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Leadership, entrepreneurship and collective action: a case study from the Colombian Pacific region

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Abstract: Building upon case-based evidence this paper explores the role of leaders in Ecomanglar, a community-based enterprise in the Black collective territory of La Plata-Bahía Málaga in the Colombian Pacific Basin, whose purpose is to provide *eco* and *ethno-tourism* services. This purpose is inextricably bound up with the region's biophysical and institutional characteristics, both of which make management of common-pool resources a key strategic task for Ecomanglar. We propose an analytical framework to understand the role of these leaders based on the interaction of two dimensions: *institutional transfer channels* and *operational capacity*. We further analyse the role of leaders as essential 'brokers' to initialise and sustain collective action, a role that brings about entrepreneurial solutions for sustainable development but also creates, or exacerbates, conflicts within the community. Our findings challenge approaches which view collective action as an emergent decentralised group-oriented outcome. The paper contributes to the literature on leadership, entrepreneurship and collective action by identifying missing links and potential points of convergence. It also sheds light on some of the challenges in promoting entrepreneurship as a means to advance sustainable development in rural communities.

Keywords: Collective action, entrepreneurship, environmental enterprises, leadership, sustainability

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1. Introduction

Following the 1991 constitutional reform in Colombia, Law 70 of 1993 established institutional mechanisms to protect the rights and identities of rural Black communities from the Colombian Pacific Basin as ethnic minorities. The law recognised their right to the collective property of their territories and created Community Councils (CCs) as internal administrative polities. Today more than five million hectares of collective territories benefit 66,452 families in six Colombian departments. This massive land titling – one of the most ambitious in Latin America – entailed many challenges. First, communities had to organise to be eligible for the title. Second, they needed to create, implement and enforce rules to manage their resources. Third, the law aspired to incentivise communities' socio economic development in line with their traditional practices.

Particularly focused on the third challenge, this paper analyses the role of leaders in the case of Ecomanglar, a productive community-based enterprise whose purpose is to capitalise on the region's natural and cultural resources through the provision of *eco* and *ethno-tourism* services in the CC of La Plata-Bahía Málaga in western Colombia. Ecomanglar aims to improve livelihoods beyond subsistence enterprises, setting it apart from the region's predominant form of economic endeavour. Since the driving force for the development of the enterprise comes from the community and particularly from its leaders, Ecomanglar avoids most of the negative effects of top-down projects and 'ready-made' development solutions. This enterprise depends heavily on voluntary work, mission-driven commitments, sharing of critical assets and long-term expected returns (financial and non-financial). These characteristics, and the fact that the enterprise is developed within collective territories, make literature on collective action and the commons relevant to inform our analysis.

We propose an analytical framework to understand the role of leaders in Ecomanglar based on the interaction of two dimensions: *institutional transfer channels* and *operational capacity*. This interaction configures four contextually determined types of leadership roles. Our framework may also illuminate the analysis of pertinent dynamics in similar cases. We argue that leaders in Ecomanglar

can be thought of as *institutional entrepreneurs*, able to sustain collective action that fosters institutional change primarily through the provision of entrepreneurial opportunities.

Theoretically, our paper contributes to the literature of the commons by acknowledging that the role of leaders is at least as important as structural conditions to catalyse cooperative behaviour, thus challenging approaches which view collective action as an emergent, decentralised, group-oriented outcome. By analysing this role in the context of cooperative and entrepreneurial solutions for sustainable development, the paper highlights the challenge of defining clear conceptual frontiers between the constructs of leaders and entrepreneurs.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section one presents the relevant literature review, from which this case is analysed, particularly focusing on the literature on leadership and entrepreneurship and their relationship to the literature on collective action. Section two explains the research method. Section three presents the socio-political context of the Pacific region and describes the history of Ecomanglar. Section four presents the results of the formal interviews conducted as part of our research. In sections five and six respectively we introduce the proposed analytical framework and advance some lessons derived from the analysis. The last section briefly presents some conclusions.

2. Literature review

In its broader conception, the purpose of collective action is to achieve common objectives. Collective action theory mainly focuses on understanding interactions among group members, the making of rules, and mechanisms for monitoring compliance and solving grievances. Less attention has been paid to how collective action emerges and the roles key individuals play. Literature on leadership and entrepreneurship help to fill this gap.

Through a selective approach, this literature review identifies points of convergence and relevant gaps between the fields of leadership and entrepreneurship within the general frame of collective action (including management of common-pool resources). The review will (a) briefly present key aspects of the literature on the commons, emphasising within-group analysis of heterogeneity and power relations; (b) show how leadership has been understood in the literature of collective action in general and the commons in particular; and (c) present key attributes of entrepreneurs and leaders in the literature on entrepreneurship and collective action respectively, to identify similarities, relevant gaps and potential contributions.

2.1. Collective action to manage the commons

Abundant literature on collective action and management of common-pool resources followed the seminal contributions of Olson (1965) and Hardin (1968). The latter argued that overuse of resources leads to the so-called “tragedy of the

commons,” the allegedly inevitable depletion of resources due to collective action problems such as free-riding. Privatisation or state control were thus conceived as the only ways to prevent depletion (Hardin 1968).

Many prominent scholars in the field have systematically contested this claim. Ostrom’s critical approach (1990, 1998) shows how decentralised governance mechanisms and institutional arrangements for managing natural resources help overcome the “tragedy” by regulating the conservation, maintenance and use of resources. Global awareness of environmental sustainability has renewed the interest in local collective action and participatory development (Bardhan and Ray 2008). If anything, the concern for the commons has become more relevant in recent decades.

Diverse approaches and traditions within the literature on the commons share a fundamental assumption: collective action results from a decentralised aggregation of actions by individuals who can advance group interests by making decisions under certain sets of rules. These rules define the institutional setting under which users access, manage, exclude, monitor, sanction and arbitrate resources (Schlager and Ostrom 1992). Although by no means uncontested, this underlying causal narrative is applied to a wide range of phenomena in the social sciences (Agrawal 2008, 47).

From a systematic review of the contributions of three paradigmatic scholars of the commons – Ostrom 1990; Wade 1994; Baland and Platteau 1996 – Agrawal (2008) summarises two sets of findings. First, members of small local groups can design institutions to manage resources sustainably and second, a set of conditions is positively related to sustainable local self-management of resources. These conditions are grouped into four categories: *characteristics of resources* (e.g. well-defined boundaries, riskiness and unpredictability of resource flows, mobility, etc.); *nature of groups* that depend on the resources (size, levels of wealth and income, heterogeneity, power relations, past experience, etc.); *features of institutional regimes* through which resources are managed (monitoring, sanctions, adjudication, accountability, etc.); and the *nature of the relationship* between the group and external forces and authorities (for a detailed account of these categories see Agrawal 2008, 48–56. See also Ostrom 2009). Notably, the role of leaders and the impact of group heterogeneity are just two among many factors within the *nature of groups*. The degree of correlation between those categories and the impact they have on the sustainability of commons institutions have proved difficult to assess unambiguously (Baland and Platteau 1999; Poteete and Ostrom 2004; Agrawal 2008).

The assumption of a relatively ‘homogenous’ role of individual decision makers is contested when the role of leaders, power relationships, inequalities and asymmetries between those individuals are taken into account (Agrawal 2001; Bardhan and Dayton-Johnson 2002). Although collective action may be understood as the emergent outcome of aggregated individual decisions with no apparent centrally allocating mechanism, there is in principle no reason to expect that all members in a group will have the same influence over the processes and

decisions leading to collective action. Power imbalances and inequalities are key to the shaping of individual and collective choices (Baviskar 2008).

Literature on how inequality affects cooperation suggests that different forms of heterogeneity and unequal distributions of wealth among group members affect trust and reciprocity, thus hindering coordination for collective action (Cardenas 2003). Most of this literature shows that asymmetries in the material benefits and costs for the users of common-pool resources affect cooperation. Interestingly, this emphasis on material factors underemphasises the symbolic dimensions of power and authority (Bardhan and Ray 2008).

2.2. Leadership and collective action

The study of leadership in collective action is relatively underemphasised and has received little empirical attention (Lofland 1996; Klandermans 1997 cited in Diani 2003; Glowacki and von Rueden 2015). Only recently has experimental research in economics studied how leadership affects cooperation and coordination (Sahin et al. 2015). Many attempts to develop a comprehensive theorisation – a task yet to be fully accomplished (cf. Aminzade et al. 2001, Barker et al. 2001) – come from the literature on social movements, which can be theoretically thought of as a form of collective action.¹ In this literature, leaders are defined, rather broadly, as “strategic decision-makers who inspire and organize others to participate in social movements” (Morris and Staggenborg 2004, 171). Three broad ideas seem to be widely acknowledged: leaders and organisations are mutually shaped (Barker 2001); deliberate efforts may often be needed to guarantee goal congruence between the leader and the movement/organisation; and different – and potentially conflicting – types of leaders may dominate at different stages of movement development (Morris and Staggenborg 2004). Recent literature tackles the issue of leadership in collective action more directly. Glowacki and von Rueden (2015) define leaders – an integral attribute for successful collective action – as individuals who have “a larger role than other group members in the establishment of goals, logistics of coordination, monitoring of effort, dispute resolution, or reward and punishment” (2).

Leaders seem to have social and cultural characteristics (as well as particular skills) that set them apart from other group members. These attributes confer distinctive roles on leaders which, played out in the context of particular dynamics of power and influence, affect the emergence, paths, and outcomes of collective action and social movements (cf. Morris and Staggenborg 2004, Harrell and Simpson 2016). Literature shows that, relative to mutual monitoring and sanctioning, leadership is a solution for collective action problems, albeit in specific conditions (Glowacki and von Rueden 2015). Although the emergence of collective

¹ For a comprehensive conceptualisation of social movements as a form of collective action see Snow et al. (2004).

action is determined by a wide variety of factors – e.g. other regarding preferences or social norms (Ostrom 1990), political and cultural opportunities (Oberschall 1973), organisational bases, material and human resources, precipitating events, threats, grievances, and collective action frames – leaders do play a salient agency role in converting these and other potential conditions into effective mobilisation (Morris and Staggenborg 2004). Even in the case of overt rejection of hierarchical structures in radically decentralised collective action, the need for coordinating actions and political representation (two archetypical functions of leaders) still exists (Melucci 1996 cited in Diani 2003).

Although literature on the commons pays relatively little attention to the role of leaders, it does acknowledge – particularly from rational choice perspectives – four different functions for leaders: allocating resources and monitoring individual strategies and targeting sanctions (Bianco and Bates 1990); distributing resources between private and public profit (Esteban and Hauk 2009); assigning differential divisions of labour (Colomer 1995); and determining stimuli to generate particular group reactions (Van Belle 1996). Two broad conceptions underlie these functions. First, the leader as a dictator or benevolent planner (Bianco and Bates 1990; Calvert 1992) who is either appointed by the group or voluntarily engaged to solve coordination problems. Second, the leader as a rational agent who has private interests different to those of the group.

As shown by Bianco and Bates (1990) it is reasonable to assume that leaders will respect the group's objectives to increase the likelihood of success and retain their role. However, group–leader goal divergence may arise: under certain circumstances, it might be more important for leaders to be individually successful than to maximise an expected collective outcome (Colomer 1995; Van Belle 1996; Esteban and Hauk 2009).

In the context of a decentralised solution to the problem of cooperation, Ostrom (1990, 1998, 2005a,b) argues that individuals can develop institutions that guarantee optimal cooperative solutions without the need of enforcement from leaders. Mutual monitoring is proposed instead. However, according to Ostrom (2000, 149) “the presence of a leader or entrepreneur, who articulates different ways of organizing to improve joint outcomes, is frequently an important initial stimulus”. Van Belle (1996, 107), also argues that leadership provides “a *rational* and *parsimonious* solution to the collective action problem, because it plays a critical role in overcoming both the *initial barriers* to collective action and the *ongoing difficulties* encountered in the pursuit of public goods” (emphasis added). Along these lines Glowacki and von Rueden (2015) argue that, in relatively large groups with considerably high costs of monitoring and sanctions, leadership is an efficient solution to the problem of collective action. In fact, there is evidence that self-organisation (i.e. decentralised) is more likely when some users of a resource are deemed as legitimate local leaders and have acquired entrepreneurial skills because of prior organisational experience (Wade 1994 cited in Ostrom 2009; Baland and Platteau 1996). Bianco and Bates (1990) show that leadership is more significant to *initialise* than to *sustain* cooperation. They argue that followers sup-

posedly act under a “trigger strategy” – i.e. punishing opponents after initial cooperation if defection (the trigger) is observed – so the leader will be more relevant when first establishing a cooperative regular conduct, the sustainability of which will be preserved by the followers’ fear of permanently losing their cooperative payoffs.

2.3. Leaders and entrepreneurs

Close similarities exist between the attributes of entrepreneurs and leaders in the literature on entrepreneurship and collective action respectively. According to Schumpeter (1975), entrepreneurs embody the driving force needed to develop an economy. They carry out a process of ‘creative destruction’ whereby – after identifying a commercial opportunity and organising resources to exploit it – innovations are propagated rendering previous ventures obsolete (Schumpeter 1975 cited in Martin and Osberg 2007). In the literature of collective action, particularly resource mobilisation theories, leaders are viewed as individuals who mobilise resources and create organisations in response to incentives, risks and opportunities (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Oberschall 1973 cited in Morris and Staggenborg 2004).

In the field of development, Lewis (1996) provides a review of four perspectives to analyse entrepreneurship. Two are particularly relevant. Following Weber and McClelland, the *modernisation school* of development emphasises the role of culture and values as prerequisites for entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are thus seen as crucial variables, located within networks of kinship, information and capital and linking the socio-cultural environment with the rate of economic development (Lewis 1996). The *social anthropological* perspective emphasises the relationships between entrepreneurs and the communities in which they operate. The entrepreneur is a ‘broker’ crossing between ‘spheres of exchange’ (Long 1977 cited in Lewis 1996).

Attempts to define different ‘types’ of entrepreneurship are common. In the literature of collective action Ostrom (2005a) differentiates private and public entrepreneurs based on their motivations, acknowledging how both can contribute to self-organised co-production of local services. In the literature of entrepreneurship Schoar (2010) identifies two types of outcome-based entrepreneurs: *subsistence*, i.e. those for whom entrepreneurship is a means to provide for subsistence income, and *transformational*, i.e. those who create enterprises that grow to “provide jobs and income for others” (Schoar 2010, 58). Other typologies identify at least three types: conventional entrepreneur, social entrepreneur and institutional entrepreneur. Specifically, institutional entrepreneurs mobilise resources to create new institutions or to change existing ones; theoretical boundaries between social and institutional entrepreneurs tend to blur when social innovations created by the former lead to large-scale change (Dacin et al. 2011).

Conceptual frontiers dividing the constructs of entrepreneur and leader are still indistinct. They tend to converge, though, on ‘resource mobilisation’ (either

economic or cultural/symbolic) as a key social role for leaders and entrepreneurs and also on the functional distinction between *enabling* and *maintaining* collective action. This convergence is particularly clear for ‘institutional entrepreneurs’ as agents who initiate diversion from the institutional status quo and also help implement those changes (Battilana et al. 2009). This makes them significantly versatile, amplifying their role beyond mere initialisers of cooperation, as stated by Bianco and Bates (1990).

Discourse, resource mobilisation, social capital (associated with the position of the actor in networks or institutional configurations), and alliances and cooperation are enablers for institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al. 2009). Discourse is particularly salient since institutional entrepreneurs “must convince different constituencies embedded in the existing institutions of the need for change and mobilize them behind it” (Battilana et al. 2009, 81). Similarly, literature on leadership in collective action and social movements define the *framing* process as the capacity of leaders to shape the definition of relevant grievances and the necessary collective action needed to address them by mobilising “potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford 1988, 198; Benford and Snow 2000, 614).

A thorough account of the conceptual frontiers between the constructs of leader and entrepreneur is beyond the purview of this paper. However, three assertions are possible: common attributes between leaders and entrepreneurs do exist, particularly in specific forms of entrepreneurship; frontiers between these constructs are porous since agents may interchangeably adopt characteristics of both (as the case of Ecomanglar will show); and rigorous assessment of whether this apparent adaptability responds to conceptual fuzziness, or to the versatility exhibited by agents, might be a relevant theoretical contribution.

In summary, this literature review suggests that it is important to consider the role of key individuals (leaders and entrepreneurs) within groups and organisations – and not only structural conditions or individual decision making – as catalysts of collective action and collective good provision (Marwell and Oliver 1993; Morris and Staggenborg 2004; Glowacki and von Rueden 2015). While ‘social structural conduciveness’ is necessary, leaders are important because they enact discursive, strategic and operational roles to mobilise collective action (Morris and Staggenborg 2004; Glowacki and von Rueden 2015). The role of leaders may be more accurately looked at from the perspective of agency, particularly when they can potentially deviate from the pursuit of common interests to follow their own (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2004). Finally, whether leaders may be appropriately conceptualised as ‘entrepreneurs’ is itself a matter for further theoretical inquiry.

3. Research method

The central inquiries in this paper arose from an ongoing research and pedagogical project started in 2008 with communities in the Colombian Pacific region, led by one of the authors. The main research purpose was to understand the impact

of collective titling in the management of the territory. The pedagogical objective was to contribute to the development of Ecomanglar by providing support and commercial and financial advice from groups of graduate and undergraduate Management students. Different groups of students, over a five-year period, participated in the project. The support of one of the authors was constant throughout, making sure that students understood the process in which they were involved. Several visits to Ecomanglar and a continuing relationship with the organisation motivated the paper's queries and also informed its analysis. As the project unfolded as participatory action research, insights into the role of leaders as special kinds of members within the community in general – and the enterprise in particular – became particularly salient.

As a single case-based study, this paper attempts to gain in-depth understanding of the context and specificities of the case which can be illuminated *by* and contrasted *to* theory to further understand the role of leaders in collective action. A total of 16 in-depth semi-structured interviews with different actors were conducted and analysed as formal primary data sources for this paper.² Interviewees included three community and Ecomanglar leaders and two Council members, five graduate students and one undergraduate, one university coordinator, three consultants and one external advisor. Secondary sources included strategic planning documents, minutes and assessment reports from students.

Analysis of the codified qualitative primary data was conducted through *thematic analysis*. This method searches for themes that emerge as recognisable patterns from repeated iterations of reading and analysis of the data, and which then become categories for the analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). Analysis was assisted by two blind-coders in two iterative rounds.

4. Context

4.1. The Colombian Pacific region

The Colombian Pacific region – part of a global 'biodiversity hotspot' – hosts the majority of Black communities, a historical consequence of the use of slavery in colonial mining (Banco de la República de Colombia 1990). This geographical concentration exacerbated the social isolation of Black communities who have largely remained marginalised from the collective national identity (Whitten 1986). As argued by Wade (1993, 60), the region has never been completely "isolated from [the central political economy] but [it's never been] fully incorporated into it". Two stark manifestations of this relative isolation are extreme poverty and lack of access to basic services. According to UNDP (2011) in Departments with significant numbers of Black people (Chocó, Valle del Cauca, Cauca, and Nariño)

² Interviews were held at different points in time from March 2013 to June 2014. They lasted between 50 and 120 min.

the Unmet Basic Needs Index³ in 2009 was 26% higher than the national index. In 2010 global malnutrition in children under five was 37.4%, and mortality of children under five (per 1000 live births) was 29.3% (DANE 2010).

During the early 1990s, Colombia instituted a constitutional reform that included mechanisms for political participation for marginalised communities. Article 55 of the new Constitution formally recognised, for the first time, the right of Black rural communities to collective ownership of their land in a region historically regarded by the government as a reserve of extractible unoccupied territories.

Law 70 of 1993 – probably the most important rights-based claim for Black communities since the abolition of slavery – established the institutional design for the collective territories. This structural transformation of the property rights regime, which entailed substantial decentralisation, was a significant step in the long-standing struggle for Black recognition started by catholic missionaries, indigenous groups and Black social movements during the 1980s.⁴ The Law created Community Councils (CCs), a special form of local administrative polity for the territories. The first collective title was granted in the Department of Chocó in 1996. Local communities have since established their CCs often supported by external organisations. Today there are 165 titled CCs with more than 5 million hectares benefiting 66,452 families in six Colombian Departments.⁵

With more visible and empowered local authorities, the new regime changed the political structure of Colombia's Pacific region (Vélez 2011). Additionally, according to community leaders, after Law 70 the volume of projects sponsored by external actors (NGOs and governmental organisations) in the Pacific region intensified (Vélez 2011). Development, however, remained elusive. By 2011, the percentage of Blacks in the aforementioned Departments living in poverty and extreme poverty was 51.9% and 24.8% respectively (UNDP 2011).

4.2. The Council of La Plata-Bahía Málaga

The CC of La Plata–Bahía Málaga (henceforth the Council), in the rural region of the municipality of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca, was established in 1998 (see Figure 1). Today it has 36,397 collectively titled hectares. The Council has four villages (*veredas*) where 612 people are grouped in nearly 160 families.⁶

³ This index presents the percentage of people from the total population who have at least one unmet basic need (improper housing, poor home services, high economic dependence, and school absenteeism). The closer to zero, the fewer people with unmet basic needs.

⁴ Notwithstanding external barriers and ongoing internal contradictions, these movements have achieved important collective milestones. For a detailed analysis of the development of these movements see Escobar (2008), Grueso et al. (1997).

⁵ Information based on 2011 data of INCODER (Colombian Institute for Rural Development). New proposals are now emerging in urban afro-Colombian settlements in the Caribbean.

⁶ Administratively, the Council is organised as follows: a Legal Representative, a Board composed of five members, a General Assembly where representatives of the Council's *veredas* meet, and small *veredas*' committees.

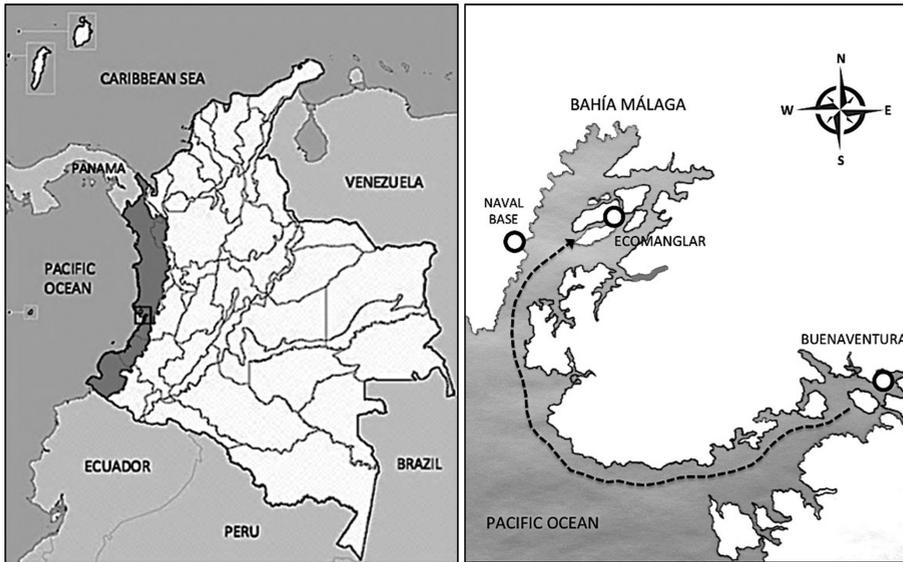


Figure 1: The Colombian Pacific Region - Bahía Málaga.

Image on the left: The Colombian Pacific Region in dark grey. Highlighted is the area of Bahía Málaga in the Department of Valle del Cauca. (Source: adapted from Shadowfox, Wikimedia Commons.) Image on the right: Access route to Ecomanglar from the city of Buenaventura (Source: authors.)

Half the population is 18 years old or less, with a roughly even proportion of men and women. Most of Bahía Málaga's population consider themselves as Afro-descendants with only 2% as indigenous or belonging to other ethnic groups. High school is the highest educational level achieved by the majority of inhabitants (Cifras y Conceptos 2012). Bahía Málaga is known for its rich biodiversity. Mangroves are the predominant ecosystem, strategically vital for conservation. Economic activities are mainly based on subsistence agriculture, fishing, and the use of mangrove and other forest resources.

The Council was self-proclaimed as a conservationist entity. Supported by WWF Colombia, the community developed an Internal Code for the Use and Management of Natural Resources that defined a hierarchy of conservation areas to preserve the ecosystems.

4.3. The history of Ecomanglar

Two young community leaders – who had worked as tourist guides supported by the local NGO Cenipacífico and who would become Ecomanglar's founders and leading members – decided to create an independent community-based organisation for ecotourism. They promoted their idea as an opportunity for economic development against a backdrop of negative experiences in neighbouring

communities where tourism had been managed by urban immigrants for whom Blacks were the employees. These young leaders convened the first general assembly in 2009. Thirty-two people out of forty attendees paid the fee to join the nascent organisation.

Ecomanglar was formally established as a productive non-profit community association. Its mission was to provide *eco* and *ethno-tourism* services mainly for researchers and niche tourists, while promoting environmental conservation by capitalising on cultural traditions and local knowledge as a value-adding competitive advantage. Improving basic infrastructure, including an unfinished lodge, was the first task at hand. Young leaders raised funds and time from other community members to repair the decaying wooden paths and signage previously set up in the forest.

Ecomanglar's first years were primarily devoted to establishing the basic organisational structure, devising the optimal operational model, training members and setting long-term strategies. As some members and external supporters manifested, Ecomanglar is still in its 'infancy' as an enterprise and is yet to produce significant economic results. Much can be learned, however, from the process of developing the enterprise – particularly, as the evidence presented in the next section will show, how the young founders took on critical tasks which eventually consolidated their leadership role.

5. Results

As previously mentioned, this research project was greatly informed by a sustained relationship with the leaders and community of Ecomanglar over a five-year period. This section is particularly focused on the results of the formal interviews conducted as part of the project. For analytical clarity, results are presented according to four 'global themes' (Attride-Stirling 2001) obtained from the coding of interviews, in all of which the role of leaders is predominant.

5.1. Operational model and skills development

Ecomanglar's business model relies on the incorporation of region-specific natural and cultural resources into its service portfolio, which includes guided visits to the mangrove forests and humpback whale watching. Ethno-tourism services include immersion into traditional customs such as local music and the collection of *Piangua* (an edible mollusc endemic to the Pacific mangroves), the main economic activity for women in the region.

Managing these resources entails balancing the contributions and expectations of community members. Some of them were initially sceptical that any work could be done without financial resources secured in advance. However, "Ecomanglar was born with [and continues to uphold] a philosophy of austerity," said one of the leaders, "having external resources secured from the start has done nothing but perpetuate the dependency of Black communities." This rationale inspired leaders to develop an operational model that relies heavily on

specialised collaborative efforts and the use of the community's own skills and resources, an unprecedented form of collective engagement in the community. Members of Ecomanglar, including the Board, provide services according to their skills and occupations: trained guides, motorboat drivers, cooks and management staff. Even a task-rotation system for certain roles was implemented by the leaders in response to some members' claims for wider community participation.

However, it became apparent to leaders that the lack of basic managerial and operational skills among community members was a critical gap. Although leaders took up strategic and even operational roles (given their comparatively higher educational level) the enterprise grew in complexity and leaders themselves became aware that they also lacked critical technical skills.

5.2. External support and relations with outsiders

Direct external support came early from university students led by one of the authors of this paper who, while doing research, engaged in close and sustained contact with the community, hence devising the opportunity to put students' management skills to work for Ecomanglar.⁷ Relations between the researcher and the leaders became stronger. Leaders realised that enhancing this support would help them mobilise resources to overcome specific challenges. Particularly, the researcher and leaders became aware of the need to strengthen Ecomanglar's organisational foundations.

Students helped Ecomanglar mainly in two ways. Firstly, they helped develop the organisation's 'business plan'. According to one of the leaders, "We thought we had a direction, albeit not written. Students told us we would develop a business plan and we didn't even know what that meant! [Laughs.] Our initial idea to promote ecotourism was to formulate projects to be submitted to NGOs and agencies. Little did we know that we had to plan and organise a strategic route." Successive groups of students (undergraduate and graduate) supported Ecomanglar in specific tasks defined in the business plan and in general management skills training.

Secondly, students persuaded leaders to modify Ecomanglar's governance mechanisms. Decisions were initially made by consensus, which – according to both leaders and students – generated bottlenecks. Majority rule was therefore introduced to speed up the decision-making process. Enforcement mechanisms were implemented; those who failed to attend training sessions would not be allowed to participate as paid tourist guides. These and other decisions were incorporated into Ecomanglar's formal internal rules. Although support from students was aimed at providing leaders with the skills to strategically manage the enterprise, embracing market logics and mechanisms proved to be a potentially disruptive goal, as will be critically analysed later.

⁷ This opportunity was envisioned as both a development alternative for Ecomanglar and a learning opportunity for students. The latter is not explored in this paper.

Noticeably, leaders served as translators between external support and other Ecomanglar members. According to one of the leaders: “After [students] taught a, say, three-day training workshop on how to do a business plan, self-evaluation showed that people in the community did not learn much. We needed to find a strategy so that people could really understand the message. (...) It’s not an easy process, though. People have gradually learned new things and become more empowered. But even for us leaders it’s still difficult to, say, formulate a project by ourselves.”

Alongside private and public universities, other organisations also gave specific support to Ecomanglar. These included governmental organisations and local and foreign NGOs (e.g. Conservation International and WWF-Colombia). While their initial support was mainly focused on economic resources and “hard” investments (e.g. infrastructure), support changed to include training and other forms of “soft” skills, as new organisations such as tourism-related businesses and consultancy firms also joined in.

Most of the support received by Ecomanglar came from either well-established development NGOs or *ad hoc* private supporters. Access to governmental support was scarce. Moreover, transfer of resources through formal institutional channels (e.g. financial services and capital investment, knowledge networks, etc.) has remained absent. As established by Law 70, collective territories were declared inalienable and indefeasible to protect communities from exploitation and forced displacement. Consequently, land cannot be used as collateral to access formal credits. Moreover, the Law did not include monetary transfers from the municipal or central government to the CCs.⁸ These factors have drastically limited access to funding sources making it more difficult for leaders and other community members to undertake entrepreneurial initiatives.

5.3. Decision-making process

Decision-making in Ecomanglar is “centred on the leaders” as manifested by the leaders themselves and other members. Although community members – particularly the Council’s Board – are regularly consulted and community contributions are essential for the operational model of Ecomanglar, leaders are the predominant decision makers. They are almost exclusively in charge of strategic and organisational planning. Only then are decisions socialised with other members.

In general, community members reacted positively to this style of leadership. However, since tangible results were at first particularly elusive, leaders faced internal tensions and resistance. Some community members criticised what they perceived as “too much discourse, excessive and rather fruitless meetings.” Resistance also came from the Council’s Board members who didn’t initially

⁸ Unlike collective territories of Black communities, indigenous collective territories (*Resguardos*) did receive those monetary transfers only for specific-purpose investments as defined by law. Resguardos were established under a different legal framework previous to Law 70.

endorse the initiative. According to one of the leaders, “Board members were reluctant because the Council already had a cooperative in charge of productive enterprises. Ecomanglar was thus perceived as a potential internal competitor (...) we argued that the cooperative did not really prioritise productive endeavours and was not able to manage monetary resources.” These reactions motivated leaders to more proactively seek support from key actors in the community (e.g. highly influential elders, outspoken members) thus reducing criticism and resistance, and also keeping Ecomanglar independent from the Council’s structure and administration.

The responsibility of designing strategies, persuading and motivating others, mobilising resources and overcoming day-to-day difficulties fell primarily, and almost exclusively, to leaders. Other leadership roles included public relations (e.g. a presence at tourism fairs) and expanding operations to other villages – key tasks in achieving what leaders envisioned as the desired future for Ecomanglar.

The convenience of centralised decision-making is a critical issue. Warned by students’ diagnoses, leaders became aware of the latent risks of leader-centred management. As one of them said: “Students once asked me ‘what would happen with Ecomanglar when you’re gone?’ It was then that I realised that one becomes the ‘engine’ of the enterprise and that formal leadership transitions are needed.”

5.4. Overcoming barriers

According to interviewees, the future of Ecomanglar depends heavily on its capacity to overcome some critical barriers. First, securing more – and less sporadic – sources of support, including a steady flow of customers. A total of 80 tourists were hosted in 2013. By September 2014, 131 had been hosted. As one of the leaders put it, “we depend on people being able to travel to [the city of] Buenaventura, the departing point. When there is violence in the city or the main access road is closed no one wants to go. For this reason, we’ve been stood up a couple of times. Additionally, when the weather gets nasty, landslides along the road prevent tourists from coming.”⁹ Efforts to improve infrastructure and fixed

⁹ Neither the armed conflict nor general criminality has directly affected the community of La Plata. None of its leaders, for instance, have so far been subjected to any kind of physical violence, a rather exceptional occurrence in a region where many forms of conflict and violence collide. Community members largely attribute this to the fact that the main Colombian naval base in the Pacific coast – providing logistic support for major military operations – is located in Bahía Málaga, approximately 4.5 km (2.8 miles) from La Plata. The base can therefore be assumed to provide stability for the community of La Plata and its proximities, the absence of which could significantly compromise the security of the area, adding more barriers to the enterprise. Whether the presence of the base has had other impacts in the community is an inquiry not directly addressed in this research. Indirect impacts of the conflict, however, have indeed affected the community. Whenever outbreaks of violence erupt in the city of Buenaventura – whose history of degraded violence is widely documented (Carrillo 2014, Human Rights Watch 2014) – the flow of tourists and supplies to Ecomanglar are significantly affected because the city is an inevitable access point (see Figure 1).

assets yielded positive results. Through financing from Bioredd,¹⁰ by 2014 members of Ecomanglar had built a new, fully equipped lodge to meet international ecotourism standards and bought their own motorboat to help overcome transportation bottlenecks. However, according to a consultant involved in leadership training, those efforts are not sufficient: “The main challenge ahead is marketing. Nobody knows Ecomanglar. Leaders have to focus on spreading the word, reaching new customers, getting people to know what Ecomanglar is and what makes it different.”

Additionally, members of Ecomanglar should also be able to reach out and strategically capitalise on broader institutional innovations directly related to the development of the enterprise and the community in general. Such innovations include REDD initiatives which some Council members have tried to incorporate into the community’s income-generating options.

These and other barriers attest to the need to reach wider economic and political institutions to advance Ecomanglar’s interests more effectively. Admittedly, the community and its leaders have achieved important milestones. They have been actively engaged in the Black social movements that gave considerable political momentum to the cause of Blacks as an ethnic minority during the 1980s and 1990s. More recently, in 2012 they engaged in collective action with other state and non-state actors to oppose the construction of a port, which led to the declaration of the ‘Uramba’ Marine National Park to protect the region’s ecosystems. In 2014 the Council’s legal representative denounced alleged political corruption in the election of representatives of Black communities in the national government.

For leaders, entrepreneurial initiatives are indeed a vehicle to overcome barriers. According to one of the leaders, “I’ve always thought of myself as a community leader trying to generate good internal governance and economic opportunities so that young people don’t leave the community. We want to remain in this sanctuary of protected areas but we must figure out how to transform it into economic opportunities (...) Leadership skills I’ve developed through personal experiences and my engagement with the community. Entrepreneurial skills I’ve gradually learned through the support I’ve received from our partners. Now we need to develop forestry and fishing as highly organised, economically viable enterprises (...) they are both potentially more profitable than ecotourism”.

Leaders seem to share an ambitious future for the enterprise. They have approached neighbouring communities to make Ecomanglar the centrepiece of

¹⁰ The Bioredd+ programme – the scope of which includes the Colombian Pacific region and other Departments in the country – is an initiative of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) whose purpose is to support Colombia in the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity (<http://www.bioredd.org>). USAID has promoted crop substitution in Colombia through different programmes and strategies for many decades. However, support for Ecomanglar does not seem to fit this line of work particularly because of the historical absence of illicit crops in the community of La Plata and Bahía Málaga in general.

ecotourism in the region. According to one of the leaders, “We must grow slowly and we need to make sure that people in the community understand where we are heading.” Since the influence of external actors in the community has been wide and continuous, Ecomanglar shows how local and external management practices are intertwined, a complex interaction addressed by the literature on the commons which will be discussed later.

6. Discussion: a two-dimension framework to analyse the role of leaders

The previous section presented evidence on four salient topics – or themes – that synthesise critical attributes of Ecomanglar’s management in which leaders are predominantly involved. Broadly, two of those topics (i.e. *operational model and skills development, decision making*) are mainly centred on internal community dynamics. The remaining two (i.e. *external support and relations with outsiders, overcoming barriers*) mostly pertain to the interrelation with actors outside the community. Building on this basic distinction, in this section we propose a framework to further elaborate and understand the role played by leaders, based on the interaction of two dimensions. Although inductively derived from the specificities of this case, as a form of ‘ideal type’ construct our framework might also illuminate the analysis of pertinent dynamics in similar cases. Moreover, it allows us to put forward some inferences which could be examined further in future research.

The first (external) dimension is formal Institutional Transfer Channels, a subset of institutions whereby resources between the community and other domains (e.g. government, external supporting actors, partners, etc.) are exchanged. These include at least two types: *economic*, and *human capital* channels, each associated with a corresponding set of resources: (a) monetary transfers (e.g. from the municipal or central government), formal financial services and capital/venture capital flows; and (b) entrepreneurial skills and different forms of knowledge (e.g. traditional, technical).¹¹ The second (internal) dimension is Operational Capacity or the ability of the community to manage and incorporate those resources.¹² These dimensions are consistent with categorisations of functional roles played by leaders in the literature of social movements. According to these, leaders face conflicting requirements as both external “articulators” and internal “mobilizers” (Gusfield 1966 cited in Morris and Staggenborg 2004). The interaction between

¹¹ We emphasise *economic* and *human capital* channels because these were particularly relevant according to interviewees. However, other types of channels would fit under our definition. For instance, Law 70 may be understood as a special set of *political* institutions by virtue of which Black communities were granted formal representation in the central political system, hence facilitating resource exchange between central and peripheral polities. Ideally, resources should flow both ways. In a highly asymmetrical context, however, resource exchange is predominantly a unidirectional transfer from external actors to the community.

¹² For the sake of analytic simplicity, relative independence between *institutional transfer channels* and *operational capacity* is assumed.

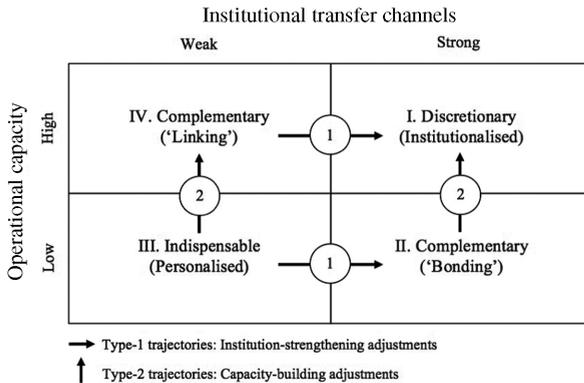


Figure 2: Nature of the role of leaders.

these dimensions creates four possible states, each describing a different role for leaders as depicted in Figure 2.

When institutional channels are strong and the capacity of the community to incorporate resources is high, the role of leaders is discretionary (quadrant I). Their contribution is residual, that is, contingent upon the specific requirements that neither formal channels nor capable communities can adequately fulfil. Leadership roles are assigned and transferred through institutionalised impersonal mechanisms. A leader's role is indispensable when weak institutional channels meet low operational capacity (quadrant III). In this scenario leaders are prone to – and often asked to – ‘micro-manage’ most of the activities within their organisations. There is higher dependency on the particular attributes of ‘exceptional’ individuals who are mainly appointed on the basis of subjective assessments of their skills and charisma (or on equally subjective perceptions of inherited merit and influence). Leaders play a complementary role when there are either strong institutional channels and low operational capacity (quadrant II) or the opposite (quadrant IV). Leaders in quadrant II help strengthen a community's capacities mainly through bonding-like functions (i.e. intra-community relationships between members). In quadrant IV they compensate for weak institutional channels mainly through linkage-like functions (i.e. inter-community relationships across levels of hierarchy and power).¹³

Four ‘ideal types’ of leadership roles have been identified in the literature of collective action and social movements: top formal leaders, secondary team leaders, bridge leaders and organizers (Robnett 1997; Aminzade et al. 2001; Goldstone

¹³ The *linking* and *bonding* terms used here are analogous to their use in Putnam's typology of social capital (2000). A link between the literature on social capital and the literature on entrepreneurship further supports this analogy: according to Battilana et al. (2009), social capital is one of the enablers for institutional entrepreneurship, as described in the literature review.

2001 cited in Morris and Staggenborg 2004). The typology presented here complements these and similar typologies, for it goes beyond characterisations of leadership in terms of how leaders relate to other members of the group or organisation to encompass both intra and inter-organisational dynamics. In so doing, it shows that in the case of Ecomanglar – and possibly in similar cases where organisational arrangements and institutional settings to carry out collective action are precarious – neatly defined types may collapse into a single individual who undertakes otherwise differentiated activities.

Although no normative “evolutionary” transition between quadrants is necessarily assumed in this framework, quadrant I may be understood as a desirable state: a *less isolated* and *more capable* community in which the role of leaders is no longer personalised in specific individuals. Hence a relevant standpoint for the analysis is to ask (a) how close has Ecomanglar moved towards this state? And (b) what trajectories have been followed and what tensions have emerged?

Quadrant III better depicts the state in which Ecomanglar was conceived and currently operates. Despite relative advancements, five years after its inception Ecomanglar still struggles with low operational capacity and weak institutional transfer channels. The community lacks essential abilities (e.g. management skills, basic literacy, means for organisational learning), thus compromising autonomous appropriation of know-how. Formal institutional transfer channels (not to mention supply of basic public goods) are still weak.

Although in quadrant III leaders may have incentives to perpetuate the status quo and maximise group–leader goal divergence, evidence suggests that leaders in Ecomanglar have strong incentives to help lead transitions away from quadrant III due in part to the common benefits arising from the close ties and shared meanings between leaders and the community. Leaders and community members alike acknowledge, however, that founding leaders are still largely necessary. As stated by one of the leaders, “I will never leave Ecomanglar without making sure adequate leadership transition is in place. It’s not easy, though, because one has certain knowledge and some people in the community still struggle to grasp things. Right now I know that when I’m not present the organisation just stalls.”

As for trajectories, two types of dynamics are relevant: *institution-strengthening adjustments* (type-1 trajectories) and *capacity-building adjustments* (type-2 trajectories). In principle, there is no reason to necessarily expect smooth transitions between states. Type-1 trajectories face opposition from path-dependencies and long-established *de facto* powers for which institutional fractures and socio-economic isolation are functional. Type-2 trajectories face internal opposition because of community heterogeneity and internal power struggles. From these opposed forces, different forms of conflict may emerge as will be explained in detail when analysing the role of leaders in Ecomanglar as ‘brokers’.

The extent to which leaders have direct impact on these trajectories is no minor issue. Arguably, leaders’ influence on the strengthening of institutional channels is less than their influence on building stronger capacities within their communities.

This assumption, however, underemphasises what the literature on collective action and social movements has identified as the *strategic framing* capacity of leaders to deliberately persuade constituents to change their interpretations of collective meanings, thus reaching broader ideological and institutional contexts beyond leaders' immediate sphere of political influence (Benford and Snow 2000).

Evidence from the case suggests that although leaders have been directly involved in both institutional strengthening and operational capacity, their efforts have mainly been focused on the latter. Other Council members have led initiatives to influence the broader institutional setting that directly affects the community (e.g. the development of REDD initiatives). In short, Ecomanglar's strategy has mainly prioritised the strengthening of operational capacity (i.e. advancing towards quadrant IV), a much more attainable goal given the immediate needs of the community and available sources of external support.

7. Lessons from Ecomanglar

In light of the preceding framework the role of leaders in Ecomanglar can be further characterised by two propositions: the centrality of their role and their function as brokers. In this section, the implications of each will be discussed.

7.1. The centrality of leaders

Centrality may be defined as the extent to which leaders are essential for the satisfaction of needs of relevant constituents or 'targets of mobilization' (Snow and Benford 1988). Leaders in Ecomanglar have been instrumental in eliciting the collective action needed to sustain the enterprise. Even under the assumption that community or institutional-level conditions will steadily improve (thus favouring transitions towards quadrant I in our framework) leaders will still be important, albeit in a different role.

One factor seems to confer this centrality on leaders: they have access to key resources that other community members don't have. These include 'first order resources' i.e. skills, assets, etc. directly controlled by leaders, and 'second order resources' i.e. relationships that allow leaders to access those resources when controlled by third parties (Boissevain 1974).

From this salient position, the kind of leader this case highlights is not only confined to the state-like roles of assigning functions and punishments or the roles prescribed by the style of 'leadership through enforcement' characteristic of a rational, apolitical 'benevolent dictator'. Leaders in Ecomanglar are allegedly interested in securing leadership transitions as an important condition to stabilise and maintain collective action, thus overcoming expected stagnation from monopolisation of resources and flows. Their interest, however, does not necessarily guarantee such transitions. In the long run, the extent to which leadership can be replaced through non-personalistic mechanisms (quadrant I in Figure 2) could therefore be a metric of success.

The protagonism of leaders in Ecomanglar's decision-making structures reveals relatively unexpected asymmetries where some theory would predict predominantly homogenous (i.e. 'apolitical') interactions. These asymmetries validate critical views on two underlying assumptions of the literature of decentralised collective action: (a) group members as autonomous, decision-makers and (b) apolitical institutional arrangements within which such members make decisions to maximise their benefits (Agrawal 2008). From this, a relevant inference follows: the prominence of leadership is inevitable when intra and inter-community asymmetries and heterogeneities – both material and symbolic – are high. The higher these asymmetries, the greater the need for leadership roles either to help improve operational capacities or strengthen institutional transfer channels. Both functions accentuate the importance of leaders as institutional entrepreneurs who can potentially lead disruptions that change the status quo and are also involved in the implementation of those changes (Battilana et al. 2009).

Leaders in Ecomanglar are central in yet another important way. Literature on the commons has extensively studied the complex interaction between externally enforced and local-level governance mechanisms to manage common-pool resources and deal with environmental dilemmas (Ostrom 2000, 2010). Two contrasting hypotheses are: (a) externally enforced mechanisms potentially disrupt local governance efforts to the point of 'crowding-out' group-regarding behaviour in favour of self-interest (Cardenas et al. 2000); and (b) external regulation does not necessarily crowd out local mechanisms – combining external formal regulations and informal community agreements can lead to greater conservation (Vélez et al. 2008). Since management of Ecomanglar is inherently bound up with management and conservation of endemic ecosystems and external actors have notably influenced Ecomanglar's governance rules, these hypotheses are key to inform this analysis. Evidence shows that the influence of external actors in the management and governance of Ecomanglar has yielded positive results (as perceived by both leaders and supporters), which would favour the second hypothesis. However, as will be explained below, risks do exist and potential disruptions of internal social dynamics, however mild, cannot be ruled out. Whatever the case, leaders remain as key actors either to provide a buffer against disruptive interventions or as the bonding element to facilitate complementarity. Rejecting external influences altogether when potential for constructive complementarities exists is no less misleading than ignoring the risks of careless interference.

In line with the literature on the commons (see Andersson 2012), the preceding analysis would support two additional inferences: (i) no community is entirely self-sufficient to design and enforce governance mechanisms for resource conservation and (ii) external actors may adequately support self-organised community processes.

7.2. Leaders as functional brokers

The position of leaders in Ecomanglar may be more rigorously defined as ‘brokerage’. A broker is an actor, either individual or organisational, connecting other actors not directly related to each other due to different types of barriers (Boissevain 1974; Fernandez and Gould 1994 cited in Diani 2003).

Brokers are not only defined in terms of access to resources but also – and perhaps mainly – in terms of the ‘networking capacity’ emanating from their multiple memberships (Diani 2003). This flexibility seems to respond to the particular contextual requirements leaders face. The relative prominence of the roles of leaders, managers and entrepreneurs in organisational settings is influenced by the socio-historical context (Czarniawska-Joerges and Wolff 1991), thus conferring on those roles an inherently dynamic nature. Moreover, conceptual frontiers between these roles are harder to establish in contexts that exhibit ‘extensive negative permeability’ between welfare providing institutions – i.e. State, Market, Community – (Gough et al. 2004) that exacerbates tensions and contradictions between these institutions.

Leaders in Ecomanglar exhibit this form of contextually determined, ‘elastic’ role-adjustment. Specific circumstances (e.g. privileged access to external support in light of persistent economic and social needs) motivate leaders to take on the role of entrepreneurs. Community leadership in the Pacific region is strongly associated with active political involvement in the Black social movements started in the 1980s. Leaders in Ecomanglar seem to differ from this predominant conception. While they do pursue institutional transformations – partly supporting the discourse of the Black Social Movement, especially to defend the autonomy of CCs to manage the territory – they choose to do so primarily through other means, i.e. providing financially sustainable entrepreneurial opportunities. This ‘pragmatic’ approach further blurs the distinction between leaders and entrepreneurs, thus challenging leaders to draw from the often conflicting for-profit and non-profit institutional logics (Dacin et al. 2011).

Leaders exercise functional brokerage by adopting a role of ‘translators’ between two different cultural spheres, both the community’s and that of external actors whose support is necessary to incorporate resources that the community lacks. Through ‘translation’ leaders help overcome the barriers that prevent communities from incorporating operational capabilities and mediate to legitimise Ecomanglar amidst established governance and organisational structures. Community heterogeneity makes this mediation all the more important (Goldman 1997). Since there is no reason to presuppose that community members are equally receptive to the ideas and values on which Ecomanglar is founded, leaders have to play their role within a space of contested cultural values and resistance.

As the following paragraphs will explain, brokerage makes leaders more vulnerable to conflicts in which they are either direct agents or mediators, and makes them bear more responsibility for the effects – both positive and negative – of bridging cultural divides.

7.2.1. Exposure to conflicts

Evidence suggests at least three forms of conflict. The first, related to internal governance struggles, is between leaders and the Council's Board. As previously mentioned, some Board members were at first reluctant to legitimise Ecomanglar fearing it could eventually create internal competition. Although initial tensions were surmounted, this form of conflict re-emerges whenever discrepancies between Board members and Ecomanglar leaders arise. Due to the strength of leaders in Ecomanglar, the community seems to be facing a multi-headed leadership whose views do not always coincide.

A second form of conflict, emanating from relations with nearby communities, is between the leaders of Ecomanglar and representatives from other villages in the Council. Ecomanglar stands as the most developed community-based initiative of ecotourism in the region, thus exercising a *de facto* leading role – and 'monopolising' resources and support – that neighbouring leaders may resent. Some of them manifest that they'd rather have their own enterprises instead of joining Ecomanglar. This tension should come as no surprise. Building alliances is a costly process for it demands uniting actors who have competing priorities and are often distrustful of each other (Hathaway and Meyer 1994; Melucci 1996 cited in Diani 2003).

A third form of conflict is also relevant. Tensions recently emerged between the leaders and some other members of Ecomanglar. For the latter, it is not clear whether leaders are actually advancing the interests of the community over their own. This suspicion has forced leaders to emphasise that they're not driven by power ambitions or access to economic privileges.

Different factors underlie these conflicts. According to a long-time consultant on ecotourism in Latin America, "in small communities engaged in ecotourism, community members almost invariably end up accusing leaders of theft, free-riding or opportunism. Leaders, in turn, are so thoroughly engaged in their work and convinced of the way they do things that they forget – or do not want – to tell others what they are doing. Add lack of communication, work overload and inability to share tasks and responsibilities, and tensions with the community will inevitably arise."

Evidence on the emergence and depth of these conflicts is not easily revealed to outsiders. Underlying these tensions is the acknowledgement that neither leadership roles nor transitions (as presented in Figure 2) are smoothly assumed or carried out. Changes invariably create winners and losers. Moreover, as argued by Glowacki and von Rueden (2015), leadership itself entails collective action problems because 'dispute resolution has the potential to cause retaliation against those who mediate or arbitrate and to drag leaders into the conflicts of others' (4).

In light of the evidence presented three inferences are possible. First, the relative advantage of Ecomanglar as a pioneering organisation able to mobilise resources and support may have created, or exacerbated, internal and external frictions. Second, these frictions reveal that, among community members in La Plata-Bahía Málaga and surrounding villages, dynamics of cooperation and com-

petition coexist, thus presenting Ecomanglar with different challenges. Third, a more effective internal ‘translation’ of the goals and aspirations of leaders to their partners and the community at large may be necessary.

Notably, none of these forms of conflict directly pertain to the wider context of the Colombian armed conflict. Rather than overstated localism or deliberate analytical omission, this fact attests to Ecomanglar’s exceptional stance. The five-decade long Colombian conflict has spawned intricate and long-standing ramifications, which may have affected some community members. However, as mentioned before (see footnote 9), the impact of the armed conflict on the community of La Plata-Bahía Málaga has been mainly indirect, contained by the close proximity of a prominent naval base. Moreover, civil wars and internal armed conflicts have the ability to segment geographical space. In the Colombian case, even adjacent localities exhibit diametrically opposed manifestations of the conflict (Arjona 2014). This provides another plausible explanation as to why the community of La Plata shows low incidence of the armed conflict despite its highly convulsed surroundings.

7.2.2. Bridging cultural divides

Leaders help bridge the wide cultural divide between rural Black communities and external actors. Whether interactions with external actors reinforce leaders’ identities and the impact this has on community relations deserves careful scrutiny. Those interactions may cause negative effects. Close interaction between leaders in Ecomanglar and external supporters has gradually generated a common language that strengthens ties and trust but may also intensify dependency, thus hindering leadership transitions. This is particularly critical in light of the region’s structural liabilities and historic dependency on external aid. According to one member of a supporting NGO, “leadership is a scarce resource in the region so it is only natural that leaders dominate access to key actors thus creating dependency. There is no critical mass of leadership. The gap between consolidated leaders and those who could eventually replace them is still too wide and it’s not clear how leadership transitions take place if at all.”

Evidence suggests that external support may have a significant impact on a community’s practices and identity. As previously mentioned, following advice from students, consensual decision-making in Ecomanglar – a traditional community practice – was changed for majority rule to speed up the decision-making process. An efficiency-based logic, shared by many external actors, underpinned this and other changes. According to a consultant for Black communities in the Pacific, “following the ethnic-territorial organisational rules everyone must be convened and heard. Naturally, it takes at least a week to reach the simplest decision.” Critically assessing whether these changes are beneficial to the community is key. Evidence shows that, when exposed to the entrepreneurial logics and values promoted by Ecomanglar’s external supporters, community members may feel left out. Some of them

describe themselves as “limited” to fully embrace those new skills and values. By focusing interaction predominantly on leaders and failing to critically consider ideological and cultural gaps, external actors may inadvertently reinforce this narrative.

8. Conclusions

In Colombia, *de jure* recognition of land property was an important milestone in the long struggle of Black communities from the Pacific Region to consolidate social and political inclusion. This paper has shown the case of Ecomanglar, an enterprise developed within an institutional regime of collective property allegedly conducive to collective action that relies strongly on shared cooperative commitments. Embedded in this context Ecomanglar has been permeated by the discourse of cooperation that communities in the region often portray as distinctive of their shared identity.

These attributes confer on Ecomanglar special characteristics. Among these, the role played by community leaders is particularly relevant. As both institutional and social entrepreneurs, leaders actively engage in institutional design and change and they also allocate resources to better capitalise opportunities for sustainable development. By acknowledging the role of leaders this paper elicits the importance of the political dimension in the analysis of collective action and challenges theoretical approaches for which collective action is a predominantly emergent decentralised group-oriented outcome. As discussed in this paper, leaders are instrumental in initialising and sustaining collective action, a role not always acknowledged in the literature.

Our analysis shows that the role of leaders is contextually determined, particularly in terms of their ability to influence the institutional settings on which their actions are framed and the capabilities of the communities of which they are a part. The types of roles and complex dynamics emanating from this perspective allow further conceptualisation of the role of leaders as that of ‘brokers’ between otherwise disconnected domains. This role might create or exacerbate conflicts and tensions. These, in turn, can be explained by the conflicting “spheres of exchange” that emerge when collectivities are newly integrated into market mechanisms (Geertz 1963; Long 1977). The capacity to “navigate” through these spheres gives leaders their particularly salient role.

The case of Ecomanglar shows that, under specific contexts, conceptual frontiers between the constructs of *leader* and *entrepreneur* may be blurred. It also shows that leadership is indeed a varied and “fluid” category. Determining how particular institutional contexts make these frontiers more porous is a more general theoretical inquiry worth pursuing. The case also illustrates the complexity of decentralised organisation and the challenge of pursuing a unified theoretical framework to understand the variables affecting collective action and the models that connect them (Agrawal 2001; Ostrom 2009).

The pitfalls of community-oriented development projects to fully address the needs of ‘beneficiaries’ have been thoroughly documented (see Mansuri and Rao 2004). Some of those ‘modernising’ projects have been strongly criticised for maintaining the status quo rather than promoting social change (Gates and Gates 1976). The case of Ecomanglar stands apart from that prevailing narrative. Ecomanglar was not conceived by outsiders or prescribed as a ‘ready-made’ solution for the community. On the contrary, its primary driving force comes from the community, particularly from leaders. Furthermore, since mobilisation of resources and support is mostly a *consequence* of the decision of leaders to become entrepreneurs, leaders can hardly be categorised as purely opportunistic ‘grant-seekers’ (a much too common role played by some community leaders in developing countries).

This paper sheds light on some of the challenges of promoting entrepreneurship as a means to advance sustainable development in rural communities. Firstly, effective transference and appropriation of organisational and entrepreneurial skills entails careful consideration of how individual and collective benefits are balanced out. Secondly, support to develop entrepreneurship beyond subsistence enterprises demands efforts on both community and other institutional levels.

In summary, this case shows that it is necessary to acknowledge the complex coexistence of different – and perhaps contradictory – discursive logics. Neither communities nor leaders are merely naïve passive recipients. They can develop adaptive strategic behaviour. As brokers, leaders benefit from external support individually. Those benefits, though, must also be collectively capitalised through ‘downward accountability’ (Mansuri and Rao 2004). Although incentives for Ecomanglar leaders seem to be aligned with those of the community, conflicts may be revealing premature fractures. Also required are incentives for leaders to consistently behave as ‘benevolent’ brokers who actively share those privileges.

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