

## Multi-stakeholder Platforms and Protected Area Management: Evidence from El Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve, Mexico

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### Abstract

This article analyses the potentials and limitations of multi-stakeholder platforms (known as advisory councils in Mexico) involved in protected area and resource management in peripheral regions. Qualitative, in-depth expert interviews conducted in 2015 at one of the world's most prominent Biosphere Reserves focused on the sources of effective and inclusive stakeholder participation through collective decision-making and joint implementation. Results identified three key interrelated factors that explain the performance and effectiveness of the advisory council at the El Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve: 1) comparatively favourable socioeconomic and political conditions at the outset; 2) efficient internal organisation that fosters informed decision-making by consensus; and 3) the ability to influence governmental institutions through collective lobbying. As a result, the council has been able to exclude several non-local actors from resource use, obtain public funding, and participate in diverse management activities. Due to the lack of a well-defined mandate; however, it still depends on centralised institutions and has no decisive stake in the governmental decision-making process yet. Therefore, despite notable progress, genuine stakeholder participation in protected area management still faces limitations in Mexico and probably other countries as well.

**Keywords:** multi-stakeholder platforms, participative management, Biosphere Reserves, Baja California, Mexico

### INTRODUCTION

Natural resource management requires innovative strategies to cope with the increasing demands of different user groups that often trigger conflicts over access to, and the distribution of, benefits. Environmental policy has responded to this emerging socio-environmental complexity by establishing multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) to foster effective, cooperative and inclusive governance based on public participation, collective action and conflict mitigation (Steins and Edwards 1999a). Other scholars stress that

governmental institutions considered MSPs a way to canalise increasingly globalised conflicts of interests, in order to deal with them within a familiar legal and institutional framework (Faysse 2006). Hence, since the 1990s, MSPs have been involved in a wide range of contexts where they are expected to serve multiple purposes (Applegate 1998; Warner 2005), including Protected Area (PA) management (Brenner 2009), an issue that has attracted increasing interest among scholars (Thiele et al. 2011) and practitioners alike (Díaz Ávila et al. 2005).

As Röling (1994:125) states, MSPs tend to “arise when stakeholders perceive the same resource management problem, realise their interdependence in solving it, and come together to agree on action strategies for solving the problem.” Therefore, the establishment and development of MSPs require shared values and perceptions among a critical mass of stakeholders, as well as the capacity to perform collective decision-making and joint action. However, as case studies show, even officially sponsored and recognised MSPs can fail to enhance participatory environmental governance (Edmunds and

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Wollenberg 2001; Faysse 2006; Mulema and Mazur 2015) and even PA management (Brenner 2009; Trench 2014). But there is also evidence of efficient platforms (Ravnborg and Guerrero 1999; Thiele et al. 2011). Thus, it is essential to identify the factors that lead to—or are detrimental to—effective MSPs. As this article will show, scholars have addressed this issue extensively since the late 1990s. Nevertheless, specific research on MSPs established in PAs in the developing world—hotspots of the planet’s biodiversity—is surprisingly scarce. Moreover, as the Mexican case illustrates, studies tend to focus on shortcomings (Brenner 2009; Cruz-Morales 2014; Durand et al. 2014; Trench 2014) and pay less attention to successful MSPs involved in PA management. Though further research on shortcomings and limitations is surely useful, it is vital to shed more light on cases of good practice (Gitsham 2014). Careful analysis of the evolution, success factors and limitations of MSPs operating in PAs might foster the effectiveness of environmental policies when establishing or promoting these platforms.

As for the Mexican case, natural resource-related MSPs to promote citizen involvement and more effective management have been legally established since the early 1990s in the form of advisory councils (ACs, *consejos asesores* in Spanish), first in marine areas and later in PA management. However, while ACs are considered a cornerstone of stakeholder participation in Mexican PAs (Díaz-Ávila et al. 2005), research is limited to a few case studies, all of which highlight the lack of inclusiveness, legitimacy and effectiveness (Paré and Fuentes 2007; Brenner 2009; Cruz-Morales 2014; Durand et al. 2014; Trench 2014). Meanwhile, Mexican practitioners stress the noteworthy performance and effectiveness of the AC at the El Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve (AC-EVBR) Brenner & De la Vega-Leinert 2014; Díaz-Ávila et al. 2005), Mexico’s largest terrestrial PA, located in the centre of the Baja California Peninsula. However, to date, no in-depth research has been conducted on this comparatively successful MSP. Therefore, exploring the factors and processes that have generated the performance of the AC-EVBR will provide useful reference points for future comparative analyses of MSPs established to enhance PA-management in Mexico and other parts of the developing world.

The questions that guided our research are:

- What has the AC-EVBR achieved over time?
- What factors explain these achievements?
- What factors still hamper the platform’s effectiveness?

The study focuses on the AC-EVBR for several reasons. First, as mentioned above, this platform is currently considered one of Mexico’s most effective MSPs. Second, the wide variety of stakeholders involved poses a considerable challenge to conflict mitigation and the balancing of interests (Brenner and Job 2012). Third, as a UNESCO-BR and World Natural Heritage Site, the EVBR plays a prominent role in national and global conservation policy.

The article is organised as follows: an introduction based on a literature review outlines the normative concept of MSPs and identifies key factors in their success, as well as shortcomings,

in order to contrast them with the results of our fieldwork. Next, the methods applied and general geographical and socioeconomic features of the research area are presented. The final sections discuss the results and the links to other research on the success factors and the shortcomings of MSPs.

## MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORMS IN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

### Objectives and Functions

MSPs are generally established and assessed under a prescriptive perspective, “focussing on the ideal type of MSPs with a very positive value connotation” (Warner 2005: 3). Accordingly, most research emanates from a normative concept that highlights how MSPs should foster inclusive environmental governance (frequently focused on resource management) and what they should achieve. Other case studies have focused on the challenges that platforms face “in the real world” (Ravnborg and Guerrero 1999; Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001; Faysse 2006; Thiele et al. 2011). Therefore, I will briefly outline the normative concept (addressing the question: “What goals should MSPs achieve?”), before turning attention to the factors that have favoured the performance of MSPs (“What factors foster the achievement of those objectives?”). The last aspect addressed in the article deals with the observed shortcomings of existing MSP (“What factors hinder achieving those objectives?”). Finally, I summarise research results on the performance and outcomes of Mexican ACs.

According to Röling (1994: 130), MSPs should identify interdependent stakeholders and invite them or their representatives “to meet and interact in a forum for social learning, negotiation, conflict resolution, and collective decision-making towards concerted action.” Accordingly, key objectives of MSPs include fostering proactive, voluntary, meaningful stakeholder participation in common resource management by negotiating conflicting interests, deliberating on critical issues, and taking collective actions to address problems that none of the stakeholders could solve on his/her own (Steins and Edwards 1999a; Faysse 2006; Mulema and Mazur 2015). Based on Habermas’ concept of communicative rationality, MSPs should, therefore, facilitate “authentic speech situations” where sincere, fair and open dialogue changes stakeholders’ perceptions and definitions of problems, leading to consensual decisions and solutions (Applegate 1998; Warner 2005).

In addition to the ultimate goals of enhancing environmental governance through joint deliberation, problem-solving and collective actions, stakeholder participation potentially triggers social learning, environmental literacy, incorporation of shared values into decision-making, expanding the legitimacy base beyond government, improving monitoring and land-use planning, and building trust in institutions and a sense of common purpose among participants, all of which support achieving the original objectives

(Beierle 1999; Warner 2005; Gitsham 2014; Kusters et al. 2018). From a practical perspective, MSPs are also expected to facilitate a cheaper and faster decision-making and implementation process than enforcing regulations, as costly confrontations and litigations can be avoided (Applegate 1998; Beierle 1999). In addition, MSP involvement may lead to better informed policies and sounder implementation decisions (Irvin and Stansbury 2004).

### Factors Fostering Performance and Effectiveness

Based on empirical analyses of existing MSPs, scholars consider eight factors that lead to achieving the aforementioned goals. For reasons of clarity, I classify them as governance-related (representativeness, participation, role in public decision-making processes, transparency and operational efficiency; summarised in Table 1) and general supporting factors (individual motives and skills, leadership, appropriate scope and scale of MSPs, and availability of resources; summarised in Table 2). The former refers to adequate representation of stakeholder groups interested in, or affected by, resource use, equal and meaningful participation, positions within and influence on governmental decision-making structures and procedures, as well as the transparency of internal decision-making, and operational efficiency. The latter, meanwhile, relate to moral standards, the motivations and capacities of individual MSP members and their chairpersons, and appropriate fields of activity and supporting resources and logistics.

### Limitations and Shortcomings

Tables 3 and 4 summarise factors that are detrimental to MSP performance. In the interests of clarity, I again distinguish between governance-related and general causes of shortcomings. Regarding the former, scholars underscore the constraining impacts of biased stakeholder representation that narrows the legitimacy of MSPs, accentuates power imbalances, and can exclude relevant stakeholder groups.

Other key factors are related to the ambiguous role of platforms in the administrative hierarchy and decision-making process, and their lack of influence on policy design and implementation. Though there is a consensus that MSP decisions need not be mandatory, most scholars agree that they should be meaningful and implemented in a transparent way (Applegate 1998; Beierle 1999; Faysse 2006). Nevertheless, governmental institutions have plausible reasons to keep their involvement in MSPs to a minimum and avoid taking on commitments (Table 3). On the other hand, MSP members might attempt to take advantage of their position to promote their own interests or may lack the skills and/or knowledge required to contribute in meaningful ways. Insufficient funding and considerable set-up costs may also curtail a platform's scope of action. Finally, sponsors and members may abort MSPs if no immediate results are achieved (Table 4). I will return to these issues below to contrast the study results with the factors summarised in Tables 1 to 4.

**Table 1**  
*Governance-related success factors of MSPs*

| Representation of stakeholders  | Meaningful participation of stakeholders   | Role regarding governmental decision-making process   | Transparency and operational efficiency   |
|---|--|---|---|
| MSP members represent the interests and perspectives of relevant resource users and those affected by their use | Members are able to understand complex issues and have the skills to participate in a meaningful way | MSP decisions are carefully reviewed and implemented by governmental institutions   | Clear rules for selecting members, choosing issues, methods of reaching decisions, and the roles of outside consultants |
| Relevant stakeholders identify with one or more members of the MSP  | Power balance among MSP members  | Governmental institutions reply to the MSP's recommendations and petitions  | Operations and decisions are open to inspection   |
| Critical mass and diversity of members to assure legitimacy and breadth of perspectives and inputs              | Participation of the MSP in the earliest phases of the administrative decision-making process        | Outcome of MSP activities and decisions are independent from governmental agendas and interests                                       | Explanations of decisions and disclosure of disagreements   |
| Representation of broad stakeholder groups, rather than special interest groups                                 | Expert input by non-members (information and assessment)   | MSP members are aware of the extent of their say  | Regular meetings open to the general public   |
| Balance between broad stakeholder representation and effective decision-making                                  |  | MSP has a clear mission and place in the legal decision-making process  | Avoiding formal votes and work toward consensus   |
| MSP includes underprivileged stakeholders, particularly poor people   |  | State should not be neither too strong (MSP would have no power), or too weak (MSP would be irrelevant or controlled by local elites) | Sessions are structured and designed to advance the decisional objectives   |
|   |  | Coordination with existing institutional decision-making schedules  | Timely review and consensual approval of decisions reached  |

Note: Shaded cells indicate congruence with fieldwork results.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Applegate 1998; Beierle 1999; Maarleveld and Dangbégnon 1999; Ravnborg and Guerrero 1999; Steins and Edwards 1999a; Irvin and Stansbury 2004; Warner 2005; Faysse 2006; Thiele et al. 2011; Djalante 2012; Gitsham 2014; Mulema and Mazur 2015; Kusters et al. 2018.

**Table 2**  
*General supporting factors of MSPs*

| Motives and skills of MSP-members  | Leadership of chairperson   | Scope and scale of MSPs  | Available financial and human resources  |
|--|---|--|--|
| Members committed to the platform and the agreements made                            | Experienced and charismatic chair enjoying public respect   | MSP decisions have well-understood scopes, applicable on different geographical scales | MSP has adequate and projectable resources available                                       |
| Commitment of members to take actions that are contrary to their expectations        | Chair assumes a leadership role, provides planning for decision-making and fosters members' expertise | Broad scope of discussed issues  | Governmental decision-makers and institutions support MSP in economic and logistical terms |
| Members are willing to address difficult issues and cooperate with different parties | Clear rules on the chair's mandate  | MSP appoint committees to expand the scopes of issues addressed                        | External, engaged sponsor or provider facilitates MSP activities                           |
| Mutual understanding of interdependence and the MSP's purpose                        |   |  | Independent third-party fosters fair negotiations and balancing of multiple stakeholders   |
| Expected material, social benefits of involvement in MSP exceed expected costs       |   |  | Regular meeting locations provide familiarity and adequate infrastructure                  |
| Limited scope of issues with manageable work load for MSP members                    |   |  |  |

Note: Shaded cells indicate congruence with fieldwork results.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Applegate 1998; Beierle 1999; Maarleveld and Dangbégnon 1999; Ravnborg and Guerrero 1999; Steins and Edwards 1999a; Irvin and Stansbury 2004; Warner 2005; Faysse 2006; Thiele et al. 2011; Djalante 2012; Gitsham 2014; Mulema and Mazur 2015; Kusters et al. 2018.

**Table 3**  
*Governance-related limitations and shortcomings of MSPs*

| Biased representation and exclusion of stakeholder groups  | Power imbalance/ inequities among represented stakeholders  | Structural/functional incompatibility of MSP and government  | Lack of mandate/limited decision-making power   | Reluctant participation of governmental institutions (reasons)                   |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Biased stakeholder representation in terms of income, education, skills, influence and power   | MSP may shroud socioeconomic and cultural inequities among stakeholders; disadvantaged groups may be manipulated or controlled by dominant actors | MSP can be controlled by powerful governmental actors at the legislative and administrative levels | MSP have no clear mandate in the decision-making process; participation is frequently restricted to information and consultation. Recommendations are not implemented if inconsistent with government priorities or agendas | Time-consuming and costly for governmental institutions                          |
| Disorganised stakeholders lacking rights of use are likely to be ignored due to their lack of institutional visibility                       | Establishing 'even' platforms without power inequities proved difficult   | Central governmental institutions can override MSPs, impairing their effectiveness                 | Long term effectiveness of MSP is at stake if not formally recognised at higher levels or without formal management responsibilities  | Loss of control over decision-making   |
| Representatives of disadvantaged stakeholder groups are vulnerable to becoming part of a privileged class, distanced from their constituency | MSP established in an environment marked by considerable social inequities failed to meet expectations  | Horizontal decision-making may be incompatible with vertical structures of government.             | MSP members are frustrated if left out of the governmental decision-making process or if decisions are not implemented  | Risk of inconvenient decisions that are politically impossible to ignore         |
| Lack of communication and interaction between constituencies and their representatives   |   | Some MSP operate outside formal democratic structures; accountability is vague                     |   | MSP involvement might create more hostility toward government if conflicts arise |
| Perception of high opportunity costs may entail self-exclusion of certain stakeholder groups   |   | Scale of MSP activities may not correspond to administrative framework                             |   |  |

Note: Shaded cells indicate congruence with fieldwork results.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Maarleveld and Dangbégnon 1999; Steins and Edwards 1999a & 1999b; Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001; Irvin and Stansbury 2004; Warner 2005; Faysse 2006; Brenner 2009; Peterson 2011; Cruz-Morales 2014; Durand et al. 2014; Trench 2014; Mulema and Mazur 2015.

**Table 4**  
**General limitations and shortcomings of MSPs**

| Self-interest of MSP members  | Lack of skills & experience  | Lack of financial resources  | Costs of setting up MSPs and long-term involvement  | Excessive expectations of MSPs  |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Members affected by the MSP's decisions tend to promote their own self-interest             | Lack of experience and technical knowledge when establishing MSP and inviting stakeholders to participate        | Insufficient economic and technical resources to implement decisions   | High transaction costs due to large, time-consuming investments in participants' skills and knowledge | Short-term benefits of MSP are generally not tangible   |
| Stakeholders have conflicting or irreconcilable expectations on outcomes of decision-making | Sponsors of MSP often underestimate or overestimate the abilities and motivations of stakeholders to participate | Over-commitment of governmental officials as no or insufficient budgets are available to fulfil the demands of MSP | Time-consuming for MSP members; frustrating if few tangible outcomes are achieved                     | MSPs might fail if high initial expectations are not met, or political ambitions are not fulfilled (in the case of politically-active actors) |
| Stakeholders may bypass MSPs to access powerful actors directly                             | Lack of clarity regarding stakeholders' roles and the task of MSP in decision-making                             |  | Travels costs and lost income hamper regular participation of underprivileged members                 | Complexity of PA management might exceed MSP's capacity   |
|   | Representatives might lack skills to negotiate on behalf of their constituents                                   |  |   |   |

Note: Shaded cells indicate congruence with fieldwork results.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Maarleveld and Dangbégnon 1999; Steins and Edwards 1999a & 1999b; Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001; Irvin and Stansbury 2004; Warner 2005; Faysse 2006; Brenner 2009; Peterson 2011; Cruz-Morales 2014; Durand et al. 2014; Trench 2014; Mulema and Mazur 2015.

### ACs in Mexican PAs

ACs were first established in Mexican PAs over two decades ago when the Global Environmental Facility conditioned its funding on enhancing public participation in management-related issues (Díaz-Ávila et al. 2005). Concretely, this agency demanded the establishment of formal platforms with well-defined objectives and competencies (Tejeda-Cruz 2009). Though the first ACs had been formed by 1992 in three BRs (on the Yucatan Peninsula), most councils date from the late 1990s and early 2000s (Díaz-Ávila et al. 2005). In order to officialise stakeholder participation in the establishment and management of PAs, regulations regarding the functions and internal organisation were passed in 2000<sup>1</sup>. ACs are generally created and funded by Mexico's National Commission on Protected Areas (CONANP for its initials in Spanish, the federal agency in charge of PA management). According to an evaluation conducted by this agency, several ACs had achieved one or more of the following goals (see Díaz-Ávila et al. 2005, though no evidence is attached to their report): 1) stakeholder participation in the elaboration and updating of PA management plans; 2) community participation in defining the priorities to be integrated into federal conservation programs and projects; 3) resolution of resource use-related conflicts among stakeholders (in some cases with limited law enforcement authority); 4) coordination of activities promoted and carried out by governmental institutions and NGOs, in particular PAs; 5) development of new regulatory frameworks and practices; and 6) promoting acceptance of PAs and sensitisation on environmental issues.

Nevertheless, independent case studies carried out at different PAs<sup>2</sup> show that Mexican ACs still face considerable challenges (Paré and Fuentes 2007; Rodríguez-Martínez 2008; Brenner 2009; Tejeda-Cruz 2009; López-Hernández et al. 2013; Cruz-Morales 2014; Durand et al. 2014; Trench 2014):

First, biased stakeholder representation of relevant groups of resource users has been observed in at least four ACs due to the following reasons: 1) the chairperson (often an influential local with personal ties to senior CONANP officials) tended to use his/her prerogative to invite primarily "cooperative" representatives, thereby excluding other relevant stakeholders; 2) as the number of AC members is legally limited to 21, some stakeholders groups are excluded from the outset; 3) the lack of rules regarding member rotations hampers both legitimacy and representativeness; 4) communication between representatives and their constituencies on the outcomes of AC meetings is limited, or even non-existent; and 5) AC members primarily represent "visible"—i.e., officially-entitled resource users—thus excluding most stakeholders from participating. Second, though statutory functions and competences have been legally-defined since 2000, they remain ambiguous,<sup>3</sup> a fact that leaves the ACs' functions and mandates open to interpretation. Third, ACs are not mandatory but left to the discretion of the PA directors. Therefore, the establishment and performance of ACs depends greatly on governmental—not stakeholders'—initiatives. Thus, chairpersons or PA directors can control agendas, processes, outcomes and the implementation of decisions. In addition, funds and logistics are usually controlled by the CONANP, a fact that constrains councils' independence and operations. Fourth, authorities are not obliged to take the ACs' recommendations into account or even respond to them. Therefore, it remains unclear to what degree ACs actually influence PA management in Mexico. Fifth, limited literacy skills and the lack of familiarity with the legal framework and institutional structure hamper meaningful participation by local resource users. Sixth, AC sessions often produce few tangible results, as they are carried out in an unorganised and sometimes disrespectful way. Consequently, councils often fail to make consensus-based decisions. Moreover, non-fulfillment of agreements has resulted in a loss of interest and low attendance at meetings.

## STUDY AREA AND METHODS

### Study Area

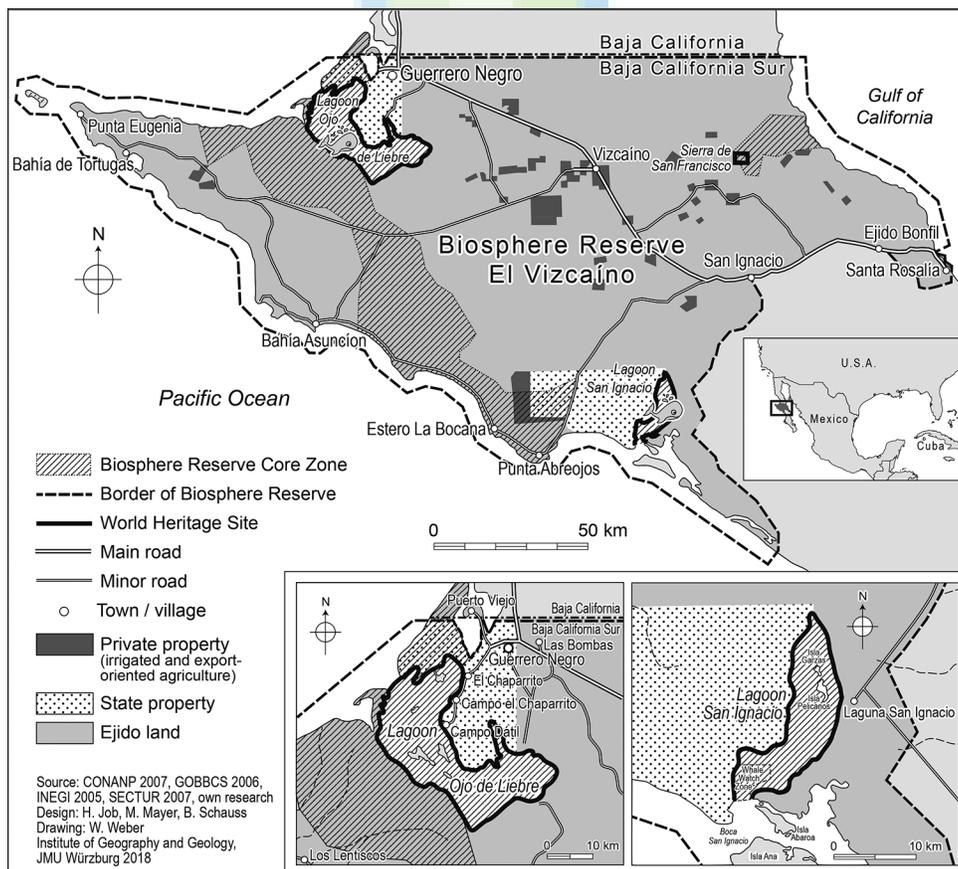
The EVBR is the largest terrestrial PA in Mexico with a size of 25,468 sq. km, 14.2% of which are designated as the core zone, and 85.8% as the buffer zone (Figure 1). Established in 1988 to protect one of the countries' most important unspoiled arid ecosystems, the reserve includes the San Ignacio and Guerrero Negro lagoons, the most important calving sites of the eastern population of the Gray Whale *Eschrichtius robustus* (see Figure 1). Both lagoons were declared a World Natural Heritage Site by the UNESCO in 1993.

The EVBR is considered an example of successful marine conservation, as the whale population has recovered after almost being exterminated due to whaling in the early-twentieth century. It has remained stable since the 1980s (Brenner et al. 2016).

The economic structure of the EVBR is dominated by capital-intensive, export-oriented industries including the world's largest saltworks and irrigated agriculture in what is an extremely arid environment. Also, small-scale fisheries, especially for crayfish, play an important role during the exploitation season from October to February, which overlaps the Gray Whale's calving and breeding period (Ortega-Rubio et al. 1998; Young 1999a and b). The importance of tourism

has increased steadily in recent decades, though it is still small-scale (Brenner et al. 2016). Most of the area is occupied by *ejidos* (=an area of communal land used for agriculture); that is, common properties jointly managed by holders of certified usufruct rights (Figure 1).

From the early-1950s to the early-1980s, the peripheral area that is now the EVBR experienced population growth and intensification of resource use fostered by government incentives such as extensive land grants, modernisation of fisheries, and the establishment of the state-owned saltworks at Guerrero Negro in 1954 managed by *Exportadora de Sal*, which is now the world's largest producer of industrial salt (Ortega-Rubio et al. 1998). It was during this period that the current economic structures based on large-scale exploitation of raw materials, fish stocks and irrigated agriculture evolved. Due to the virtual absence of governmental institutions capable of enforcing the law and regulations outside major towns<sup>4</sup>, access to natural resources was *de facto* open to all (Cudney-Bueno et al. 2009). Virtually no environmental restrictions were imposed until the late-1980s, so it is fair to say that open access prevailed for over three decades (Young 1999a,b). Due to the absence of platforms that might have facilitated dialogue and negotiation, conflicts of interests among resource users occurred with some frequency (e.g., fishing cooperatives, "freelance" fishermen, and *ejidos*) (Young 1999a).



**Figure 1**  
*The El Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve (location, zoning and land tenure)*

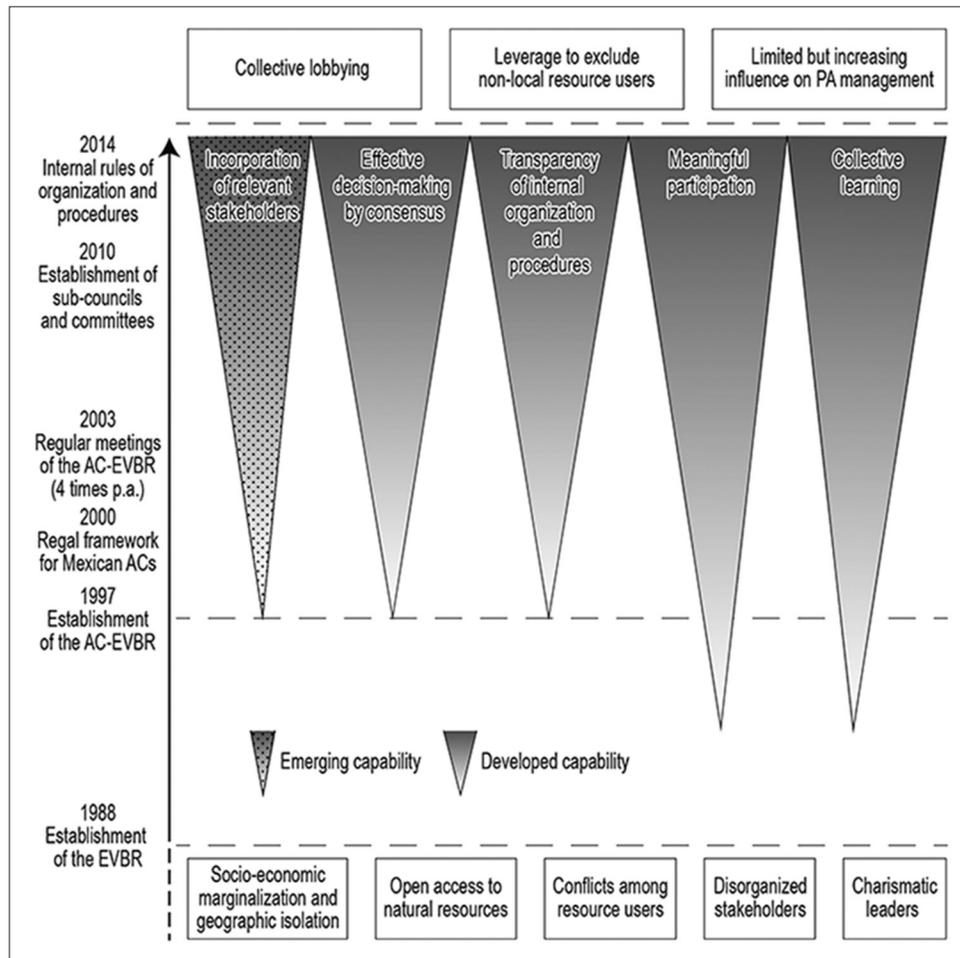
The establishment of the EVBR in 1988 marked a turning point, as its administration gradually managed to fill the governance voids<sup>5</sup>, especially in remote areas (Brenner and De la Vega-Leinert 2014; Brenner et al. 2016), but consolidating the functional governance structures led by the BR's administration became a protracted process (Breceda et al. 1995; Young 1999a,b).

**Methods**

A total of 26 semi-structured, in-depth, expert interviews (duration varied from 15-60 minutes) were conducted in Spanish from September to November 2015.<sup>6</sup> Interviewees included all 21 permanent members of the AC-EVBR during that period (or their deputies if the appointed member was not available). Interviewees represented the following stakeholder groups (*sectores* in Spanish): fishing (three members with voting power) and tourism cooperatives (2), private enterprises (4), federal, state and municipal governmental institutions (5), *ejidos* (2), universities and research centres (3), the state-owned saltworks (1) and environmental NGOs (1). In order to consider perspectives of non-involved experts,

three informants with no ties to the council (1 academic, 1 *ejido* representative and 1 municipal official) and two “special guests” (advisors without voting power, but who attended meetings) were interviewed. The fact that most interviews were held with the then current AC members might imply that the study focuses on an internal perspective. However, the non-involved informants and AC members that were interviewed identified similar critical issues regarding the AC's performance and limitations. Applying a snowball method, an attempt was made to identify and interview all informants with adequate knowledge of the AC-EVBR. Nonetheless, the number of non-involved informants turned out to be limited, as few non-members knew about the AC's evolution and current mode of operation.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Filler words were eliminated and grammatical errors corrected. Prior to the field study in 2015, 38 in-depth interviews<sup>7</sup> focusing on stakeholders' attitudes regarding acceptance of the EVBR and related environmental regulations were conducted from February to April 2010 (see Brenner and De la Vega-Leinert 2014 for details). Transcriptions of those interviews were also analysed qualitatively to complete the 2015 results.



**Figure 2**  
*Evolution of the Advisory Council's capacities (1997-2014)*  
 Source: Elaborated by the author based on qualitative content analysis

In both cases, a qualitative content analysis was conducted using Atlas ti 6<sup>®</sup> software. I defined and successively assigned codes, dividing them into code families. Next, I used various search tools to identify shared perceptions and assessments. In line with the research questions, coding focused on the evolution, performance and shortcomings of the AC-EVBR. Applying Mayring's (2010) method of content aggregation, I successively abstracted transcriptions that focused on perceptions and assessments shared by experts. To illustrate key topics, I quote translated excerpts from transcriptions.

## RESULTS

### Success Factors of the AC-EVBR

Interviewees mentioned several interlinked factors and processes that eventually generated the assets which now characterise the AC-EVBR. Five factors that preceded the establishment of the reserve (Figure 2, bottom) favoured the development of what I term 'internal capabilities' (Figure 2, centre), which triggered three additional capabilities that allowed the AC-EVBR to gain influence over comparatively powerful external actors, especially governmental institutions (Figure 2, top).

Interviews stressed that before the establishment of the AC-EVBR there was growing dissatisfaction with the following conditions: socio-economic marginalisation, geographic isolation, absence of governmental or civil institutions capable of taking action, open access to natural resources, conflicts among local and non-local resource users, and disorganisation of stakeholders (Figure 2, bottom). Therefore, since the early-1980s, several leaders of local resource users called for the exclusion of non-local users, such as industrial fisheries, and the presence of an agency capable of establishing and enforcing rules regarding access to natural resources. Under these circumstances, the declaration of the EVBR and the establishment of a permanent PA administration in the early-1990s partially filled the institutional void. Most resource users, especially those affected by the open access to fish stocks and other natural resources, refrained from resisting environmental regulations and eventually supported (or at least tolerated) the emerging governance of CONANP. In fact, by the early-2000s, CONANP was widely-accepted as a ruling institution, as it succeeded in limiting open access to natural resources and offered an alternative, essentially government-led, regime: "It is better that there are rules, laws, without them it would be chaos [...] If there were no regulations on the lagoon [Guerrero Negro], who knows what would have happened?" (Member of a tourism cooperative, 2010). "Now, there are more benefits than downsides. Talking about regulation and control in every area [of the reserve], well, we are okay with that now." (Member of a fishing cooperative, 2010).

This institutional context was decisive as it favoured the formation of five capabilities after the founding of the AC-EVBR in 1997 that considerably enhanced the platform's

internal performance over time (Figure 2, centre): first, according to the interviewees, representatives of most (though not all) relevant stakeholder groups have voluntarily joined the AC-EVBR over the years. In late-2015, five governmental institutions (federal, state and municipal), two universities, one research centre, four private enterprises, three fishing and two tourism cooperatives, two *ejidos*, one NGO and the state-owned salt-works, *Exportadora de Sal*, were represented. In contrast, most *ejidos*, freelance fishermen and farmers still lack representation.

Though interviewees recognised that several influential agribusiness firms continue to oppose environmental restrictions and refuse to cooperate with the AC (an issue discussed below), representation is nevertheless considered to be relatively well-balanced: on the one hand, representatives have been elected first by their respective stakeholder group and then appointed at plenary meetings. This procedure prevented individuals from pursuing their own, self-serving interests and under-the-table nominations.

[A new member] is chosen after receiving a proposal on behalf of the sector he represents. This proposal needs to be based on a valid voting act. If there is a vacancy and if the person has been recommended by his sector, that's fine with us and we accept [him] (Chair of the AC-EVBR, 2015).

On the other hand, interested stakeholders who lack formal representation can have their say as a "special guest" (*invitado especial*) who is entitled to voice an issue at AC meetings, though they do not have the right to participate in the formal decision-making process. Special guests can also apply for full membership if a member resigns or is removed from the AC-EVBR for failing to perform her/his duties (regular attendance and active participation during meetings, among others). "There are many [stakeholders] that we do not accept [as AC members]; not because we don't want to but because there's no [vacant] seat. We have a limited number of members and accept others, but only as special guests." (Chair of the AC-EVBR, 2015).

Because unrepresented stakeholders now show increasing interest in gaining formal representation, current members seek to maintain their positions as council members. "Since all seats are occupied, we can only dismiss someone due to absenteeism [...] then we can appoint another one who applied for it. [...] There is already a [...] waiting list of groups that want to participate" (Secretary of the AC-EVBR, 2015).

Second, the AC-EVBR strives to achieve decision-making by consensus after exhaustive discussions. Majority decisions by formal voting are avoided, but applied if efforts to reach agreement fail. This procedure proved to be effective in preventing confrontations, fostering effective decision-making, and mitigating conflicting interests. Hence, the AC-EVBR is less about mediating conflicting interests than seeking agreements about on complex issues. For this reason, third-party mediation is deemed unnecessary.

“We express our issues frankly and with no intention to offend we just try to avoid what used to happen, saying ‘all right, let’s leave it for later’. No, [now we say] ‘let’s get through this issue’ [...] trying to fix everything, to do everything right, as harmoniously as possible [...] and differences are not so great anyway.” (Private tourism entrepreneur, 2015)

Third, the AC-EVBR managed to agree on regular meetings and ratified a set of internal rules of procedure: in 2003, the council decided to convene at least four times a year, though regulations passed in 2000 stipulate only one annual session. Interviewees also stressed that *trimestral* (=quarterly) meetings proved necessary to address all pending matters thoroughly and so enhance the platform’s performance. In order to reach unambiguous decisions, members also agreed to honour the sessions’ agendas and record minutes which are ratified by all members. “One of the strengths of the AC is that we really stick to the agenda items and don’t waste our time on fruitless arguments. That’s why the AC is considered very mature.” (Secretary of the AC, 2015).

By 2010, committees and “sub-councils” dealing with whale-watching, inshore fisheries or waste management had been established for the purpose of improving members’ knowledge of technical matters and addressing local issues in a more detailed manner. The most important step, however, was taken in 2014 when the AC-EVBR adopted specific internal regulations<sup>8</sup> regarding decision-making, members’ duties, and a procedure for appointing new members. According to the interviewees, despite the fact that ACs in other PA (e.g., the Montes Azules BR) also established internal regulations, no other council has passed an equally comprehensive and effective body of rules. “[The establishment of internal regulations] was a milestone for us as we now had a legal instrument that governed our activities, functions, obligations and rights.” (Academic, 2015).

Fourth, members and permanent guests are motivated to participate purposefully. As a result, sessions are generally attended (at their own expense) by up to 50 persons, including members, special guests and invited experts.

We like to participate because we have learned that without participation there are no agreements; you can’t express your ideas, you can’t share your troubles, you can’t propose or comment on anything. That’s the council’s common ground: we are all very experienced because we have learned that we have to talk and cut right to the chase. That’s what makes us succeed in managing [the reserve] correctly. (Chair of the association of the local timber industry, 2015)

The fact that sessions are open to the general public and held in different places also fosters spontaneous citizen participation.

Fifth, the AC-EVBR passed through a process of collective learning. Interviewees stressed that the members’ long-term affiliation fostered the acquisition of technical, administrative,

legal and environmental knowledge. In addition, they were able to familiarise themselves with strategies for conflict resolution and negotiation with governmental institutions. Most members also acquired leadership skills over time, while the AC has benefited from the experience of the long-tenured chair who has held this position since 1999. Thus, despite lacking office space and permanent staff, the council has expanded both the scale and scope of its actions. The AC now performs actions in different parts of the reserve though its initial area of influence was confined to Guerrero Negro (where most sessions take place) and the surrounding area. “The AC is developing its capacities: it has engaged a lot in [...] conservation, carrying capacity, [economic] development, evaluations, monitoring and all these things.” (Chair of the association of the local timber industry, 2015).

The council’s enhanced internal performance triggered three additional capacities that transcend its internal organisation and performance (Figure 2, top). On the one hand, with the support of the EVBR administration, AC members now jointly lobby for subsidies and exclusive rights to resource use. Interviewees emphasise that membership implies privileged access to funds to promote economic and community development, and that governmental institutions and environmental NGOs tend to prioritise petitions that have been “legitimised” by the AC over requests made by other, non-affiliated actors. Thus, councillorship is currently leveraged by some AC members to obtain tangible economic benefits. This explains the stakeholders’ interest in gaining or conserving membership. Apart from greater opportunities to receive funding, membership also offers good prospects to obtain indirect benefits, such as first-hand information on federal environmental and funding policies, personal contacts with officials, and bargaining skills: “As the AC members get to know each other, take action and see results [...], they consider the council as a platform suitable for negotiating [with governmental institutions] and applying for funding.” (Chair of the AC-EVBR, 2015).

In addition, the AC-EVBR now occupies a position that allows it to exert a certain influence on governmental institutions in efforts to restrict access by non-local actors to natural resources. The AC legitimises the interests of the stakeholders it represents by demanding exclusive usufruct rights. For example, non-local tour operators are banned from operating inside the EVBR based on the argument that income from whale-watching compensates local people for the restrictions imposed on them: “[Establishing the EVBR] was in fact more beneficial than prejudicial, because the resources here, they’re for us, we live here, and outsiders can’t come and take possession of the resources any more.” (Member of a community-owned tourism cooperative, 2010).

In a similar vein, some *ejidos* voluntarily collaborate with the EVBR administration in surveillance in efforts to prevent poaching by outsiders.

Finally, the AC-EVBR is now involved in operative decision-making and, more recently, law enforcement. For instance, local communities monitor inshore fisheries at the

San Ignacio and Guerrero Negro lagoons, though they are not empowered to sanction violations. Nevertheless, AC members consider themselves prepared to assume additional management responsibilities to assist—even replace—federal authorities due to their wide experience: “We think, [and] maybe that’s what we all think now, that one objective of the AC is to play a more executive role: [to] regulate, execute, implement, control, manage.” (Chair of the association of the local timber industry, 2015).

### Limits and Shortcomings of the AC-EVBR

Despite these achievements, several factors narrow the AC’s manoeuvring room. First, interviewees stated that governmental institutions frequently ignore (tacitly or explicitly) the AC’s recommendations and petitions. Though requests are generally revised, federal and state agencies are often unwilling to assume commitments they consider inconsistent with political priorities and agendas. As a result, several members sustain that the lack of executive authority is the AC’s Achilles’ heel. This reluctance to commit is clearly visible in the agencies’ practice of sending uninformed junior officials who lacked decision-making power to attend AC meetings; an act that most AC members interpret as disinterest or even disdain. Other factors that constrain the AC’s leverage on government are the remoteness of the area, which hinders face-to-face negotiations with governmental decision-makers (based in La Paz or Mexico City), the frequent turnover of senior officials at the municipal, state and federal levels, and the council’s strong dependence on public funding. “The council has no power [...], because one can simply make recommendations, but the authorities are not even obligated to respond formally, let alone act on them [...]. That’s why we don’t get anywhere, and problems are the same as before.” (Private tourism entrepreneur, 2015).

Second, implementation of decisions taken by the AC depends not only on governmental resources, agenda and willingness, but also on realistic assessments of the council’s sphere of action. Interviewees acknowledge that the AC occasionally overrates its own competence, manoeuvring room, or expertise, and that this often leads to impasses. Moreover, the sheer extension and dispersion of the population involved generates complex socio-environmental issues that the AC might be unable to cope with.

Third, the AC lacks systematic environmental and socio-economic monitoring that could support more informed decision-making and the implementation of preventive actions. As a result, the council usually deliberates on issues that have already manifested impacts. Potentially severe problems (such as declining fish stocks); however, remain unattended until they become evident. Some interviewees stress that the *trimestral* meetings proved insufficient to detect short-term developments on time or to opportunely agree on countermeasures. “When a problem appears in the council, it’s because the sector is already in crisis; and, unfortunately, we don’t have any monitoring system... red lights only turn

on because there’s already a problem.” (Academic, 2015).

Fourth, though most stakeholders are represented, the owners of irrigated farms in the El Vizcaino Valley (Figure 1) are reluctant to join the AC because they disapprove—beforehand—any and all actions that might restrict their access to groundwater, a scarce resource required to sustain the production of tomatoes and other vegetables destined for export. Due to their irrevocable usufruct rights acquired before the 1980s, these farmers tend to avoid cooperating with institutions related to the EVBR. Therefore, a small but influential group has decided to keep their distance from the AC. Thus, the council has so far failed to address important environmental issues, such as water stress caused by large-scale irrigation. “Our relationship with the reserve is not good [], the reserve is like a woman we were forced to marry against our will. Actually, we don’t want to have anything to do with her.” (Agribusiness manager, 2010).

Fifth, mandates of AC members and its chair are renewed periodically after little formal deliberation. Hence, rotation is infrequent. On the positive side, this practice fosters collective learning, but it also entails the risk of choking off innovative inputs and necessary changes. In this context, some interviewees suggested that the AC’s chair (in office since 1998) exerts excessive influence on the council’s agenda, particularly regarding the appointment of new members. Even though internal regulations—that allow confirmation in office every two years—are honoured, the lack of rotation potentially jeopardizes legitimate representation. Consequently, the integration of new sectors is a slow process and the benefits of social learning are limited to the “established” AC members and special guests. In addition, transfer of the chair’s office will likely turn out to be problematic, since potential successors lack managerial experience.

“We don’t know how many years this gentleman has acted as president [of the AC-EVBR], we don’t know when he’ll resign. Nevertheless, all the directors of the reserve confirm him in office, confirm him in office, and confirm him in office. The president is in control. We’ve attended meetings where somebody attempted to ask for a seat on the council, and he [the president] didn’t even turn around.” (Academic, 2015).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to assess the AC-EVBR, it will be helpful to differentiate among three interrelated groups of influencing factors: the determining conditions that led to its establishment, internal capabilities developed over time, and capabilities to influence specific external actors and decision-making processes (see Figure 2). This approach will allow us to reach a deeper understanding of the performance of particular MSPs than adopting a perspective that focuses exclusively on “strengths” and “weaknesses,” as ultimate causes would likely remain unclear. However, it is important to keep in mind that our findings essentially reflect an internal perspective, due

to the relatively small number of non-involved experts who were able to provide information (see also the methodological section).

Upon examining, first, the factors that preceded the establishment of the AC-EVBR, several issues drew our attention: the marked geographical and political isolation of the area triggered, and later fostered, voluntary cooperation among relatively powerless and formerly disorganised stakeholders. In contrast, governmental intervention in densely-populated and ethnically-heterogeneous PAs (such as the Mariposa Monarca, Montes Azules and Los Tuxtlas BRs) began earlier and, over time, established far-reaching clientelist relationships between governmental institutions and socially-fragmented local stakeholder groups. The resulting political structures turned out to be highly detrimental to both effective and participatory resource management (Paré and Fuentes 2007; Brenner 2009; Durand et al. 2014), a fact that might explain the poor performance of their respective ACs. Realising that airing concerns individually had proven essentially futile before 1988, people came to realise that a more viable way of pursuing shared interests would be to become affiliated to the council and undertake collective action to get some attention from far-away governmental institutions. In addition, the virtually open access to natural resources led locals to demand the exclusion of external users with no ties to the area, particularly those practising inshore fishing and shellfish harvesting on the Pacific coast. Again, several local stakeholders eventually came to consider that the AC-EVBR offered them a realistic chance to obtain certain exclusive usufruct rights (particularly regarding fisheries and ecotourism) that would be guaranteed by the BR administration, thus putting an end to distributional conflicts with non-locals. In a similar vein, local lobster fishing and ecotourism cooperatives at the Sian Ka'an BR struggled successfully to gain exclusive access to natural resources (López-Hernández et al. 2013). Thus, power relations between holders of permanent usufruct rights and governmental institutions are dynamic and depend on the negotiation leverage each actor possesses at a given time. In addition, influential government agencies, such as the *Exportadora de Sal* and CONANP, backed up the AC-EVBR right from the outset, thereby enhancing the council's capacity to act. Therefore, the collaboration of a small number of comparatively independent governmental institutions with MSPs may become effective, especially in peripheral, sparsely-populated regions, such as central Baja California.

In a nutshell, the results of our study confirm that it is crucial to evaluate the initial conditions of MSPs in order to assess their chances of success, as they might fail to meet expectations that were set unreasonably high, as occurred in the Mariposa Monarca (Brenner 2009), Los Tuxtlas (Paré and Fuentes 2007) and Montes Azules BRs (Trench 2014). As for the case at hand, the AC-EVBR benefited from its geographical isolation and a comparatively favourable socio-political environment. Other Mexican ACs, in contrast, confronted far more adverse conditions when coping with PA management issues. For example, deep-rooted conflicts and

socio-economic inequalities among local resource users in the Mariposa Monarca BR hampered collective decision-making and the acceptance of environmental restrictions (Brenner 2009; Brenner and Job 2012). On the other hand, top-down implementation of environmental regulations without prior consultation, along with long-term intervention by centralised governmental agencies in local matters, evoked persistent resistance against conservation measures at several PAs in south-eastern Mexico (Durand et al. 2014; Hoffman 2014; Martínez-Reyes 2014) and the Los Tuxtlas BR (Paré and Fuentes 2007).

Turning to the second factor, the internal capabilities that the AC-EVBR acquired over time coincide with several success factors identified by other scholars. Results suggest that the AC-EVBR has achieved many (though by no means all) of the qualities considered keys to attaining effectiveness (see shaded cells in Tables 1-2). The evident overlap between our results and those of other studies leads us to argue that the following qualities are critical assets of MSPs involved in PA management:

- participation by members representing the interests of a wide variety of resource users, including (but not limited to) special interest groups such as fishing cooperatives and tour operators. However, the fact that the AC failed to integrate agribusiness and most non-organised resource users, such as independent small-scale farmers, weakens the AC's performance, particularly when it comes to mitigating environmental impacts caused by agriculture and cattle- or sheep-farming (Brenner and Job 2012);
- genuine interest in becoming affiliated to the council, as this provides legitimacy and breadth of inputs. The existence of "waiting-lists" suggests that stakeholders attach more value to the benefits of involvement in MSPs than the costs entailed;
- relatively broad stakeholder representation and active participation by members and invited experts that spur effective, well-informed decision-making;
- regarding the balance of power, the commitment and managerial skills of the principle MSP leaders can compensate for their predominance over ordinary members, at least to some extent. However, infrequent rotation of the AC's chair and members has been detrimental to the inclusion of new stakeholder groups and the balance of power during the decision-making process;
- under these circumstances, the motivations and skills of members tend to increase over time, together with the scope and scale of the council's activities—albeit at the expense of increasing inequalities among AC members;
- jointly-defined and consistently-implemented internal rules ensure transparency and continuity regarding the selection of new members, defining and enforcing assumed obligations, and formal decision-making procedures; and
- writing and reviewing minutes, regular and scheduled meetings open to the public, sticking to well-defined agendas, consensus-seeking decision-making and evaluation of implementation will all enhance the

influence, efficiency and effectiveness of MSPs. It appears that this system of rules and procedures mitigates power imbalances among the stakeholders represented.

Nevertheless, several shortcomings highlighted in other research (see shaded cells in Tables 3 and 4) also clearly, and similarly, affect the AC-EVBR. Most importantly, the council plays a highly-ambiguous role in the public decision-making process, which allows governmental agencies to ignore its petitions, even if not categorically or permanently. Nevertheless, dependence on centralised institutions and senior officials, along with uncertainty as to outcomes, tend to undermine the council's effectiveness and jeopardise the long-term commitment and willingness of members to devote time and effort to the AC-EVBR. Hence, the lack of a well-defined mandate and formal management responsibilities affect MSPs' performance. As a result, the council does not yet play any crucial role in governmental decision-making processes (see Table 1). Nevertheless, the AC still possesses a conditional influence, which enables limited, but increasingly effective, lobbying for its members' concerns.

Another key issue is the reluctance of powerful governmental institutions to participate in more meaningful ways. As observed in this case study, involvement bears considerable risks and may turn out to be costly. The fear of losing control over decision-making or of playing an active role in binding, but politically-inconvenient decisions, are plausible factors that impede agencies from accepting binding commitments during the AC's sessions. Though a reasonable strategy from the perspective of government, this jeopardises the credibility and influence of MSPs, an issue that has been observed in other institutional and geographical contexts as well (Ravnborg and Guerrero 1999; Brenner 2009; Mulema and Mazur 2015). Moreover, like other MSPs, the AC-EVBR has few resources at its disposal to implement the decisions made at meetings. This aggravates its dependence on governmental institutions and funding. Finally, some underprivileged stakeholder groups, such as *ejidatarios* based in remote areas of the reserve, are unable to attend meetings, due to prohibitive travel costs and lost income.

Nonetheless, the AC-EVBR did succeed in developing abilities to influence relatively powerful external actors and decision-making processes to an increasing degree. These skills are, on the one hand, a long-term outcome of internal capabilities developed over time; on the other, they reinforce these capabilities, enhancing the council's scope of action and influence. I argue that this interrelation is a key cause of the noteworthy performance of the AC-EVBR. Therefore, the capacity to lobby for governmental support and subsidies on a regular basis turned out to be a key asset. The fact that the AC-EVBR has been able to exclude several external resource users proved to be another crucial achievement that has helped consolidate internal capabilities. Finally, increasing involvement in day-to-day management also strengthens the AC-EVBR's internal capabilities, despite limited executive power.

While participation in PA management is deemed a desirable outcome of MSPs, the ability to lobby effectively for government support and to exclude non-local actors from resource use are issues rarely considered in assessments of crucial success factors. It is, however, the interrelation between internal capacities and the power to exercise a clearly limited, but increasingly palpable, influence on governmental institutions, that distinguishes the AC-EVBR from other MSPs involved in PA management in Mexico.

For this reason, most of the shortcomings identified in PAs in the central, eastern and south-eastern areas of the country (i.e., biased or limited stakeholder representation, dependence on PA administration, lack of skills, motivation and internal rules of decision-making, and frequent confrontations among members) turned out to be less detrimental in the present case.

Understanding how efficient MSPs developed capabilities will prove useful when widening and strengthening stakeholder participation in PA management. It is also quite possible to overcome shortcomings if the fields of activities, responsibilities, rules of procedure and authority are conjointly specified in a binding way, in order to eliminate the ambiguities that all too often have propitiated unrealistic expectations, frustration and diminished participation. In this way, members could overcome tedious and inefficient 'muddling through' and enhance transparency, performance and effectiveness. Further research should focus on comparative studies that identify shared features that characterize best practices.

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## NOTES

1. The following issues regarding AC in PA are regulated by the General Law on Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection (Cámara de Diputados 2014): functions, composition, rights and duties of members, deputies and advisors, as well as decision-making rules.
2. Research focused specifically on ACs has been conducted at the Monarch Butterfly (Brenner 2009), Montes Azules (see Durand et al. 2014; Trench 2014) and La Sepultura BRs (Cruz-Morales 2014). Also, though focused on other topics, several case studies mention issues related to ACs at the Los Tuxtlas (Paré & Fuentes 2007), Sian Ka'an (López Hernández et al. 2012), and Montes Azules BRs (Tejeda-Cruz 2009), and the Puerto Morelos Marine National Park (Rodríguez-Martínez 2008).
3. According to Federal Environmental Law, ACs are entitled and encouraged to: 1) "advise and support the directors of PAs"; 2) "propose and promote measures"; 3) "participate in the elaboration of management plans"; and 4) "suggest actions" and "promote social participation" (Cámara de Diputados 2014).
4. The capital of the State of Baja California Sur is located some 700 km south of Guerrero Negro, almost the same distance as the nearest major city to the north (Ensenada).

5. Influence of governmental institutions is limited due to the distance from administrative centers: Guerrero Negro is located 270 north of the municipality of Mulegé (to which the EVBR belongs) and 750 km north of the State capital of La Paz.
6. I define 'expert' as a source of specialised knowledge related to a particular phenomenon pertaining to specific research.
7. During the period February-April 2010 the following stakeholders (5 were members of the AC-EVBR at that time) were interviewed: owners or managers of private tourism and agricultural enterprises (10); leaders of cooperatives and community-owned enterprises (10); as well as a representative of the state-owned saltworks at Guerrero Negro (1), governmental institutions (9); local and regional NGOs (4); academic institutions (2); and *ejidos* (2).
8. *Reglamento Interno* in Spanish.

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