile kao priliku da preuzmu kontrolu nad gradom. Upravljanje rizikom slučajnog pružanja informacija koje bi mogle biti iskorišćene od strane takvih grupa predstavlja dilemu za današnje antropologe.

Ključne reči: Kovid-19, socijalne percepcije, fokusirana etnografija, Tepoctlan, Meksiko

Perceptions de l'impact de Covid-19 à Tepoztlán, Mexique: Une étude ethnographique ciblée

Cet article analyse la transformation de Tepoztlán, une communauté rurale au Mexique, pendant la pandémie de Covid-19. Cette pandémie a modifié les

perceptions des gens sur leur vie et leurs perspectives futures, et a approfondi leurs liens avec les réseaux mondiaux. Une étude ethnographique ciblée a révélé comment les femmes ont dirigé le mouvement pour fermer la ville aux visiteurs extérieurs et comment, grâce à des négociations et des décisions communautaires, la ville a finalement rouvert, mettant en évidence l'impact de ces processus sur l'emploi. Les données d'une enquête statistique menée lors du premier pic d'infections de Covid-19 en 2020 ont montré les réactions des jeunes femmes et des mères célibataires à l'impact de la pandémie qui, selon leurs propres termes, «leur a volé leur liberté d'action», tandis que les hommes de tous les groupes d'âge étaient profondément préoccupés par l'avenir économique. De manière inattendue, la réouverture de la ville a entraîné une forte augmentation du tourisme postpandémique qui a été saisi par des groupes puissants, agressifs et illicites comme une occasion de prendre le contrôle de la ville. La gestion du risque de divulgation involontaire des informations pouvant être utilisées par de tels groupes pose un dilemme pour les anthropologues contemporains.

Mots-clés: Covid-19, perceptions sociales, ethnographie ciblée, Tepoztlán, Mexique

Primljeno / Received: 14.08.2022
Prihvaćeno / Accepted for publication: 15.02.2023