

# Conflicts, Territories, and the Institutionalization of Post-Agrarian Economies on an Expanding Tourist Frontier in Quilotoa, Ecuador

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## SUMMARY

World Heritage and associated conservation-based tourism can generate significant national income, yet the top-down efforts to open up new tourist destinations can displace communities that are meant to benefit. In Ecuador, the administration of Rafael Correa has invested substantially in both new infrastructure and community level training in order to steer world heritage visitors into a more diversified tourist sector. Our research examined the attempt of one community at the crater lake Quilotoa (Cotopaxi province) to maintain control of their economy in the face of increased state investments. We asked, under what circumstances is a community able to both define and defend a zone of locally managed economic development? To answer the question, we carried out a participatory GIS mapping project focused on sites of conflict and community assemblies and supplemented the mapping with an economic survey and detailed career histories. Our research finds that, since 1988, cycles of conflicts within the community of Quilotoa and between Quilotoa and its neighbors came to define an effective, yet informal, territorial boundary within which residents were highly committed to mobilize to defend their work and investments. Interviews show the importance of territory as political resources used by the community to escalate commercial conflicts into matters of wide public concern and ultimately establish the institutional basis of non-agricultural work.

## 1. Introduction

South America is home to two archetypes of world heritage. The Galapagos Islands were the first site inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage list in 1978. In the 1960s, approximately 2000 visitors arrived in the islands annually, by 2005 numbers had increased to 120,000 per year (Epler, 2007). In Peru, the state created the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu in 1981; UNESCO granted it World Heritage Status for natural and cultural patrimony in 1983; and over 690,000 visitors made it to the historic Inca ruins in 2006, with 70,000 of them hiking the Inca trail to get there (WCMC, 2011).

Together these two sites epitomize central features of large-scale conservation and heritage tourism in the Global South and especially in Latin America. First, tourism is a significant and growing part of the world economy, accounting for 5 percent of global GDP (UN World Tourism Organization, 2015). In Ecuador, the sector generated \$786 million in 2010, while in Peru it earned

\$2.74 billion (The World Bank, 2012). Second, tourism in developing countries frequently relies on heritage, as opposed to, say, simply "recreation." Foreign visitors flock to sites that UNESCO has declared to be "irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration" with "universal application" (UNESCO, 2012). Third, the very success of these enterprises—both the promotion of humanity's common heritage and the enhancement of tourism infrastructure—puts that heritage at risk (Chambers, 2010; Honey, 2008; Weaver, 2006). In response, national governments develop programs to divert visitors to new attractions to protect sites and diversify earnings. Fourth, even in the most regulated conservation sites, local residents seek ways to make a living from the cultural and natural resources found there (Castañeda, 2009; Little, 2004, 2009; Maxwell, 2012).

Taken together, the rapid economic growth, the national investment in new natural heritage projects, and high-stakes community conflicts make emerging tourist economies an important scientific opportunity and an urgent development issue. Ecuador offers a

particularly valuable case. Trying to divert the Galapagos-Quito flow of tourists and their spending to hard pressed rural provinces, Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa increased the ministry of tourism's budget from \$40 million per year in 2012 to \$150 million per year 2013–17. With new funding, the state launched “a process of continuous improvement of tourism destinations” and “implementation of new routes” ([Agencia Pública de Noticias del Ecuador y Suramérica, 2013](#)). Such development has expanded tourism in established destinations and has opened new frontiers of activity, including in the Illiniza Ecological Reserve and its crown-jewel, the crater lake Quilotoa. Complementing infrastructure investment, the Ministry of Tourism has set up a new unit of administration, an official “Center of Community Tourism” or CTC. By 2014 more than 250 communities had entered into the process of becoming CTCs ([Cabanilla, 2014](#)). Among these, Quilotoa is perhaps the most successful, with over 90,000 visitors in 2014.

All this growth reveals the risks citizens face when the state champions conservation-based tourism on a national scale ([Baird & Leslie, 2013](#); [Dressler & Roth, 2011](#); [Miller, Caplow, & Leslie, 2012](#); [West, 2006](#)). At the point when the state makes good on its investment promises, local people face enormous pressure to cede control of the distinctive economies of place amid regulations imposed by national ministries ([Brand, 2001](#); [Breglia, 2006](#)). In the severest of cases, states remove communities entirely from the land they had been farming or raising animals on, or the centers of commerce they had developed ([Colchester, 2004](#)). More commonly, the state facilitates expansion of outside enterprise to develop tourist services in ways that concentrate earnings in a few hands and thwart local residents' efforts to upgrade their work and grow earnings ([Moore & Donaldson, 2016](#)). Across Latin America, local entrepreneurs may defend their work by turning to traditions of community mobilization forged in periods of agrarian reform or in the course of indigenous social movements ([Collredo-Mansfeld, 2009](#)). Such politics, though, may lead to confrontations, are time consuming, and risk reprisals.

In Quilotoa, Quichua-speaking residents have been fighting back and the circumstances of their struggle endow it with broader relevance. As in many zones in Latin America, Quilotoa is a rural district where agricultural earnings nonetheless are shrinking in importance falling behind the incomes offered by wages, diverse commercial livelihoods, and remittances ([Berdegué, Escobal, and Bebbington, 2015](#); [de Grammont and Martínez Valle, 2009](#); [Lanjouw, 1998](#)). The shift away from agrarian work within the countryside has profound effects for everything from state administration of rural districts to family structure within peasant households. Further, repeated conflicts between locally owned tourist businesses and the state management of natural resources pits a disadvantaged indigenous, ethnic minority against a government identified with dominant national, Spanish-speaking culture ([de la Maza, 2016](#); [García-Aracil & Winter, 2006](#)). The negotiated resolutions—or forced settlements—of resource-based conflicts establish a model for similar disputes across the nation's Andean and Amazonian regions.

Most importantly, a critical institutional problem of community development lies at the heart such rapid scaling of tourist economies. Nearly two decades ago, [Agrawal and Gibson \(1999\)](#) warned that simplistic assumptions about communities doom scholarly understanding of effective, bottom-up participation in conservation and development. They urged a shift away “the mythic community” ([Agrawal & Gibson, 1999](#), p. 640) and its vision of a small spatial unit, a homogeneous society, and shared values. Instead, problems of local resource-use needed to be framed as institutional ones: what rules will enable local, long-term use of resources? Under what circumstances can people legitimately challenge and change the rules?

In this paper, we look at details of territorial practices amidst conflict in order to identify the ways that people regularize, defend, and authorize their use of resource conservation areas. The act of territorializing is simultaneously a claim to rightful use of resources and an assertion of collective authority and identity ([Berdegué, Bebbington, and Escobal, 2015](#); [Manuel, 2010](#)). It is partly a matter of defending sites of work and critical resources on the landscape. Yet, to evoke territory in the midst of economic struggle also points to a deeper play of values. In Ecuador, as elsewhere “the legitimacy of territorial claims is based on different notions of history and interpretations of the esthetic and productive values of the landscape” ([Rasmussen, 2018](#)). Customary understandings of the land become a powerful institutional tool. “Customs do things,” as the anthropologist Sider ([Sider, 2003](#) [1986], p. 177) explains, “They are not abstract formulations of, or searches for, meanings, although they may convey meaning. Customs are clearly connected to, and rooted in, the material and social realities of life and work”.

Supporting Rasmussen and Lund's argument (this volume), the events in Quilotoa indicate that legitimacy and authority of new trade associations do not precede the ability to territorialize but are a consequence of it. The analysis offered in this paper focuses on the interplay between older customs of agrarian socioterritorial units ([Ibarra, 2004](#)) and the formation of novel, territorially defined trade organizations that have the power to resist state management of emerging, place-based commercial resources. English historian [Thompson \(1993\)](#) has argued that the classic English systems of common usage relied not just on rules of use—concerning stinting, for example,—but on custom, which “was a field of change and of contest in which opposing interests made conflicting claims” ([Thompson, 1993](#), p. 6). Extending Thompson's analysis to current resource disputes, we contend that the assertion of territorial tradition to defend new claims of authority does not, in fact, guarantee consent. Rather, such tactics set narrower and widely intelligible terms for community debate and facilitating the growth of workable rules from hard-won conflict resolutions.

It is no surprise that, rural, indigenous people would assert a territorial identity for their trade association. The predictability, however, should not obscure their inventiveness. Indeed, we identify three tendencies that have emerged in the cycle of conflict that drive further organizational innovation. First, if worries about work amplify participation in territorial conflicts, then the reverse is true: collective conflicts are central to the productivity of community members' non-agrarian commerce. That is, the political skill needed to restrict the encroachment of the state and competition from outside business rivals is a skill that can translate into practical, joint economic action ([Schmitz & Nadvi, 1999](#)). Second, the fights over work can flare up in many ways—among enterprises within the community, between communities, and with rival businesses from afar. Any of these “micro-clashes” can put the authority of a tourist organization in play and a successful outcome builds the capacity for risky “macro-clashes” with the state. Third, in a territorial dynamic that is tied to defending fruitful work, the state does not figure merely as opponent. Residents balance antagonism and accommodation as agencies of the state offer skills training, infrastructure upgrades, and marketing. Earnings rise when these programs work, even as increased state activity also jeopardizes local control. The conflictual public sphere stems in part from regular debates about just how to manage shifting alliances with the state to promote jobs and earnings.

In the pages below, we introduce the community of Quilotoa as it emerged in the 1960s in the epoch of land reform. We then further develop arguments about customary usages, territory, and the defense of shared resources by drawing from creative new work on the commons. Examining the linkages between

community governance and the recent history of conflicts and local initiatives we share the results of a community survey and a participatory mapping project that reveal how trade organizations consolidated its territorial identity in relation to changes in work over the last two decades.

Research for this article took place from 2013 to 2015 as part of two parallel, collaborative ethnographic projects. The one focused on a holistic account of the provincial indigenous economy, taking into account artisan trades, the emerging role of savings cooperatives, and the tourist trade. The second investigated community economic territorialization in a comparative context, focusing on Quilotoa, San Cristobal (Galapagos) and Peguche (Imbabura). In Quilotoa, we surveyed over sixty individuals from the surrounding peasant community of Ponce to identify the limits of the tourist economy. In 2014, we gathered perspectives on conflicts and community governance through a participatory mapping project. We supplemented these tasks with an agricultural land use study and participant observation in community meetings and fiestas.

## 2. Agrarian reform and the limits of agricultural development in Quilotoa region

At an altitude of 3,570 m in the western cordillera of the Andes, the crater lake Quilotoa draws visitors from around the world. The high ridges of the collapsed caldera drop steeply to the lake whose mineral rich waters are turquoise under the bright Andean sun. It has not been an easy place to get to. When adventure travelers began to seek out the lake in the 1980s, they traveled on a poorly maintained interprovincial highway across the high moors of western Cotopaxi province, descending to the small, parish center of Zumbahua. From there, they caught a rare truck heading north, eventually disembarking twelve kilometers away, just short of where the parish road begins its descent to the town of Chugchilan. From this pass, it was a short hike through pastures to the rim. Indeed, this very remoteness and ruggedness of the terrain contributed to Quilotoa residents' gains during Ecuador's agrarian reform a generation earlier. The titles for fields in these high, steep, roadless regions could be pursued by families without stiff resistance from the estate owners.

In contrast to the bolder land redistribution programs of post-revolution Mexico or the military-led reforms of Peru, Ecuadorian reform of 1964 was a piecemeal effort (Barsky, 1988; Pallares, 2002). The 1964 law abolished the vestiges of indentured labor systems and provided a mechanism for large landholdings to pass into the hands of small hold farmers when such land was underutilized. To successfully claim land collectively, rural residents had to organize into official peasant *comunas* that could hold land. Then, in addition to rights to shared pastures, individual members of the *comuna* could also pursue the titling of the plots that they had historically worked on their own. These individual and *comuna* efforts to secure land co-existed with men and women's participation in the wider social life of rural parishes. These older spatial units, linked to both church and landed estates, united wide swaths of formal and informal peasant communities (Sánchez-Parga, 1985, 1986). And it was through parish civic and religious rituals that men and women achieved authority that others recognized across the parish and not just within a bounded peasant community.

Sánchez-Parga (2002) has characterized the Quichua speaking regions of the Ecuadorian highlands as having a kind of "homogeneous ethnic territoriality" in the immediate wake of land reform "whose homogeneity does not exclude its numerous and complex internal delimitations, many times within the same *comuna*" (Sánchez-Parga, 2002, p. 111). The rural zone of Quilotoa aptly

illustrates this interconnected, parish-defined territoriality. In 1964, the 11,000 hectare hacienda Zumbahua that once had occupied the level farmland and Quilotoa's upland slopes first passed into state management and then became registered as two *comunas*, Zumbahua and Cocha, with the Ministry of Agriculture (María Belen, 2014). The families that worked the land around lake flexibly affiliated with these and other *comunas* according to personal interests or family ties.

Established as means to standardized state administration of small-hold agricultural economy, peasant *comunas* were not simply a codified administrative unit. It was also a template for forging an identity between a people and place and vesting residents with authority to represent their interests vis-à-vis the state. If both the 1937 Law of Cooperatives and 1964 Agrarian Reform laws intended to sideline the power of estate owners and consolidate state control, what they actually put in motion were complicated new traditions of indigenous peasant self-management (Almeida Vinueza, 1981; Villavicencio Rivadeneira, 1973; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1999). Scattered settlements of interrelated households found ways to pursue rural development projects and manipulate benefits, following the practices of *comunas* to work with NGOs, but ultimately stopping short of securing formal recognition.

For nearly two decades in the 1970s and 1980s, poverty in the Quilotoa region deterred political entrepreneurialism and interest in setting up a narrower, lakeside *comuna* (Noroña S, 2014). Indeed, nearly intractable economic deficiencies gripped the five lakeside parishes, including Zumbahua and Chugchilan. A 1995 national survey of unmet basic needs found that each of the five parishes ranked in the lowest 5 percent of 996 rural parishes (see Table 1) and taken together the five parishes constituted the poorest such cluster in the Ecuadorian highlands (Sánchez-Parga, 2002). Young men, in particular, responded to the poverty by seeking waged work in the cities (Weismantel, 1988) and the region has been losing population since the 1970s (Sánchez-Parga, 2002, p. 18). By the early 2000s, even an NGO with a track record of successful development work in the parish of Zumbahua discounted the future of the peasant economy. Salesian missionaries, who had worked within Zumbahua's communities for thirty years, observed that the small land holdings gained in the 1960s were increasingly subdivided through inheritance and exhausted through annual cultivation and predicted "here in Zumbahua, after ten years, there will be no way to farm" (Martinez Novo, 2004: 249). When it came to tourism, one Father said in 2002, "There are a variety of things that seem to me to keep it from growing. First, tourism is not a commitment for the communities here. People do not agree about it and those that live up by the lake do not let in outside investments. There is little infrastructure" (Martinez Novo, 2004, p. 249).

Yet, tourism had already gained a toehold and with its growth Quilotoans set in motion an increasingly urgent institutional problem. Indeed, despite the ongoing issues that the Salesians reported in 2002, the residents at the access point to Quilotoa had fifteen years of experience selling services to tourists on a modest scale. Further, as earnings had become more regular, households had enough faith in this work that they dismantled most of the zone's communal holdings. Beginning in the 1980s, four to five households who pastured flocks around the rim of the lake built unauthorized homes in these lands for themselves and to facilitate their fledgling hostels. A few men built rough stores from which they sold Tigua paintings, a new art tradition founded in the neighboring parish of Guangaje (Whitten, 2003; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2011). As these artisanal painters found success, still another five or so households relocated closer to the rim, building houses in the open fields near the lake. The vice president of Quilotoa recalled in an interview in June 2015 how these new constructions eventually precipitated the dissolution of shared land holdings:

**Table 1**  
Severity of Unmet Needs in Quilotoa Lakeside Parishes, 1995

Canton (Township)	Parish	Parish poverty ranking <sup>a</sup>	Population	Percentage with unmet basic needs
Sigchos	Chugchilan	13	3,985	77.5
Pujili	Zumbagua	19	5,384	76.8
Pujili	Guangaje	42	4,091	75.5
Saquisilí	Cochapamba	23	2,329	76.3
Sigchos	Isinlivi	43	2,899	75.5
Pangua	Ramon Campana	32	1,633	75.9

Source: Compendium of Unmet Basic Needs of Ecuadorian population. Map of Poverty, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INEC) 1995 (originally cited in Sanchez-Parga 2002).

<sup>a</sup> Rank of severity of poverty among 966 rural parishes in Ecuador.

At that time, when my husband was secretary of the community of Cocha, little by little a few people secretly got private deeds for the pastures. My husband knew and talked with other leaders from Cocha. They decided then, “No, no, no, in vain do we do this secret building. Just one person here and another there, each silently getting their land title. No, everyone must be a part of the division.

The elected council of Cocha worked openly to split the shared holdings among the families at the lakeside margin of their *comuna*. The vice president in 2015 dismissed the remaining communal land as insignificant: “There is nothing of community land, nothing of community land.” Measured by the needs of commercially viable flocks of sheep, the remaining pastures were negligible. The dissolution of the communal pasture irrevocably committed the residents to new tourist work—and broke sharply with the conventional purposes of the peasant *comuna*.

Consequently, residents had to match individual commercial entrepreneurship with ad-hoc efforts to solve pressing institutional demands and achieve some organization beyond the scope of any single family enterprise. Such a reorientation to tourism presented monumental challenges: none of Quilotoa’s residents had tourist-service skills; no one had capital to invest; few had access to credit. The community lacked electricity and potable water. The trade expanded outside the duties of the peasant *comuna* leaders and there was no formal group to promote its development. More troubling, at the moment residents tried their hand at tourism, the state would contest the community directly for control of lands around the lake. In short, they faced the full set of critical institutional problems and urgent time line to solve them. In this sense, Quilotoa freshly illustrates well-established debates on communities, governance, and sustaining local economies.

### 3. Tourism, place-based work, and the new commons

Key scholarship on effective resource management at the local level has taken up the challenge posed by Agrawal and Gibson. Researchers have focused on just how boundaries, conflicts, customs and authority come together to deter harmful competition within the community while challenging incursions of outsiders. Indeed for Common Pool Resource (CPR) investigators, the collective protection of a resources all starts with clearly defined boundaries that link resources and a group of users (Acheson, 1988; Ensminger & Rutten, 1993; Lesorogol, 2008; Ostrom, 1990; Rival, 2003). Such boundaries may be formally recognized jurisdictions or informal divisions between communities. Informal though, does not mean loose. Acheson demonstrated that even those boundaries not sanctioned by the state can be “precise, demarcated by small geographical features familiar only to people with an intimate knowledge of the area”(Acheson, 2003: 25). And it is the little habits of community work—the interactions of neighbors, the informal learning of trades from an older generation, and a history

of encounters with outsiders—that affirm the precision of a community’s territory.

While some contemporary writers embrace the commons as the cooperative alternative to the destructive competition of capitalist livelihoods (Nonini, 2007; Reid & Taylor, 2010), long-time CPR investigators are more hardnosed. They often start with a narrow, ecological view of just what territoriality is: “the maintenance of an area ‘within which the resident controls or restricts use of one or more environmental resources’” (Cashdan, 1983: 47, Carpenter & Macmillan, 1976). Many then emphasize how conflict and competition generate stable territorial systems. Historically, fights among those earning their living from the same resource resolve into the rules and territories that people live by. For example, in the Maine fisheries in the United States, changing technology—everything from the spread of railroads, to the adoption of wire lobster traps—shifted the balance of power among different communities. Cannerymen ceded livelihoods to live-lobster fishers; those who lived on islands held their fishing grounds more staunchly than those on the mainland (Acheson, 2003). Acheson traces transitions between exclusive territories, mixed territories, and no territories over the twentieth century and observes “the territorial system that results is the product of conflict between groups of fishermen; it is not the result of conscious design” (Acheson & Gardner, 2004, p. 296).

Across Latin America, new conflicts over craft economies, conservation areas, cultural heritage sites, and tourism have moved communities to evoke the cultural meanings of place and political prerogatives of territory to steer outcomes. In northern Peru, a group of potters in Chulucanas worked with the national government to trademark the distinctive features of their ceramics (Chan, 2011). Becoming the first artisans in South America to have a geographically indicated product, they used international intellectual property law to protect the exclusivity of their town’s wares. In the Yucatan, communities near well-visited Maya ruins have insisted on their rights to offer tourist services. As a consequence, heritage becomes a practice, a particular kind of relationship “between local populations and state agencies” (cf. Breglia, 2006, p. 14). In Belize, a new conservation area, the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, forced nearby Maya communities to shift from traditional subsistence practices to tourist craft sales and other cash earning opportunities (Medina, 2015). Yet, these communities only rose up in protest and blocked access to the sanctuary when a conservation NGO tried to open the tourist economy to other communities. That is, as intrusive as the new conservation regime was, Maya residents quickly assimilated it into the exclusive economic patrimony of their community. A militant act of mobilization came when the boundaries of this new trade were violated.

Amid these cases of commerce, place-based resources, and institutional innovation, Quilotoa offers new insights into economic organization. Within two generations its economy reoriented from farming to be predominately service oriented. Over

**Table 2**  
Sequence of Artisanal, Commercial and Tourist Organizations, Quilotoa, Ecuador 1988–2016

	Associated Conflict	Name of Organization	Approx. Members	Sponsoring State Agency or NGO	Official Comuna Jurisdiction
1988	Monopoly by senior artists	“Association of Painters and Weavers of Quilotoa”	15	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture, and Fisheries, and Salesian Mission of Zumbahua	Cocha
1994–1996	Militarized attempt to relocate community	“Artisan Center of Ponce-Quilotoa”	30	Ministry of Foreign Trade, Industrialization, Fisheries, and Competitiveness	Cocha
2000	State prohibition on community entrance fee	“Organization for Tourist Development”	100	Ministry of Tourism	Cocha
2007	Development of communal lands for gallery and restaurant	“Community Organization for Tourism Development-The Green Lake Quilotoa”	100	National Council for the Development of the Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador (CODENPE), and Maquita Cushunchic Comercializando Como Hermanos (MCCH-“Let’s join hands and market as brothers”)	Ponce
2013	State prohibition on community entrance fee	“Center for Community Tourism (CTC) The Green Lake Quilotoa”	220	Ministry of Tourism	Ponce

**Table 3**  
Informant assessment community conflicts, Quilotoa, 2014 (*n* = 61)

	Conflict with Outside Business	Conflict with local business	Conflict with local authority	Conflict with other communities	Conflict with state agencies
Not important/somewhat important	56	55	53	48	38
Important/very important	5	6	8	10	23

that time residents have never fully resolved the vulnerability of its growing trades (see Table 2). At first, the peril was internally generated. An intergenerational rivalry thwarted the entrance of young men into a lucrative indigenous art trade. As commerce in the lakeside community picked up, threats came from state officials seeking to relocate the entire community in order to conserve crater rim pasture and forests. Then, the challenge arrived as outside investors tried to tap crater lake tourism. When households did consolidate their authority, they pursued new ambitions, such as an illegal levying a toll on all who passed through the community to the lake. The entrance fee has generated substantial resources for development since 2000 and insured a ceaseless battle with authorities from two separate state ministries. At the heart of these cycles of conflicts and economic expansion are tactical disputes over place and the building of a territorial identity for a trade organization aiming for a post-agricultural future.

#### 4. Conflicts and the building of territorial identity

In 2014, in an in-depth questionnaire concerning livelihoods, infrastructure, NGO support, credit, and skills training, we asked community members to assess the severity of conflicts the residents of Quilotoa had experienced. We framed the issue as the potential for strife to create economic hardship and to think about disputes as moments that undermined their ability to make a living in Quilotoa. In contrast to our work in the Galapagos where respondents minimized conflicts of any kind and avoided talking about past episodes, Quilotoans openly acknowledged a history of disputes with the state, even if they downplayed disagreements they had with neighbors or local authorities (Table 3). At the same time, they also neglect to mention some incidents of intra-community antagonism, including a bitter moment when someone set fire to a neighbor’s newly constructed hostel. Conversely, it may also suggest that many saw little of importance in such disputes, seeing them as fitting into private histories among specific families and rather arising as an issue of general concern. As not all incidents arise to a community-wide problem, it is instructive to review those that Quilotoans do single out as

important for the lessons they teach about the tactical uses of territory.

##### (a) 1988, “association of painters and weavers of Quilotoa”

The first ever economic organization came together, not around tourist services but as an effort to break an internal monopoly on an artisan trade in Tigua paintings. Three men from Quilotoa had learned the art informally through social contacts with other painters from the neighboring Tigua parish and allied with a man from that parish to begin the sales of Tigua art near the lake. As they succeeded in selling items to lake visitors, these four men prohibited younger members of the community from arriving with their own paintings to sell. More than that, they refused to offer any instruction to younger men who wanted to learn the art. “They made their paintings here. They were, as we say, like the owners of Quilotoa,” Eduardo Latacunga recounted in June 2014 when discussing the hostility of the older men.

Eduardo added, “Then we put together another group of young men and we did it. We learned with volunteers brought by priests. We learned like it was a school.” In order to muster the authority to challenge the four older painters, fifteen young men turned to the active Salesian mission headquartered in Zumbahua to learn the skills they needed. The Salesians had established a large carpentry workshop in the parish center. However, the Quilotoans requested that training take place at a small school near their houses in Ponce-Quilotoa. With guidance from their instructors, the younger men formally organized a small business association in 1988, ultimately registering it with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture, and Fisheries. Artists from neighboring Tigua had founded a similar association in Quito five years earlier in order to negotiate for the right to sell in Quito’s parks. By formalizing this Quilotoa organization, these young painters sought similar authority to depersonalize the conflict with their elders and legitimize community access to the trade. In contrast to a *comuna*, which also is registered with the Ministry of Agriculture, the trade association is far more limited. It is a subset of local residents who share an artisan trade and who meet to promote the interests of that trade. Yet, created to solve a particular intra-community dispute, this

state-registered association was the first to link place, work, and residents in Quilotoa, distinguishing its members others in Cocha peasant *comuna*.

(b) 1996, “artisan center of Ponce-Quilotoa”

A tourist clientele with more money to spend began arriving in the 1990s when guidebooks started to promote the “Quilotoa circuit,” a loop that featured the famous weekly market of Saquisilí, a stop at a new eco-lodge in Chugchilan, a visit to the lake, a stop in Zumbahua, and finally a swing through the painting cooperative in Tigua. The families that had pioneered the early backpacker refuges now built new hostels out of cement blocks and glass windows. Craft vendors multiplied and diversified wares to include baskets woven from the wild grasses of the moor, woolen hats and gloves, and carved masks. By 1993, nine of the current fifty-seven houses, hotels, studios and shops in Quilotoa had been built (see Figure 1).

Success provoked a backlash from the state and the most serious threat to the future of Quilotoa’s tourist trade. Alarmed at the encroachment of new construction on the crater rim, the national government elevated the conservation status of the lake. Beginning in 1992, The Ecuadorian Institute of Forests, Natural Areas and Wildlife (Instituto Ecuatoriano Forestal y de Areas Naturales y Vida Silvestre, INEFAN) developed a plan to integrate the lake into the reforestation and water conservation project they had developed for the twin peaked Illiniza mountains. In 1996, they formally declared Quilotoa to be a part of the new Illiniza Mountains Ecological Reserve (La Reserva Ecológica de los Illinizas) and sent officials to the community to demand that residents relocate at least 500 meters from the crater (Noroña S, 2014).

Scores of families mobilized to defend their right to do business. Many pointed to the legal titles that they held for lands not just outside the crater but all the way down to the shores of the lake. The confrontation between the state and residents escalated over a series of encounters. Partly, it was the spirit of the times. National indigenous uprisings in 1990 and 1994 disposed communities to stand their ground. The provincial affiliate of the national movement, Movimiento Indígena y Campesino de Cotopaxi (MICC) was one of the most militant and politically active in all of Ecuador (Martinez Novo, 2004). On the opposing side, the government,

too, had a history aggressively challenging indigenous protest. The two sides reached an impasse in 1996. The state sent military troops to support INEFAN representatives who sought to enforce the relocation order. Quilotoans responded occupying their lake-side lands, seizing and holding an INEFAN representative and demanding the removal of the troops. Explicitly tying their dispute to the defense of indigenous territory and community, leaders from Quilotoa supported the intervention of MICC representatives. Indigenous movement leaders then negotiated the release of state officials and continued to work with the Quilotoans as they pressed their case for staying.

In this moment of militarized confrontation, it was Quilotoa painter’s association, not the peasant councils from either Cocha or Ponce, who spoke for the residents. Concurrently with the ongoing INEFAN conflict, the members had newly registered their group, naming it the Artisan Center of Ponce-Quilotoa (sp. Centro Artesanal de Ponce-Quilotoa) and affiliating it with the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Industrialization, Fisheries, and Competitiveness (MICIP). For association leaders, allying with MICIP was a way to raise the profile tourism and commerce within a rural area. In the cultural geography of the parish the name of the organization, “el Centro” would become the shorthand way people would refer spatially to the lakeside zone of houses, distinguishing it from the rest of the districts in the peasant *comunas*.

Members of the Artisan Center followed up the military invasion of their community with a protest March in the provincial capital of Latacunga. INEFAN eventually decided to accommodate the community in the reserve, delegating to them conservation responsibilities that had to be executed along with the trades they plied (Noroña S, 2014). This concession set an important precedent, effectively making territorial stewardship a duty of the trade association even at the moment it sought tourist development projects. To the extent that growing membership of the Artisan Center wanted to fashion themselves as worthy of state support, they would need to support the Artisan Center’s conservation activities. Organizing collective work parties to reforest the lake shore and supporting new rules restricting the burning of pastures in the dry season, the elected leadership of the Artisan Center mixed the militancy of its territorial defense (couched in indigenous politics) with compliance with Ecuador’s strengthening regime of conservation laws (cast in the language of careful management).

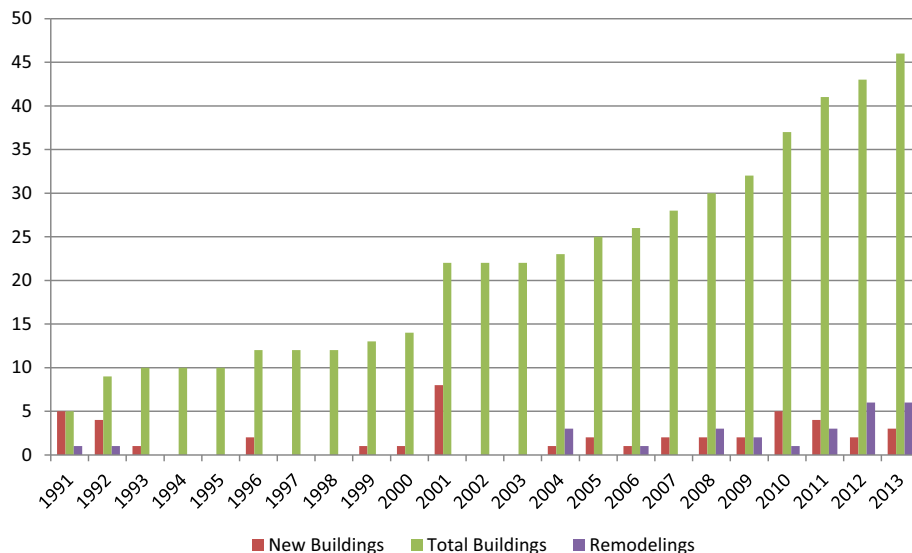


Figure 1. Growth and remodelings of buildings in Quilotoa, 1991–2013.

(c) 2000, “organization for tourist Development”

With the resolution of the INEFAN conflict, Quilotoa’s growth diversified and its organization strengthened. Established businesses were left intact and new ones arose. Indeed after a hiatus of construction, people began building again in the early 2000s (see Figure 1). Following the conflict with the state, Quilotoa’s artisan group developed a strong capacity to undertake development projects and confidence to challenge the state’s efforts to restrict their growth. Indeed, Quilotoans offered a telling example of the hybrid community autonomy that the national indigenous movement had promoted for all Ecuadorian peoples. This form of self-determination did not aim at isolation or sovereign control of territory (Erazo, 2013). Rather, it entailed working with the state, but reserving the right to elect leaders from within the community and to locally determine development priorities for native-owned lands—public and private (Pallares, 2002).

In the late 1990s, the Artisan Center built an entrance gate on the access road to the lake. They charged a flat \$1 per person access fee, and unlike national park entry fees, Quilotoans made no distinction between international and national visitors. Both the provincial government and ministry of the environment quickly stepped in to end the toll-levying. By 1998, though, the national indigenous movement had succeeded to get indigenous authority over community development and rights to community property recognized within the new constitution. In defending the toll booth, the Artisan Center not only counted on MICC and indigenous activists, but also the newly elected provincial prefect, the first indigenous man to hold the post. The Ministry of the Environment backed down and allowed the entrance gate to stand.

The toll booth negotiations led to further reorganization. In 2000, the trade association reincorporated as the “Organization for the Tourist Development of Quilotoa,” now under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism. The revamped organization used the entrance fee money to provide a set of standard services, hiring members of their group as information officers, gardeners, gallery managers, and maintenance people for foot paths and parking areas. By 2012, revenue from the toll had grown to more than \$60,000 per year. In an economic survey of sixty-one residents in 2014, more than half of the paid work that respondents had (28 out of 52 cash earning activities) came from the Quilotoa tourist association paid for with entrance gate fees (see Table 4). With growing revenue, they were also able to set up a social benefit fund to help members with emergency health bills or fees to complete high school.

As membership in the organization began to confer material rewards, Quilotoans restricted enrollment of new members from outside the community, even as they deepened local participation, especially for women. Residents from Cocha, for example, had little chance of joining unless they married a Quilotoan. Rather, almost

all growth was accounted for by the spouses or offspring of the early members. Indeed, women from Quilotoa have found diverse employment within the organization, serving as part of the central directorate or managing newly established businesses such as kayak rentals. Others have been secured the rights as holders of a profitable mule-ride concession quota, independently of their spouses. In the 1990s, the women from the parish had become increasingly vulnerable to problems of domestic abuse and other conflicts in households where husbands spent long periods working in cities (Sánchez-Parga, 2002). In contrast, in the Quilotoa tourist zone, women were gaining new economic resources and raising their public profile through the work of the organization.

Quilotoans continued the tenacious defense of their territory. In the 2000s, a man from Quito sought to capitalize on the surge in Quilotoan tourism by buying land just outside the entrance of the community and building a high quality hostel with wood stoves in each room and private bathrooms. After investing his fortune and opening the business, local residents challenged the Quiteño and ultimately forced him to sell his hotel to three private buyers from the community. In the same years, an indigenous artist from neighboring Tigua purchased land in the center of the Quilotoa tourist area. While opposition was not as strong, some members asserted that the artist was an outsider who would limit local opportunities to sell art. The Organization for Tourist Development soon bought out the Tiguan and has held the land as communal space. Flexibility of community affiliation had once been a hallmark of the Cocha-Ponce-Quilotoa. Now, a new, bounded division of space was taking shape.

## 5. De-communalization and the rise of territorialized commerce

Sánchez-Parga (2002) argues that the unlinking of ties between communities has been a long-term process of “decommunalization” that represents a breakdown across ritual and familial institutions of agrarian society and not just a narrowing of community practices. The dense interconnectivity of parish, *comuna*, and kin fostered diverse kinds of circulation. It was also a space of rich symbolic practices—especially the ones that were fully ritualized in weddings, baptisms, saint’s day celebrations, new house parties, planting and harvesting rites (Sánchez-Parga, 2002, p. 109). Yet poverty, outmigration, and the failures of agrarian reform undermined participation in communal life. Hardship pushed residents to repurpose rural *comuna* away from its wide social purposes and toward narrower projects of development. Less a place that nurtures shared values and identities, the *comunas* became strategic instruments of administration. In the process, they no longer compelled the same high level of loyalty: “we are not a

**Table 4**  
Primary paid work\* reported by Quilotoa residents, 2014, n=61

Independent Occupations			Organization-paid Employment		
	Frequency	Percent of total jobs		Frequency	Percent of total jobs
Farming	7	11%	Grounds and clean up	5	8%
Construction	4	7%	Kayak operator	4	7%
Hotel worker	4	7%	Administrator	4	7%
Artisan	2	3%	Organization watchperson	4	7%
Domestic work	2	3%	Parking lot attendant	4	7%
Food seller	2	3%	Trash collection	3	5%
Guide	1	2%	Toll booth attendant	2	3%
Health promoter	1	2%	Path maintenance	1	2%
Hygiene worker	1	2%	Organization Restaurant	1	2%
No paid work reported	9	15%			

\* Occupations identified by respondents as their principal way of earning cash among the multiple work activities that were reported.

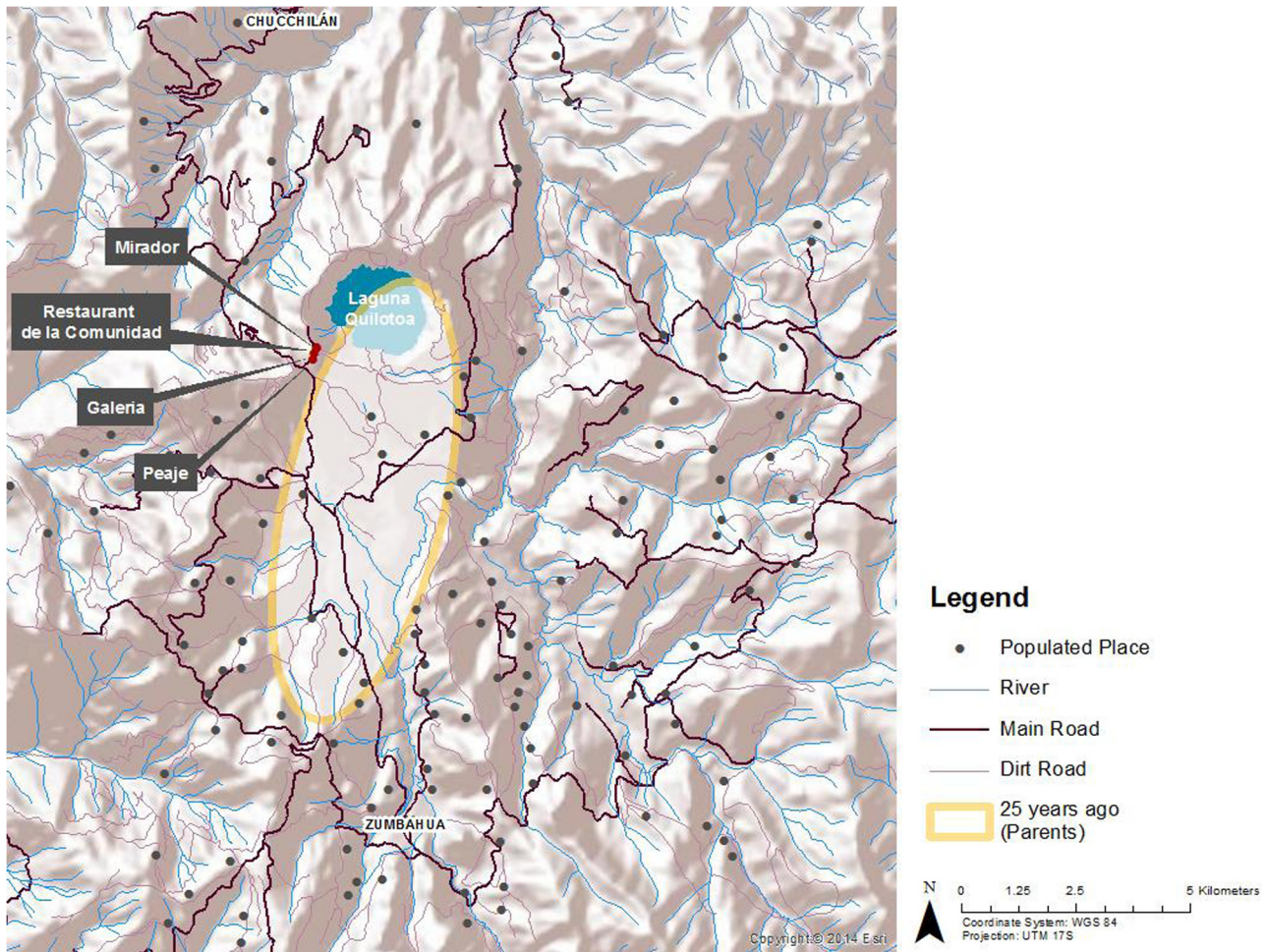


Figure 2. Zone of community meeting places identified for parent's generation, c. 1985.

*comuna*, we are free Indians” as one interviewee in Zumbahua told Sánchez-Parga (2002, p. 10).

Our participatory mapping tracked this unraveling of interconnected parish spaces. In 2014, we used an aerial photograph centered on Lake Quilotoa and covering the parishes of Zumbahua and Chugchilán to interview fifty men and women affiliated with the tourist organization. Respondents marked critical sites of work, meetings, family ritual, and conflicts on an overlay of graph paper which we subsequently digitized. The spatial trends for each variable were developed following a directional distribution analysis via identifying a standard deviational ellipse of the dataset. We then identified statistically significant spatial hot spots of selected variables. The answers illustrated a wide community affiliation had previously materialized across the zone of Cocha-Ponce-Quilotoa. Indeed, adults in the community in 2014 identified Cocha as one of the regular sites where their parents went to community assemblies (see Figure 2).

Within a generation, though, Quilotoa residents withdrew from Cocha and reoriented their community involvement to zones closer to Ponce-Quilotoa (see Figure 3). The overlap that enabled residents to claim kind of triple residence in Quilotoa, Ponce and Cocha had been dropped. Partly, the rise of the tourist economy induced lakeside residents to narrowly target collective investment in Quilotoa center. Yet, the 2014 participatory mapping project suggests the break was not a simple growing apart of two communities as their economies diverged. When we asked residents to identify the locations of conflicts in the parish, the widest streak was in a zone that stretched from Quilotoa through

to the center of Cocha (see Figure 4). Such a pattern corroborates community tensions observed elsewhere in the northern Andes (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2002, 2009) and suggested greater problems than was reported during our survey about intra-community conflict (Table 3).

De-communalization, however, is not the same as de-territorialization. Although Quilotoa’s leaders have pushed hard to build a non-agricultural future, they have repeatedly managed confrontations as a territorial matter. More to the point, territorial claims have been a potent way to escalate conflicts that might otherwise come across as narrow commercial disputes. Drawing on long histories of land and resource disputes (Ibarra, 2004), residents have regular strategies to “officialize” disputes as Bourdieu (1977, p. 40) has conceptualized, insisting on a socioterritorial “definition of a situation, especially in the moments of crisis when the collective judgement falters” (cf. Twyman, 1998).

In these tactics, the peasant *comuna* becomes a holistic model of mobilization. Thus, activists do not simply invoke a generic loyalty to Quilotoa. Rather, in the course of working out of their conflicts, they elect councils or organize labor parties or affiliate with province social movements—acts that accord with *comuna* governance. Released of the actual administrative work of a true *comuna*, these institutions have become powerful, and contentious, habits of institutionalization, making the fight to regulate the new tourist trade a matter of public concern.

In fact, this new territoriality is limited. Quilotoa’s trade organizations are specialized where the *comuna* is a general agrarian institution. The tourist trade group accommodates its member’s



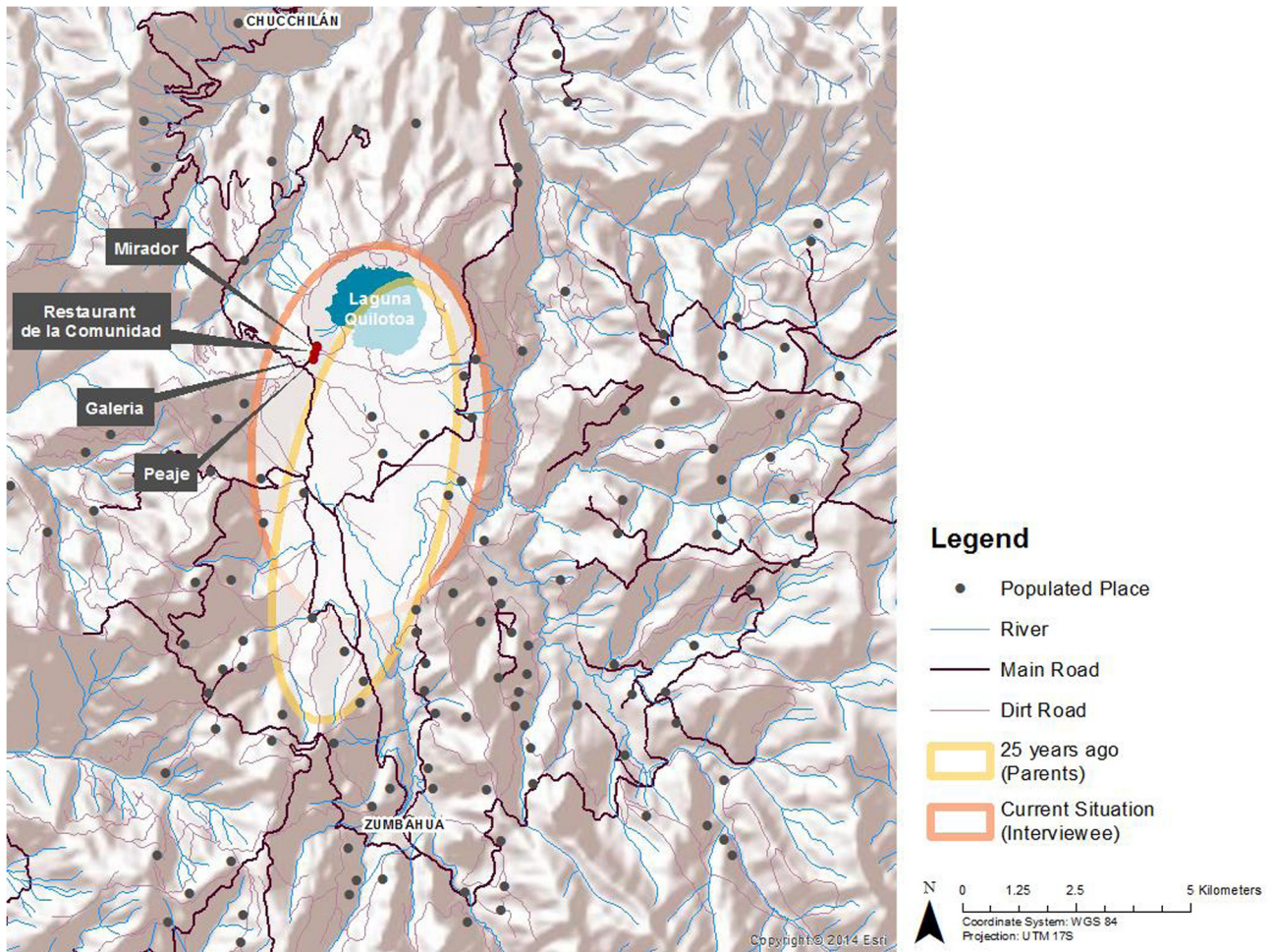


Figure 3. Reduction of zone of community meeting places for current residents, 2014.

affiliation with the surrounding peasant *comuna*. The group holds a variety of land parcels in common, but does not seek territorial jurisdiction, that is, a geographically defined territory officially registered with the state. Its leaders insist on the right to autonomous indigenous development, but are keen to have a variety of state support. It is restricted in a second, corporate sense as well. For all its informality, the *de facto* territory asserted by Quilotoa's trade organizations has increasing precision. It circumscribes a valuable point of entry to Lake Quilotoa behind an entry gate and links it to a bounded and regulated membership. Its defense of place entails a codified set of maintenance and conservation duties. This exclusivity has provoked yet more conflicts, especially as Quilotoa has benefited from significant outside investment in its infrastructure. And amid new tensions, this partial, yet precise mode of territoriality is constantly tested.

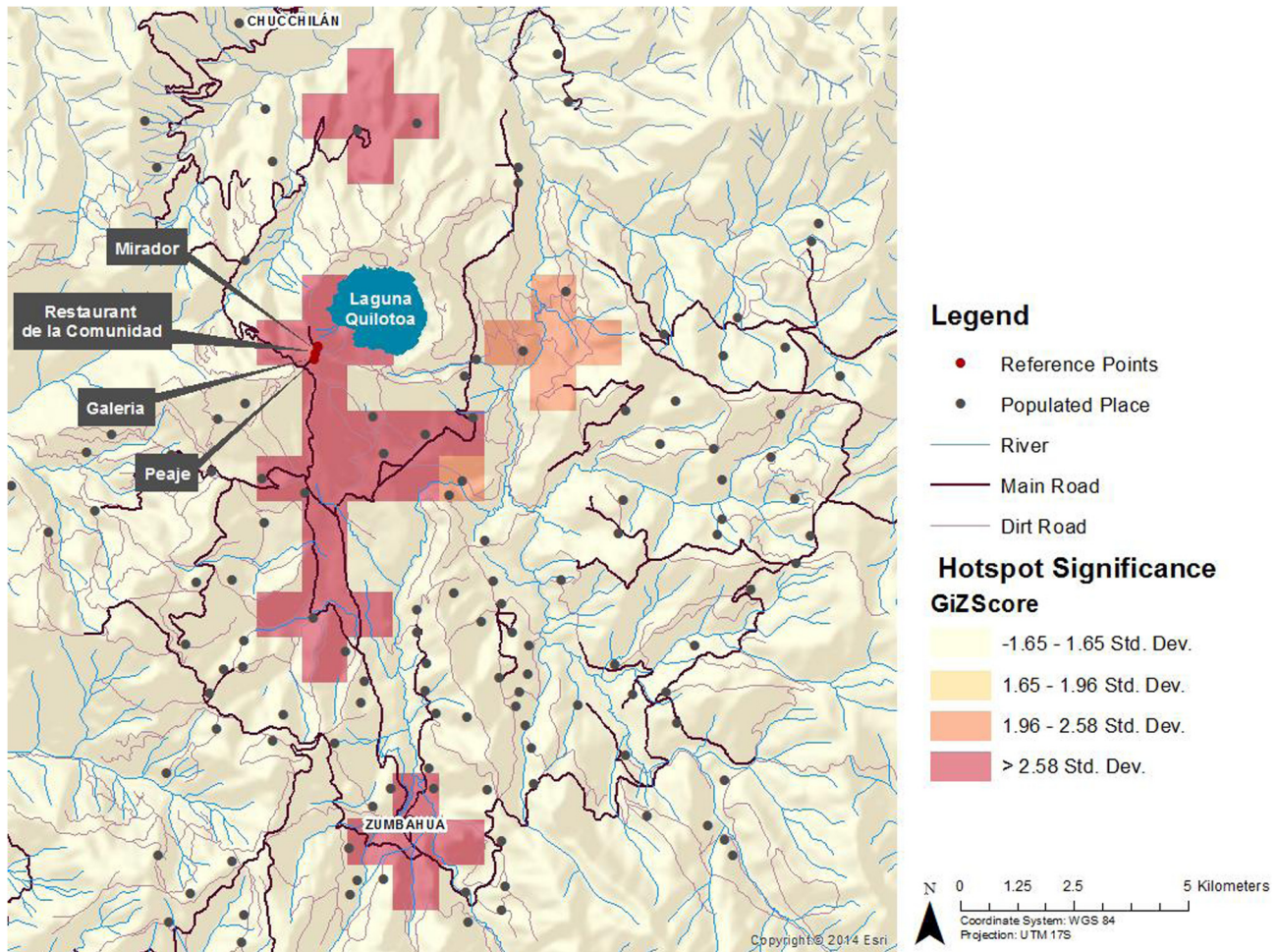
## 6. Community-based tourism in an era of accelerated development

Having built their businesses up slowly over the years through incremental investments, Quilotoans began to receive substantial development assistance beginning around 2010. First, the NGO MCH (Maquita Cushunchic Comercializando Como Hermanos or "Let's join hands and do business as brothers") partnered with the community to build a substantial new restaurant with large picture windows overlooking the lake. Shortly afterward, the administration of Rafael Correa committed to three large projects that transformed Quilotoa: they rebuilt the road from Zumbahua

up to the lake, spent over \$350,000 on a new artisans' gallery and parking area in the middle of the community, and then invested another \$170,000 in an overlook for people to climb up to see the lake. Still more money was allocated for hospitality training programs, improvements in the path to the lake, and the purchase of kayaks to set up a rental service run by the community organization.

In return, state authorities expected two things of the community. First, they worked with the president of the association in 2012 to once again reconstitute the organization, this time as a "Center of Community Tourism (CTC) The Green Lake Quilotoa" (Centro de Turismo Comunitario (CTC) Lago Verde Quilotoa). However, unlike all previous instantiations of the community, this one ceded executive authority to the state. The community could nominate its officers, but the state actually approved the leaders. Where Quilotoa's association had long modeled itself on agrarian democracy, the CTC had recast the organization as the lowest level administrative unit of the Ministry of Tourism.

The Ministry of Tourism also forbade the collecting of entrance fees. To head off community protest, they offered to pay the salaries of community administrators. The new arrangement cut the number of paid positions and eliminated the emergency social fund. Even so, the newly created CTC's officers, suspended the toll's operation. Beginning in 2013, entrance to the community was free, the organization coordinated closely with the ministry in its projects and planning, and individual business operators sought training in marketing, accounting, and professional hospitality. Leaders



**Figure 4.** Conflict hotspots: sites of disputes between residents of Quilotoa and members of neighboring peasant communities for period approximately 1985–2014.

had made a calculated risk that the new infrastructure would considerably elevate the number of visitors for years to come. They believed the way forward would rely less on political struggle and more on skilled business practices.

Then, in January 2014, the Ministry stopped paying the salaries of CTC employees. Months went by with the association president driving continually down to the provincial capital to get the money reinstated. The members of the association met four different times to discuss the situation, finally resolving to reinstate the toll. In a concession to provincial authorities, those collecting the entrance fee explain to all visitors that the money is for parking, tourist information and other services provided by the community, not access to the lake (which could be visited from other communities). The year turned out to have record number of visitors. With revenue from entrance fees and additional earnings from the restaurant, kayak rental, and concession fees paid by those who offer mule rides to visitors, the organization earned a total of \$220,000 in 2014.

Once again in defiance of the Ministry of Tourism and subject to new criticism from neighboring communities, the leaders of the Quilotoa organization set about raising their profile with local political allies. At the Zumbahua parish fiesta, July 5, 2014, the members of the tourist trade association of Quilotoa became one of the most memorable groups in the parade through Zumbahua. Their marching ensemble feature a lady, a fox and a ram, which had arrived with scores of accompanists by truck and bus from the wind scoured rim of Lake Quilotoa. The trio was an instant hit among the thousands who gathered along the parade route,

spectators and fellow parade participants alike. The “lady” was a crossed dressed man, a scoundrel who put on a rubber mask of a white woman with a tangle of auburn locks and a cigarette dangling from her mouth. She toted along a loosely swaddled doll that she constantly put into peril. The “fox” was a masked man wearing a one-piece clown suit and a carved wooden mask. In cultural terms, they were time-honored tricksters whose presence used to grace village celebrations that have now faded from the scene. The ram, meanwhile, was a ram. Big and woolly and festooned with a green blanket proclaiming the formal name of the trade association. He was a gift from the Quilotoa organization to the parish elected officials presiding over the events that day.

As good a show as this ensemble was, it was also a mess. Quilotoa’s leaders had got into a fight among themselves over whether to use a bus or a caravan of pick-ups to transport everyone down from the community. After sorting things out, they arrived late and found a place as the second to last group, following over thirty other marching groups. Where others twirled down the route in synchronized moves, the Quilotoans shambled along. A disheartened young man from Quilotoa complained that the whole presentation of the association was badly done. “In 2006, the council organized things; we put on dances and won prizes at the fiesta. Now, nothing.”

Yet in all of the parade, this group was the only one marching as a community—not a school or a savings coop. Quilotoa, essentially a collectivity of tourist entrepreneurs, mustered its members where the scores of peasant jurisdictions in the parish stayed home. There was a political cockiness in this small district, a self-

confidence that came clothed in peasant traditions. In the Quilotoans' antics an unfocused scrappiness bubbled up all morning long. It showed a group newly investing in the old rituals, stories, and mythic characters of the parish at the moment it fought for a new kind of tourist development, an economic future that professionals had dismissed a decade earlier as impossible.

## 7. Territory, custom, conflict, and community

For the state, frontier making—the undoing of community self-governance in Cotopaxi and opening of an undeveloped tourist destination—has been a two stage process. First, conservation efforts in the 1990s established a set of potentials around Quilotoa: a restoration of a water-rich landscape, the defense of a scenic natural destination, and the creation of a zone of expert state administration. In response, Quilotoa had to stand guard against claims that they were a source of natural harm. Then, little more than a decade later, the state elevated tourism as the overarching purpose of the lake. This was not a gradual evolution, but a sharp break: massive state spending on highways; unprecedented investment in a gallery, restaurant, and hotel; intensive consulting to upgrade service skills; and pointed interventions in local administration. All this built toward a model of tourism to be fully integrated into the profitable, well-developed circuits of Galapagos and Quito world heritage travel.

At the same time, the state is still invested in a far older plan for the province, the modernization of an agrarian society. Launched in the 1930s, this vision entailed the promotion of cooperative production, well-governed peasant communities, and national integration. Having taken hold with Agrarian Reform in the 1960s, aspirations for rural development waned with Ecuador's neoliberal turn. At that moment, the national indigenous movement rose up to champion community economies. For those that lived in the countryside, the drive to modernize had never disappeared. They sought schools, potable water systems, electricity, and community tourism projects. When markets favored their work, local residents eagerly manufactured crafts, sold services to tourists, and relegated farming to a subsidiary activity.

Under all these programs, the parish became a landscape of unrealized, state-led improvements and multi-layered loyalties. For Quilotoans, though, things were far simpler. They honored their ties to the peasant *comuna*, but they consumed themselves in their commitments to Quilotoa's promise of tourism. "The big community, the formative community is Ponce. Only for the work, to have some security, did we form the association," one veteran named Cesar Pilatasig explained. Nonini (2007) has written that the commons is a particular kind of collective asset that is held in trust and to be transferred to future generations. It is not hard to find this commitment in Quilotoa. Cesar Pilatasig emphasized the intergenerational aspiration of the group's members: "In this sense, we have spoken in our meetings, speaking to young men and women to not migrate but instead to look for work with the organization itself, in the sector itself, in the community itself. We have always been clear, emphasizing key advice that the youth should not leave to be robbed and damaged in the cities and then return to do damage to the community. We do not want this. So we speak out and they have always understood and now we number many people. We are organized."

Agrawal and Gibbons rightly warn against approaching local development in terms of the "vision of the mythic community." Assumptions about shared values, homogenous society, and of small units of territory can mislead when it comes to understanding the conflicts sparked by community-managed resources. These authors insist instead on the need to focus on institutions and the making of rules that regulate who can exploit resources and under

what terms. Researchers have made considerable progress tracking new community institutions of craft and tourism development. Yet, this argument risks wrongly divorcing rules from myths, splitting institutions from tradition. Sustained ethnographic and historical investigations emphasize how customs themselves provide the key to asserting, challenging, and changing rules.

This Andean case underscores how even the most striking economic shifts away from agricultural economies can rely on the customs of an agrarian world to set up novel institutions. For rural residents in new tourist districts, territoriality is a practical matter of controlling resources that attract visitors. It is also the cultural work needed to legitimize that control. The tactical uses of territory vary: identifying an organization with a place; using residence to qualify men and women for market participation; assembling an organization as a constituent of an umbrella provincial social movement; modeling of members' duties after shared labor parties; and recruiting participants to older rituals of collective life. At each turn, such acts are instrumental. They sustain collective authority, ensure material care for valued sites, and deter unauthorized use. Such territorial tactics also invoke the symbolic world of participatory, indigenous self-management.

However much new trade organizations borrow from the peasant *comunas*, they significantly rework the identity that rural zone makes possible for people. The institutions of parish, *comuna*, and kin group had once sustained diffuse, non-corporate socio-territorial world. Today, the specialized purposes of tourist organizations make territorial units at once more partial and more precise. They incline their members to identify with a line of work that distinguishes some residents from their comrades across the parish. Through explicit rules and tacit practices, the successive organizations inscribe boundaries between neighbors. Such exclusivity makes the regulated, sustainable use of the conservation area possible. It has also facilitated highly effective countermoves against the state's attempts to dispossess residents of their land and livelihoods. Yet, inequalities increase in a region marked by widely shared poverty, ensuring that brief respites in the cycles of confrontations will not last long. What is more, new challenges will likely come from rivals who appropriate the creative territorial tactics underlying Quilotoa's successes.

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