

The Emergence of Associational Life in México's Wild West: Pioneering Civic Participation, Sea Turtle Conservation, and Environmental Awareness in Baja California Sur

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Abstract This research explores the contributions of the sea turtle conservation movement in Baja California Sur (B.C.S.), Mexico, to the growth of associational life in the state. Mexico has historically been known as a country with a traditionally weak associational life. Yet, the activities of sea turtle NGOs and community groups presented a unique case study to better understand the social, political, and strategic factors that have contributed to voluntary civic engagement and the environmental successes of the movement. Through 799 interviews and surveys with public stakeholders, this research utilized Sabet's (Democratization 2:410–432, 2008) focus on political opportunity, efforts to reform informal rules, and supportive social networks, as an explanatory framework to help describe the emergence of associational life. We found that the sea turtle conservation movement in B.C.S. has become accessible to a diversity of interests and individuals. We found unexpected results in the extent of federal environmental agency complaisance in regard to the involvement of NGOs in conservation programs and environmental policy decisions that have traditionally been the sole domain of the Government of Mexico.

Résumé Cette étude examine la participation du mouvement de conservation des tortues de mer en Basse-Californie du Sud (B.C.S., Mexique) à la croissance de la vie associative dans cet État. Le Mexique a toujours été connu comme un pays doté d'une vie associative traditionnellement faible. Pourtant, les activités des ONG et des groupes communautaires pour la défense des tortues de mer ont présenté une

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étude de cas unique pour mieux comprendre les facteurs sociaux, politiques et stratégiques qui ont contribué à l'engagement civique bénévole et aux succès environnementaux de ce mouvement. À l'aide de 799 interviews et sondages réalisés auprès des acteurs publics, cette étude a utilisé l'intérêt de Sabet (Democratization 2:410–432, 2008) porté à l'opportunité politique, aux efforts visant à réformer les règles informelles et aux réseaux sociaux de soutien comme un cadre explicatif pour aider à décrire l'émergence de la vie associative. Nous avons constaté que le mouvement de conservation des tortues de mer en B.C.S. est devenu accessible à une diversité d'intérêts et d'individus. Nous avons trouvé des résultats inattendus concernant l'étendue de la complaisance de l'Agence fédérale de l'environnement à l'égard de l'implication des ONG dans les programmes de conservation et les décisions en matière de politique environnementale, qui ont été traditionnellement les domaines exclusifs de l'État mexicain.

Zusammenfassung Diese Forschungsstudie untersucht den Beitrag der im mexikanischen Bundesstaat Baja California Sur (B.C.S.) ansässigen Bewegung zum Schutz der Meeresschildkröten zum Wachstum des Verbandslebens in diesem Staat. Mexiko ist historisch bekannt als Land mit traditionell schwachem Verbandsleben. Doch die Aktivitäten der nicht-staatlichen Organisationen und Gemeindegruppen zum Schutz der Meeresschildkröten boten eine einmalige Fallstudie für ein besseres Verständnis der sozialen, politischen und strategischen Faktoren, die zum gemeinnützigen Bürgerengagement und zum Erfolg der Bewegung im Bereich des Umweltschutzes beigetragen haben. Mit Hilfe von 799 Interviews und Befragungen öffentlicher Stakeholder nutzte diese Studie Sabet's (Democratization 2:410–432, 2008) Konzentration auf politische Gelegenheiten, die Bemühungen zur Reform informeller Regelungen und unterstützende soziale Netzwerke als erläuternde Rahmenbedingungen zur Beschreibung der Entwicklung des Verbandslebens. Wir stellten fest, dass die Bewegung zum Schutz der Meeresschildkröten in B.C.S. für eine Reihe von Interessen und Personen zugänglich ist. Und wir stießen auf unerwartete Ergebnisse hinsichtlich des Ausmaßes des Entgegenkommens bundesstaatlicher Umweltbehörden in Bezug auf die Mitwirkung nicht-staatlicher Organisationen in Schutzprogrammen und bei umweltpolitischen Entscheidungen, die bislang traditionell ausschließlich der Kompetenz der mexikanischen Regierung unterlagen.

Resumen El presente estudio analiza la aportación del movimiento conservacionista de la tortuga marina en la Baja California Sur (B.C.S), México al crecimiento de la vida asociativa en el estado. Desde siempre, México se ha reconocido como un país con una vida asociativa muy escasa. Sin embargo, las actividades de las ONG y los grupos comunitarios defensores de la tortuga marina nos brindan un estudio de caso extraordinario para entender mejor los factores sociales, políticos y estratégicos que han contribuido al compromiso cívico voluntario y a los éxitos medioambientales del movimiento. A través de 799 entrevistas y encuestas con interesados públicos, este estudio se basa en el enfoque de Sabet (Democratization 2:410–432, 2008) sobre oportunidades políticas, así como sus esfuerzos por reformar las normas no oficiales y las redes de apoyo social, como estructura explicativa para ayudar a describir el surgimiento de la vida asociativa. Según nuestras

averiguaciones, el movimiento conservacionista de la tortuga marina en B.C.S se ha vuelto accesible a intereses y personas muy diversas. Hemos encontrado resultados inesperados respecto a la complacencia de las organizaciones medioambientales federales en relación con la participación de las ONG en programas de conservación y en las decisiones políticas medioambientales que desde siempre han sido dominio exclusivo del gobierno de México.

Keywords Associational life · Mexico · Environmental nonprofits · Sea turtles · Civic engagement

Introduction

Mexico has been described as a country with a traditionally weak associational life—but undergoing transitions toward greater associational involvement. Recent literature (Dolhinow 2005; Perry 2004; Verduzco 2003; Donelson 2004; Sabet 2008; Campeon 2006) documents the transition within Mexico, to stronger communal associations. This article utilizes the broad-based sea turtle conservation movement in Baja California Sur (B.C.S.), Mexico as a case study to answer calls from the social science research community to (1) contribute to the growing body of research that addresses the growth of Mexican associational life and (2) document the social, political, and strategic phenomenon that have facilitated the movement in galvanizing a diversity of public and governmental support for, and civic participation in, sea turtle conservation measures (Sabet 2008; Verduzco 2003). Community organizers in this field have questioned the extent to which their strategies have been effective and if the limited resources employed are making an impact (Delgado and Nichols 2005). This research is an important first step in making an assessment of the complex set of variables contributing to the growth of the sea turtle conservation movement and associational life in B.C.S.

The sea turtle conservation movement in B.C.S. is comprised of 17 recognized Mexican non-governmental organizations (NGOs)¹ and 19 community groups (Fig. 1). Its size, and as we shall see, importance, salience, and robustness provided a special opportunity to collect data to analyze the social, political, and strategic factors that allowed the movement to grow in size so rapidly since 2000 when only two NGOs and one community group were working for sea turtle conservation in B.C.S. The research documents the extent to which this popularized movement in B.C.S. is contributing to the growth of broader associational life in the state. Growth of associational life, as described in this research, can be understood as the development of a vibrant community of non-governmental organizations and community groups, and the associated voluntary civic participation within these organizations. Of further importance for our case study in Mexico is the contribution that voluntary organizations make to “fostering the development of democratic values and attitudes” (Maloney et al. 2000, p. 212).

¹ Mexico uses the term Civil Association [*Asociación Civil (A.C.)*]. For the purposes of this research, we refer to these organizations as NGOs.



Fig. 1 Map of coastal communities participating in sea turtle conservation efforts in Baja California Sur, Mexico

The article is divided into four main sections. First, we explain the growth of associational life in Mexico, generally, and explore the history of the sea turtle conservation movement in B.C.S. and the extent to which associational life has revolved around this environmental issue in the state.

Our analytical framework and method sections describe the explanatory framework (provided by Sabet 2008) that we chose to employ when analyzing the observations, interviews, and surveys we conducted with our sample populations. In our research data findings section, we present descriptive narratives, representative participant quotes, and Type I tabulations organized within Sabet's explanatory framework. Finally, we offer our conclusion.

Associational Life in Mexico

Documenting the weak history of associational life in Mexico, Mendez (1999) writes that 150 private assistance organizations existed in all of Mexico between the nineteenth century and the 1950s, including mostly human service organizations linked to the hierarchy of the Mexican Catholic church. This was followed by a

period of growth in civic organizations from the 1970s through 1999 due, in part, to (1) the public image of associations as “carriers of ideology for new social and popular movements” (p. 94) and (2) “disappointment and disillusionment with other actors, including the government and political parties” (Mendez 1999, p. 95).

The slow formation of Mexican NGOs, and public participation within these organizations during the political rule (1929–2000) of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), is widely attributed to the PRI’s desire to have state control over unions, and public organizations and services (Hernandez and Fox 1995; Sabet 2008). There was a growing recognition of a weakening of state influence during the 1982 economic crisis and recognition of community organization effectiveness by both the Mexican public and international funding agencies and NGOs involved in the Mexico City earthquake relief in 1985 (Mendez 1999). From a B.C.S. statewide context, the fall of the PRI in 2000 produced a political transition that improved the ability of citizens to establish new NGOs, and facilitated the public’s ability to access and participate in NGOs and community groups. For instance, in 2006, The International Community Foundation and the Autonomous University of B.C.S. identified 100 Mexican civic organizations operating in B.C.S., 48 of which had a community service orientation comparable to U.S.-based NGOs, as defined by section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. tax code.² New NGOs have emerged in the state—in healthcare, education, environment, community development, and the arts. Environmental NGOs, however, have reaped the majority of “philanthropic support, technical assistance, training, and institutional development from U.S.-based partners and funders. Other programmatic areas have not received this targeted support...” (ICF 2006, p. 14).

Why Study the Sea Turtle Conservation Movement in B.C.S.?

The sentiment for contemporary environmental policies was established early in the twentieth century when Mexico undertook state sponsored conservation measures that continued through the Mexican Revolution (Dedina 2000; Simon 1997). This postrevolutionary response to the protection of natural resources (that were historically exploited by foreign business interests) has continued to this day to help recover formerly endangered marine mammals such as the gray whale (Dedina 2000). Despite the fact that Mexican federal environmental agencies are sorely understaffed and underfunded (ICF 2006), the country’s environmental policies and legal framework are fairly progressive in terms of species protection and the amount of protected lands (Simon 1997).

Baja California Sur contains the second largest amount of protected lands in the country, bested only by the northern state Baja California (ICF 2006); 41% of B.C.S. is managed by the National Commission for Natural Protected Areas (CONANP). And the 1988 establishment of the 2.54 million ha El Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in B.C.S., represents the largest wildlife refuge in all of the Latin America (CONANP 2010). The national recognition of the importance of marine conservation and sea turtle protections, in concert with policies that serve as an

² The ICF also identified 40 U.S.-based NGOs working within B.C.S. in 2006.

infrastructure for grounding programmatic efforts, provided a salient platform for strategic community organization (and the basis of our research). Further, during the last 5 years, we had observed first-hand what we thought to be public and federal agency buy-in, trust, and participation with the sea turtle conservation movement. That is, we had witnessed that the former informal societal rules of cynicism and mistrust were changing, but wanted to explore the degree to which this was occurring through qualitative research and analysis.

Events and Participation of Core Actors in the Sea Turtle Conservation Movement

Recognizing the unsustainable sea turtle harvest rates³ and the subsequent sharp decline in sea turtle populations, the government of Mexico (via Presidential Decree) in 1990 declared all five northwestern endangered species of sea turtles in Mexico's waters as protected from kill and capture (DOF 1990). At that time, the Mexican federal environmental agency responsible for enforcing environmental laws—the Federal Attorney General for Environmental Protection (PROFEPA)—did not exist, and The Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) had no species or habitat recovery plan in place to coordinate sea turtle conservation efforts. Nichols, who was involved in early sea turtle research and conservation efforts in B.C.S., details the 1990 ban on sea turtle harvest in Mexico:

Essentially overnight the consumption of sea turtles—that was pretty widespread—became illegal, and became a black market activity...it went underground. Many of the people who were involved in that original movement considered 1990 the *end* of their campaign due to the passage of major legislation that included strict fines and penalties. However, despite the fact that eating sea turtles was against the law, even government officials continued the practice. Meanwhile, sea turtles weren't being saved and populations continued to decline (interview respondent, August 15, 2008).

In 1992, a community organized nesting beach protection effort was implemented in B.C.S. in Bahia de Los Angeles. But as late as 2000 only two NGOs, Niparajá and The Association for the Protection of the Environment and the Marine Turtle in Southern Baja (ASUPMATOMA), were working to protect sea turtles in B.C.S. While government policy banning harm to sea turtles provided the legal framework within which these NGOs could accomplish their conservation goals (Steinberg 2005), NGOs and government agencies were neither working together on community outreach and education, nor collecting bycatch and sea turtle poaching data.

In January of 1999 in response to the absence of an orchestrated Mexican agency sea turtle recovery plan, Nichols, Seminoff, Dedina, Rangel, and others facilitated a working group with 45 fishermen, community leaders, and scientists in B.C.S. with the intent of organizing a groundswell of community-based efforts to conduct

³ Between 1950 and 1970, Mexico supplied the world with 50% of the world's sea turtle catch (Marquez et al. 1982, Marquez 1990, FAO Fishery Department 2000).

monitoring and protect sea turtles (Delgado and Nichols 2005). This was the first meeting of *Grupo Tortuguero*. According to Nichols, in the absence of a federal effort, this was the beginning point for grassroots civic engagement in a social network that supported sea turtle conservation efforts:

This was a movement ready to happen; we just needed to connect it. People who were paying attention to the ocean knew that sea turtles were in trouble and they didn't want them to go away...that was the common ground! Scientists, conservationists, community members, fishermen...we all shared that...it always came back to that, not a political agenda. Even people who were eating sea turtles the morning of the first meeting came and sat down with us (interview respondent, August 15, 2008).

The Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) is Mexico's central "environmental superministry" (Simon 1997, p. 237) spawned from the 1994 Zedillo administration. The ministry issues permits to handle sea turtles through their division of Vida Silvestre, and currently serves as an umbrella for two highly respected federal agencies responsible for the enforcement of sea turtle poaching (PROFEPA) and sea turtle monitoring and research (CONANP). However, despite their shared goals, these agencies did not have an amenable relationship with B.C.S. sea turtle conservationists, neither the Mexicans nor the *extranjeros* (foreigners). Nichols noted that in the last 10 years "the idea of involving fishermen and citizens, and valuing their knowledge and experience wasn't well developed...involvement was a new concept for PROFEPA" (interview respondent, August 15, 2008). Rangel more candidly noted that "under the PRI government, they [the agencies] wouldn't pay any attention to us, it was like we weren't even there" (interview respondent, May 29, 2008).

Historical factors that affected the growth of associational life in B.C.S. (and Mexico more generally) went beyond governmental/NGO relations and were compounded in part by the persistence of informal social rules. There existed a weak culture of philanthropy; lingering public distrust and cynicism toward NGOs (for fear of corruption and linkages to political parties); and longstanding citizen reliance upon, and expectations of the federal government to solve social and environmental problems (Sabet 2008; Lemos et al. 2002). Dedina adds that as late as 2003 "We were absolutely attacked. There was no trust on the part of the public towards NGOs. We were completely despised and people were negative and hostile towards us" (interview respondent, May 17, 2008). This pre-existing hostility, was to a certain extent, attributed to Mexican distrust of the efforts of foreign organizers associated with international NGOs who worked for species and environmental protection in Mexico. Simon (1997) writes that President Echeverría in 1970 went so far as to believe that environmentalism was a "conspiracy by multinationals who hoped to preserve resources in the underdeveloped world so that they themselves could one day exploit them" (p. 236).

Analytic Framework

Fox (1996) provided researchers with the "Political Construction Approach" for better understanding the emergence of associational life *under* authoritarian rule in

Mexico, through a tripartite analysis of political opportunity, social energy, and scaling up. More recently, Sabet (2008) provided us with a modified and somewhat more robust framework that includes political, cultural, and social factors that helped us to explain the growth of the sea turtle conservation movement, its contributions to associational life, and the further democratization of Mexico: “(1) political opportunity; (2) efforts to reform informal rules; and (3) social networks capable of incubating organizational efforts” (p. 411). This is a more robust set of factors that proved useful for understanding the emergence of associational life in Mexico *after* the democratic transitions that took place in 2000. Most notably during this time, the PRI lost their dominant control of Mexican politics with the election of the National Action Party’s (PAN) Vicente Fox.

Throughout the analysis, Sabet’s (2008) explanatory framework is employed as the basis for organizing participant responses to our interviews and surveys. The factors proved appropriate for an explanation of the growth of associational life in B.C.S. not only due to the framework’s prior success in explaining the emergence of associational life in the U.S.–Mexico border region, but also because the three components of the framework had the potential to generalize (fit) to the phenomenon we encountered in regard to the sea turtle conservation movement and associational life in B.C.S.

Methods

Understanding the complex set of variables contributing to the growth of the sea turtle conservation movement and associational life in B.C.S. required a research design that (Serow 1997; Yin 2003) necessitated gathering information from NGO and community group facilitators in both Mexico and the U.S. Our Mexican respondents included Mexican governmental agency officials, state sponsored university researchers, directors of NGOs and community groups, and the public of B.C.S. In the U.S., we interviewed directors of NGOs who are working in conjunction with the B.C.S. sea turtle conservation movement. In total, we conducted 799 interviews and surveys from two distinct populations. Population I refers to the 23 interviews conducted with key leaders from the sea turtle conservation movement between March 2008 and May 2009 (Appendix). Population II refers to the interviews and surveys we conducted with 776 members of the general public in 11 cities throughout B.C.S. from September 2008 through May, 2009.

Population I: Conservation Leaders

We conducted 23 semi-structured interviews (Creswell 2003) with stakeholders working specifically within the environmental arena in B.C.S. on the topic of sea turtle conservation (Appendix A). These 2-h interviews were conducted with the directors of Mexican NGOs and community groups, and Mexican federal environmental agencies, which included PROFEPA and CONANP. In addition to the management of protected areas, CONANP is the federal agency responsible for the implementation of national sea turtle conservation programs. Both agencies

Table 1 Interviews and surveys conducted with general public and students in B.C.S.

B.C.S. city	Sea turtle organization?	Public interviews/surveys ^a
Adolfo López Mateos	Yes	68
Cabo San Lucas		55
C. Constitución		140
C. Insurgentes		70
La Paz	Yes	54
Loreto	Yes	71
Pescadero	Yes	50
Puerto Magdalena		27
Puerto San Carlos	Yes	96
San Juanico	Yes	55
Todos Santos	Yes	90

^a Sample sizes represented in this column were almost evenly split between adult and student respondents

work under the broader ministry SEMARNAT. We interviewed the directors of three U.S.-based NGOs that have facilitated sea turtle conservation in the state for the last decade. One interview was also conducted with Dr. Volker Koch from the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur, where he is a Professor of Marine Resources and Department Head of Coastal and Marine Studies. All interviews took place in offices, homes, and at conferences.

Population II: The General Public of Baja California Sur

The second facet of our sampling focused on surveying and interviewing the general public throughout the state. This approach was employed to triangulate the responses we obtained from the 23 stakeholder respondents mentioned above (Creswell 2003). Public data sources included a total of 776 surveys and interviews with the inhabitants of B.C.S. (adults⁴ $n = 398$, students $n = 378$). The average age of our adult participant was 36; the average age of our 12–18-year-old student participant was 14. Participants were randomly selected from the streets, parks, beaches, schools, bus stops, restaurants, and stores in 11 communities throughout B.C.S. (Table 1). These surveys and interviews were conducted with the assistance of study-abroad students from The School for Field Studies—Center for Coastal Studies via snowball, convenience, and purposive sampling (Creswell 2003). Researchers with sufficient Spanish language skills conducted interviews with the public, while others utilized our survey instrument.

We developed two different interview and survey instruments for the adult and student participants. The written surveys closely mimicked what was discussed during the semi-structured interviews. Participants responded to questions that related to their prior and present perception of the sea turtle conservation movement; sources of information, participation and volunteerism related to sea

⁴ The four major adult participant occupations included retail, homemakers, skilled laborers, and fishermen.

turtle conservation; exposure to sea turtle education in B.C.S. schools; and the extent of intergenerational learning and philanthropy.

Data Analysis and Collection

All 23 interviews with key stakeholders were audio and video recorded, transcribed and translated to English, coded to identify thematic trends in the responses, and grouped according to Sabet's framework mentioned above. Interviews and surveys with the 776 public respondents were recorded by hand on individual survey instruments. Descriptive narratives (Schneller 2008) proved useful in our prior research as a low-inference data analysis technique used to recognize trends in participant responses and to convey our multiple research findings.

The descriptive narratives used to present the interview and survey data yielded quotes from the public respondents. They were coded and grouped using Sabet's framework of three explanatory components (Creswell 2003). Validity of our findings was further addressed by identifying accounts of discrepant information (deviant cases) (Creswell 2003). Inclusion of outlying participant perspectives provides for a more holistic understanding of the variations in responses while allowing for a more contextualized and descriptive participant response framework. "The prevalence or lack of discrepant information therefore allowed for greater insights into the credibility of perceived patterns of phenomena identified by this research" (Schneller 2008, p. 297). Our qualitative analysis also employed Type 1 and 2 tabulations as prescribed by Silverman (2006). More precisely, we assigned percentages to the interview data to more accurately display a numeric prevalence of phenomenon.

Authors attended and participated in eight sea turtle conferences, five monitoring meetings, and six sea turtle festivals throughout B.C.S. Participation in these events was useful for interview and data gathering, observational purposes, as well as confirming participant responses, and to better understand the organizational and collaborative approach used by the sea turtle conservation movement (Creswell 2003). Further, we conducted a thorough archival study of NGO documents, education and outreach materials, and websites.

Findings

Our research findings are organized and analyzed below within Sabet's (2008) framework that focuses on the three broader factors of political opportunity, efforts to reform informal rules, and social networks capable of incubating organizational efforts.

Political Opportunity

Grupo Tortuguero's conservation mosaic model (Delgado and Nichols 2005) was facilitated through a supportive social network (foundations, communities,

scientists, fishermen, NGOs) that organized communities to collaboratively protect sea turtles. Their formation in 1999 was timed to coincide with an epoch of heightened political opportunity and democratization efforts during the fall of the PRI, yet still unsure about the potential negative outcomes. Their timing and outcome is related to Tarrow's (1994) "political opportunity structure," addressed by Fox (1996) who wrote that "Associational life does not unfold in a vacuum: state or external societal actors can provide either positive incentives or negative sanctions for collective action" (p. 1090). Perhaps of greatest importance, opportunity was created by the 1997 PRI loss of its absolute majority at the Congress of the Union in Mexico, and soon after, the first non-PRI president was elected in 2000. The fall of the PRI at the state level in B.C.S. paralleled the shift in federal government structure in 2000. Political leadership in B.C.S. in the Governor's office (from 1999 to 2005) saw Leonel Cota (PRD) elected, followed by the incumbent, Narciso Agúndez (PRD) from 2005 to present.

A consequence of this was the emergence of a greater level of perceived freedom. In regard to B.C.S. specifically, Dedina noted that "If you engaged in nonprofit advocacy work under the PRI during the Zedillo and Salinas administrations [1988–2000] you had retribution carried out against you...you were definitely not free to do this in B.C.S....activists were punished" (interview respondent, May 17, 2008). The foundations for the emergence of the sea turtle conservation movement and the resulting rural community and public participation were laid in 1999 just prior to the fall of the PRI and the first meeting of Grupo Tortuguero in Loreto, B.C.S. In response to this political opportunity and the loosening of state attitudes toward NGOs and civic engagement with conservation organizations, "People started to organize themselves as they realized that there was an absence of government control after the PRI lost power, and slowly over time there emerged the capacity for NGO conservation groups to operate" (Dedina, interview respondent, May 17, 2008).

Associated with trust was a lack of fear and retribution. In relation to Tarrow's (1994) work, the movement's decision to capitalize on a political opportunity of this magnitude may have seemed attractive due to a lower chance of negative sanctions or retribution for their collective action (advocacy). Further, the opportunity was most likely used to "reveal potential allies and show where elites and authorities are vulnerable" (1994, p. 18). Sotelo-Amaya commented on one such ally: "The PRD is a lot more open to our work. The governor wore a proCaguama sea turtle t-shirt in López Mateos, so we know that we have the support to do our work better, it's a lot easier" (interview respondent, June 21, 2008). And Rangel noted that "Under PAN [currently holding presidential power] it's easier to form a [NGO] group" (interview respondent May 29, 2008).

Another ally emerged soon after 2000 when Vida Silvestre (the division of SEMARNAT that permits the handling of endangered species) began expediting the formalization of permits for sea turtle groups working in B.C.S. And later in 2006, the agency worked even further to streamline the sometimes cumbersome transactions (Camacho-Romero, interview respondent, June 13, 2008).

The amassing of political opportunity in the last 10 years has created significant inroads for sea turtle organizations to influence conservation policy decisions, and there now exists a heightened NGO/agency cooperation (discussed in more detail

below). Yet, despite the fact that the PAN and PRD have been easier to work with policy wise, and for the establishment and legal formation of an autonomous NGO, there is still widespread corruption in the state, and the black market for sea turtles thrives: “The highest government authorities in the state eat sea turtles quite publicly. It’s valued as a symbol of power among people with authority. And it’s well known that the illegal trade in sea turtles is tied to the drug traffic” (anonymous, interview respondent, 2008).

Reforming Informal Rules: Trust, Cooperation, and Voluntary Participation

Historically in Mexico under the PRI, and even as recently as 2008, Sabet (2008) explained that at his U.S./Mexico Border research sites, positive working relationships between civic organizations and governmental agencies were less common due to the persistence of informal rules in government. More precisely: “Many government officials are hesitant to surrender control to citizen initiatives” (p. 427). However, our case study results below demonstrate that the federal agency actors, sea turtle NGOs, and community groups in B.C.S. have a complementary and overall positive working relationship.

One contributing factor to the emergence and influence of the sea turtle conservation movement in the last 10 years in B.C.S. was the slowly evolving acceptance by federal agencies of the valid scientific work of the movement. In part, the longstanding agency hesitancy toward civic intervention was overcome by the agencies’ inability to conduct scientific monitoring and protect sea turtles, due to funding and staffing shortfalls. PROFEPA responded during interview that they have merely 12 agents dedicated to environmental law enforcement for the entire state of B.C.S. The state contains nearly 1000 miles of coastline encompassing both the Pacific and gulf coasts; however, in addition to enforcing marine regulations and turtle poaching, these 12 agents are responsible for the entire land area of the state and the enforcement of environmental regulations that pertain to issues far beyond sea turtle poaching. Therefore, has the recent growth in acceptance of the sea turtle conservation movement by federal agencies been a means to access external resources that could help fulfill their legal mandates? The answer is “yes,” but the explanation is much more complex and involves, in part, a serious effort on the part of the agencies to “save face.”

The biggest push to save sea turtles from extinction in B.C.S. was created through the Grupo Tortuguero citizen lead movement, and only then, after being popularized, did agencies begin to appear deficient in their duties and out of step with public demands. “SEMARNAT and CONANP want to work with us. In the past, they wouldn’t come to Grupo Tortuguero meetings and now the heads from Mexico City come. SEMARNAT has put themselves in the light, to be present at the meetings” (Rangel, interview respondent, May 29, 2008). Nichols noted that this positive relationship between NGOs, community groups, and federal agencies is a relatively new phenomenon, crediting media work and the dispersal of peer-reviewed research.

At first the relationship was combative, and people at SEMARNAT denied the conservation data. But as the research got published and entered the mainstream media the government couldn’t deny the problems. Agencies began to realize

that they needed to partner with the NGOs. Agencies began asking for formal invites to the annual Grupo Tortuguero meetings when they realized the importance of the work of the NGOs (interview respondent, August 15, 2008).

During interviews with NGOs and community groups that formed after 2000, it was apparent that they considered the government agencies to be “cooperative.” But Dedina too explained that this cooperation is a relatively recent phenomenon in B.C.S. and attributes some of the historical shift in attitude to media campaigns with professional wrestler El Hijo de Santo, professional soccer players Jorge Campos and Kikin Fonseca, and famous musicians *Mana* and *Los Tigres del Norte*:

WiLDCOAST started a groundbreaking media campaign in Mexico City in 2002 and people started seeing repeatedly the conservation work that B.C.S. fishermen were doing. The campaign included national sports and music celebrities...we made sea turtles cool! By 2003 federal officials started appearing with us on TV. Policy wise, that’s when the government started cooperating with the NGOs in B.C.S. (interview respondent, May 17, 2008).

The federal agents we interviewed provided even more useful insights into their symbiotic relationship with the sea turtle NGOs and community groups in B.C.S. The data below show clearly that this citizen movement has (for the most part) the full cooperation of the federal agencies, as well as access to shaping policy and research initiatives. While this cooperation is due in part to agency shortfalls in funding to operate a comprehensive statewide public education and outreach campaign, surveillance, monitoring, and a sea turtle research and recovery plan, the agencies also lack the specific expertise that NGO and citizen groups provide. Camacho-Romero is the La Paz-based marine biologist in charge of the Marine Turtle Conservation Program at CONANP (under SEMARTAT) and stated that:

SEMARNAT does not have sufficient funds or personnel to do the job that we should be doing to protect the turtles, that is why we rely so heavily on the community groups to help us do our job. Ninety-five percent of the sea turtle conservation work in B.C.S. is conducted by turtle groups while five percent comes from the government agencies. Baja California Sur is a very unique state in terms of turtle conservation because we do not operate any sea turtle research camps. We rely on the groups to do most of the work. We support them technically, we support them with the PET programs financially [seasonal funding for community projects], with the permits, *and with anything else that they may need*, but we do not operate our own sea turtle field camps in B.C.S. (interview respondent, June 13, 2008).

From the Mexico City headquarters of CONANP, we interviewed Sarti, The Technical Coordinator for the National Program for the Conservation of Sea Turtles. Sarti works throughout Mexico with sea turtle community groups, and in B.C.S. she directly supervises and consults on Leatherback nest protection measures. She stated that to maintain an atmosphere of trust between the agencies and the conservation organizations, CONANP must “Maintain the necessary communication and exchange of information to better facilitate government/group relationships. As

for the role of CONANP, it is necessary to visit the groups to become more familiar with the work that they are doing” (interview respondent, July 4, 2009).

As seen in the cases mentioned above, Mexican federal agencies have assisted and encouraged rural community sea turtle groups and B.C.S.-based NGOs. For once isolated rural/coastal communities, the social, economic, technical, political, and “access” possibilities that have emerged through the cooperation between the Grupo Tortuguero network and the federal agencies cannot be understated. And the fact that there is a vibrant willingness among the communities to engage in associational life gives us some indication of the existence of heightened public trust in civic organizations, explained in more detail below.

In one discrepant case, we make note of the relationship between Cabo Pulmo National Park (CONANP) and Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo (ACCP), an NGO comprised mostly of volunteer fisheries and eco-tourism families who have worked since 2001 within the park in conjunction with federal agencies, to protect sea turtles, nests, and turtle nesting beaches. The ICF (2006) reported that Cabo Pulmo National Park in the southeast portion of the state is negatively affected by coastal development and lax enforcement of fishing and recreational activities, and that “the park has always suffered a shortage of financing, a management plan, and personnel” (p. 421). Due to professional differences, and despite the park’s need for community participation in sea turtle conservation, the agencies denied ACCP a renewal of their permit to work with sea turtles during the 2010 nesting season.

Heightening Public Trust and Buy-In

Sea turtle NGOs and community groups do not offer formal paid membership, and as such, we could not easily measure associational activity through “group membership.” The fact that the sea turtle conservation movement in B.C.S. has grown from one community group and two NGOs in 2000, to a total of 36 NGO and community groups in 2010 is a testament not only to the rapid growth and staying power of the movement, but also the extent to which rural/coastal B.C.S. communities and their citizens have bought into associational life and emerged as major actors in marine conservation. In fact, we could not find *any* other citizen lead movement in the state with as much far reaching popular participation and support, or whose mission was so well known. In part, Nichols attributes this heightened public trust to the changing face of NGO management and associational life in B.C.S.:

There’s been a change in public perception in relation to a transition from the only interaction of Mexicans with environmental organizations being with foreign NGOs, to now, where there are groups comprised of Mexican nationals, fishermen, and local communities who started turtle groups. You have removed the component that these are outsiders...that makes all the difference...that is new. There would be no sea turtle conservation movement without the community groups, NGOs and public participation. You need public buy-in, and for local leaders to stand up and save sea turtles and protect the ocean (interview respondent, August 15, 2008).

We found that sea turtle NGO and community groups had a visible public presence in many isolated coastal communities, and the encouragement to produce local leadership has served as the foundation of the outreach and organizational model implemented by Grupo Tortuguero. The directors of NGOs that we interviewed listed a total of about 730 community members volunteering yearly for sea turtle conservation programs. Koch has worked extensively with sea turtles and coastal communities throughout the state since the growth of the movement in 2000, and he explained that “In general people have become more supportive of sea turtle conservation, supportive of the work that NGOs are doing, but it’s a pretty slow process. Community involvement is the key, people eating less sea turtles and less fisheries by-catch” (interview respondent, June 25, 2008).

Since 2001, the Municipality of Los Cabos has trained roughly 1000 community volunteers, 100 of which have credentials to participate in their citizen surveillance committee. This innovative program empowers firemen and hotel workers to take leadership roles in sea turtle conservation. Tiburcio explained that: “In 2001 working for sea turtle conservation was my vision, but now the community is dictating it. Other communities want to participate, and the involvement of hotels came about because they wanted to participate and work with sea turtles” (interview respondent, June 21, 2008).

The movement collectively reported reaching 5,700 students each year. Dean explained: “Generally people enjoy participating in sea turtle education programs. It’s a developing relationship and we are building that trust by involving communities in monitoring and collaborative community conservation” (interview respondent, May 17, 2008). Larger programs of note include the field program of ASUPMATOMA that reported having 33 groups of students (about 1000 students total) visit their beach-side nesting facility (north of Cabo San Lucas) yearly to be involved in an environmental learning program complete with baby sea turtle releases. The Municipality of San Jose reported involving 1000 students *yearly* in environmental learning programs and baby sea turtle releases.

The extent of sea turtle NGO outreach programs in B.C.S. schools was apparent through our student surveys, interviews, and community observations. We encountered many students in the 11 research cities wearing Grupo Tortuguero, proCaguama, and WiLD Coast t-shirts. Cars in various cities displayed these NGO’s stickers, handed out in B.C.S. schools and at community events. As mentioned earlier, Grupo Tortuguero and WiLD Coast have incorporated community-based social marketing techniques into their sea turtle conservation program, and stickers and comic books (with conservation messages tailored toward Mexico’s youth), displaying Mexican wrestler *El Hijo del Santo* were especially popular. Students discussed with us the NGO visits to their schools and detailed the variety of experiential activities in which they participated. And interestingly, 38% (144/378) of students we surveyed had the ability to name at least one sea turtle NGO in the state.

This extensive presence within the rural/coastal communities, encouraging civic participation, leadership, and ownership of the issue, coupled with strategic messaging and experiential education with youth in B.C.S. schools, has made an impact even in the most reluctant of fishing communities where much of the illicit trade in sea turtles is centered. Grupo Tortuguero’s Lucero explained that:

The public attitude has really changed a lot. Before, people would talk about environmental groups as if they were your enemy; it happened little by little, but now people want to participate in the turtle releases. We always try to invite new fishermen to our meetings. Coastal communities are small and new people are encouraged to get involved. But people want to get involved because they are interested in the project. When they get involved there is a responsibility, and they are participating, not spectators. The real reason communities get involved is because of conviction (interview respondent, June 13, 2008).

CONANP's Camacho further explained:

The public is the most important element in the success of the conservation programs. The public are the ones that have to change their attitudes about turtles and it's directly related to the amount of publicity that the groups can do...their environmental education programs. Communities that have turtle groups have more consciousness about the turtles because they have more contact with the groups working in their area and can directly see the results. When we have more consciousness in the communities we will have better results reducing illicit activities with turtles (interview respondent, June 13, 2008).

Voluntary Participation and Public Attitudes

We interviewed the citizenry of B.C.S. to better understand the current public perceptions (attitudes) toward the sea turtle conservation movement and the extent to which they are associating with the sea turtle conservation community. Our data showed that out of 398 adult participants interviewed and surveyed on the streets of 11 communities in B.C.S., 45% (180/398) had volunteered for an activity organized by a sea turtle conservation group (Fig. 2); the most common activity being a beach or sea turtle habitat cleanup effort. Out of those who had volunteered, the average instance of volunteerism was 4.4, with individuals volunteering as few as one time and as many as 30 times during their life. We encountered some instances of strong commitment to the sea turtle conservation movement with 15% (60/398) of participants volunteering five or more times during their lifetime. Among student respondents, we found high rates of strong participation; 58% (220/378) had volunteered for environmental activities organized by sea turtle NGOs or community groups.

The advent and impact of the popular sea turtle festivals in the state are also deserving of note as it demonstrates one more tool used by the sea turtle conservation movement to involve the public in associational efforts. Dedina (2000) found that environmentally themed festivals in B.C.S. that celebrated the gray whale were wildly popular in B.C.S., received extensive media attention, and helped to raise environmental awareness in participants concerning marine conservation issues. Similar to the gray whale festivals, our research found that seven cities in B.C.S. host sea turtle festivals yearly. During interviews and surveys with the public, we found that among student participants, 62% (233/378) reported that they had attended a sea turtle festival. Of those that had attended a sea turtle festival, 33% (76/233) reported having attended three or more fests in their lifetime while

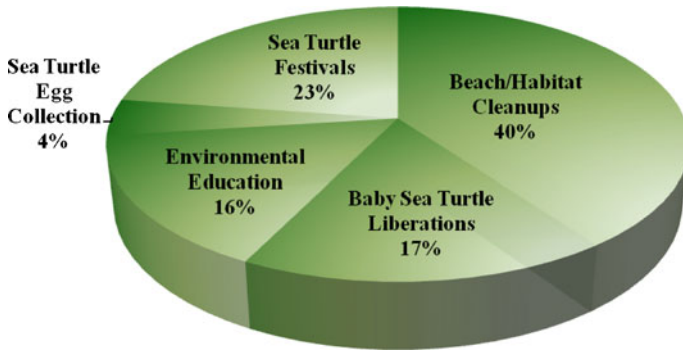


Fig. 2 Adult volunteerism with sea turtle NGOs: 180 individuals volunteering 792 times

10% (23/233) had attended a sea turtle festival in more than one city. We found similar numbers among our adult participants: 48% (188/393) reported that they attended a sea turtle festival. Of those that had attended a sea turtle festival, 44% (83/188) reported having attended three or more festivals in their lifetime, while 12% (23/188) attended a sea turtle festival in more than one city.

In respect to changing public attitudes, we again found that the outreach and participatory activities organized by the NGOs and community groups were a key component to changing negative environmental behaviors, an individual’s perception toward the movement, and their willingness to participate voluntarily with group projects. While the majority of our public participants were unaware of the existence of the sea turtle conservation movement 10 years ago, they are now aware of the movement, and very few thought it to be a threat to the culture of B.C.S. As mentioned above, many of our interviews and surveys were conducted in coastal communities, known as centers for the illegal trade in endangered sea turtles. The

Table 2 Representative public quotes by city

Representative quote	B.C.S. city
Sea turtle groups are very important and have achieved in a big way greater consciousness in the general population...to not consume the species	Puerto San Carlos
I have a lot of respect for the groups. A lot work with turtles and release them, they are excellent. They raise consciousness in the people	Cabo San Lucas
It’s interesting today to know that there are groups that take care of these endangered species, and I want to help	Todos Santos
I’ve been offered sea turtle a lot, but this year I haven’t eaten it. I haven’t had it in 10 years	Ciudad Constitución
My opinion is that I greatly admire the good actions of the groups	La Paz
I ate sea turtles before, but now I don’t eat them. When groups told me, I stopped eating it	Puerto Magdalena
My opinion of sea turtle groups and conservation changed because of publicity and communication	Loreto
I have more ecological consciousness and my opinion [of the groups] changed for various reasons, including the sea turtle festival	Loreto

eight representative quotes (Table 2) highlight public attitudes toward the sea turtle conservation movement:

The Puerto Adolfo López Mateos-based NGO “proCaguama” has worked extensively with the artisanal fishing cooperatives to reduce bycatch of loggerhead sea turtles through education programs, cooperation, and a retooling of the fleet’s fishing equipment. Further, proCaguama has worked extensively with the local community in sea turtle monitoring, conducted education campaigns in the schools, hosted weekly environmental films, and facilitated a longstanding sea turtle festival. As seen in the quote below, their long-term efforts in the community offer an example of strategies that have changed coastal community environmental behaviors and attitudes, reversed cynicism and mistrust of civic organizations, and heightened participation with NGO and community groups:

Originally the groups were a threat to the town and there was a lot of negativity towards them. Thanks to groups like proCaguama, they have manifested a new art of fishing. We [my coworkers] don’t eat turtles and we talk to other fishermen, not to catch them. Now we work to protect turtles. The groups have been talking to the people, and work in the schools to teach about turtles and to liberate sea turtles with the children. They have a lot of influence with the people. It’s expensive to fish all day with hooks, and turtling was easy. But we don’t eat turtles anymore. We need alternatives like sport fishing, whale watching and possibly turtle watching (López Mateos Fisherman).

The Culture of Philanthropy

Here, we have included the nature of B.C.S.’ culture of philanthropy within Sabet’s second factor “Efforts to Reform Informal Rules,” as historical patterns of philanthropy in Mexico may have contributed to the slow growth of associational life in the country. Our community interviews and surveys showed that 75% of adult participants had never donated equipment or funds to a sea turtle conservation group; however, 73% of respondents stated that they would be willing to donate funds and become a *member* of a group. Interviews with directors of the sea turtle NGOs show that none of the Grupo Tortuguero community groups retain membership or ask for monetary donations; only one of the B.C.S. NGOs (Tortugueros de Las Playitas, A.C.) solicited funds or retained membership. proCaguama reported that during sea turtle monitoring high season (May to September) they have received in-kind donations from small stores, restaurants and hotels, and one-time monetary donations from individuals (Peckham and De la Toba, interview respondents, January 29, 2009). Here, we note the importance of keeping membership records as a potential source for alternative funding and heightening public “ownership” of the movement, but also the usefulness of keeping contact information of participants for campaign needs and updates, and advertising events and volunteer opportunities.

Fortunately, the culture of philanthropy that is prevalent in the U.S. and Canada has to some extent directly assisted the movement. This alternate source of funding and volunteerism comes from supportive U.S. and Canadian expatriates living in B.C.S., seasonal visitors to B.C.S., and tourists visiting B.C.S. for short periods of time and

engaging in sea turtle ecotourism. Nichols, Nahill and Pesenti manage an innovative “voluntourism” program called SEE Turtles (www.seeturtles.org). Income from these trips—where participants assist B.C.S. NGOs with sea turtle monitoring programs—helps to fund community-based sea turtle research and conservation efforts; an 8-day trip in B.C.S. costs roughly \$1,700 USD (See Turtles, 2009).

Social Networks Capable of Incubating Organizational Efforts

This third component (social infrastructure) in Sabet’s explanatory framework has already been discussed cursorily throughout the research findings (above) in the context of the Grupo Tortuguero network that serves as a unifying umbrella organization under which 19 community groups and 17 NGOs fall. Their efforts to organize the geographically dispersed sea turtle communities include an annual monitoring conference where participants from around the state (and beyond), receive technical and logistical training for the monitoring of sea turtles and nesting beaches. Then there are the annual reunions held in Loreto every January. Loreto reunions serve as a venue for the geographically dispersed monitoring and nesting communities, NGOs, and all associated federal agencies, to meet (with paid room and board) to share in their conservation successes. Each community presents research data from their field camp and has the opportunity to meet agency representatives, researchers, other sea turtle communities, and take part in technical workshops.

The role of external norm entrepreneurs has contributed to the growth of the Grupo Tortuguero network and the associated increase in voluntary public participation with conservation organizations in the state. International NGOs such as proPeninsula, WiLDCOAST, and Ocean Revolution have worked extensively at capacity building,⁵ knowledge sharing, scientific and technical trainings, policy promotion, and education and outreach in various communities throughout B.C.S. to encourage positive environmental behaviors and attitudes. There is no denying that these international NGOs continue to strengthen B.C.S.-based NGOs, their effectiveness, and their understanding of what is needed to successfully (and legally) operate a civic organization in Mexico. Our interviews showed that at times this involved providing scientific and technical support, and travel expenses, to attend meetings and workshops through what proPeninsula appropriately calls *connectivity grants*.

All of the NGOs that we interviewed participate in the annual reunion of Grupo Tortuguero every January in Loreto, while some also participate in the monitoring meetings every August. The benefits provided through the Grupo Tortuguero network presented a unique organizational model that has proven effective for the achievement of an accessible social/environmental movement in B.C.S. that is working toward the protection of endangered species as well as the broader promotion of civic and environmental responsibility through community participation. The Mexican and

⁵ Extensive financial support for the movement provided by: The New Sandler Foundation, Marisla Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, The Global Green Grants Fund, PADI, The Packard Foundation, NOAA, Norcross Wildlife Foundation, WiLDCOAST, The Ocean Foundation/proPeninsula, Natural Resources Defense Council, Waterkeeper International, The Blue Ocean Institute, Ocean Revolution, and private donors and Mexican businesses.

American conservationists who helped to organize the movement to protect sea turtles in 1999 in B.C.S. are the same individuals who attended the first meeting of Grupo Tortuguero in Loreto and continue to be involved in the annual meetings and associated projects. Many are independently operating their own NGOs, and along with their representative communities, are the leaders of the sea turtle conservation movement in B.C.S. today.

Conclusion

This research worked to explain the contributions of the growing sea turtle conservation movement in B.C.S. to the emergence of associational life in the state, using Sabet's (2008) focus on political opportunity, efforts to reform informal rules, and social infrastructure. During our case study, we found that political opportunity which emerged at the national and state levels after the 2000 Mexican elections did contribute to the initial timing and growth of associational activity in B.C.S. However, as highlighted by Sabet (2008), heightened democratic opportunities at the national level in Mexico have not always translated to opportunities at the local level: "Only in Nuevo Laredo, where there is neither electoral competition nor alternation in power, does the political realm continue to dominate associational life" (p. 427). Fortunately, for the sea turtle conservation movement (and associational life more broadly) in B.C.S., pluralistic national and state level politics have continued to offer opportunities for the development of autonomous NGOs.

The strategic and organizational methods employed by the Grupo Tortuguero network and the involvement of international NGOs and foundations cannot be understated in our findings. Of penultimate importance was their work to gain the trust of and provide a voice for isolated rural/coastal fishing communities throughout the Baja peninsula, who in the past received little attention or support from the environmental community. Despite the fact that sea turtle community groups in B.C.S. are geographically dispersed, in coastal, rural, and urban settings and in both wealthy and poor communities, the social networking opportunities provided through norm entrepreneurs such as Grupo Tortuguero have contributed to the emergence of new voluntary associations. Growth of the movement is due in no small part to community access to a broader conservation network, technical training, funding, and organizational and ideological support, all contributing to competency, solidarity, empowerment, and political clout for the communities. Detailed by Fox (1996), this process of "scaling up" is of major importance for strengthening the geographically dispersed groups and stimulating associational life.

Our data showed that this active social/environmental movement is responsible in many instances for changes in public and agency attitudes toward NGOs; as a result, associational life in B.C.S. has been improved by the sea turtle conservation movement. The ability of the sea turtle conservation movement to gain the attention, trust, and cooperation of the centralized federal agencies has given us an indication that such accomplishments in the environmental sphere are generalizable to other regions of Mexico. As far as successes in other citizen movements outside of the environmental arena—in terms of public influence with federal agency programs—

this case study has provided insights that Mexican agencies might be amenable to furthering the inroads of citizen movements. However, we must note that the sea turtle conservation movement did not initially meet with *strong* government resistance or true conflict in 2000. There was no “embattled” challenging of elites, rather there was more likely an attempt to marginally modify what government does and create policy where government may be indifferent (Dowding 1996). In fact, the combativeness that Nichols described above in relation to agency/NGO interactions was more likely fueled by (1) agency embarrassment of their inaction, and (2) left-over negative attitudes (from the PRI era) toward civic organizations and public intervention in governmental matters. We believe that in this case study agencies ultimately acted opportunistically and aligned themselves with a scientifically legitimate, publicly popular, and well-funded conservation movement. In the hypothetical case of a true challenge of power, agencies may respond differently.

Fortunately, for the sea turtle conservation movement in B.C.S., the Mexican federal agencies who in the past were reluctant to give up responsibilities have realized that their work cannot be accomplished without the continued trust and assistance of vibrant community groups and NGOs. And as such, agencies have been amenable to knowledge and responsibility sharing. More importantly, in relation to broader environmental policy outcomes and the continued democratization of Mexico’s government, federal agency agreeability toward the goals and projects of the B.C.S. sea turtle conservation community has resulted in the third sector having greater access to political/conservation decision making (Meyer and Minkoff 2004).

Our research showed similarities to that of Campeon (2006) who found that in Mexico: “The state is progressively losing its grip on civil society, presenting NGOs with opportunities to promote the development of grassroots organizations, as well as a greater involvement in politics” (p. 1). Our research also coincides with Steinberg (2005) who found that NGO/government cooperation does not decrease the importance of government, as federal legislation provides the legal framework within which NGOs operate and achieve their conservation goals. He notes further that effective conservation policy requires the participation of the public. Our research also produced results similar to that of Snaverly and Desai (2000) who found that the work of NGOs and government often complement one another; NGOs help to enforce government policy; and found NGOs operating in response to the failures of government to provide a good or service.

While the emergence of associational life linked to the sea turtle conservation movement has coincided with a general upswing in associational life in other focus areas in B.C.S., the sea turtle conservation movement remains one of the largest contributors to the growth of associational life in the state. After documenting extensive instances of voluntary civic engagement with sea turtle groups we propose that it is the most visible and well organized environmental and civic effort on the lower Baja Peninsula. Peckham went so far as to say: “Other than the Grupo Tortuguero network, I don’t know of other NGOs or civic organizations that are augmenting citizen involvement in mobilizing policy or practice in B.C.S.” (interview respondent, April 5, 2009). The community groups, agencies, universities, NGOs, and individuals not only continue to play a direct role in sea turtle conservation efforts, but are also participating in, popularizing, and contributing to

the growth of associational life in B.C.S. We hope that the many instances of civic engagement that we observed during our research are also helping to increase social capital and promote the further democratization of Mexico. While our results are encouraging, to say precisely to what extent this is happening outside of B.C.S. remains elusive without further investigation.

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Appendix

See Table 3.

Table 3 Interviews conducted with sea turtle groups and government affiliates

B.C.S. sea turtle group	Government agency	U.S.-based NGO
Amigos para la Conservacion de Cabo Pulmo, A.C. (Castro)	CONANP (Camacho-Romero; Sarti)	California Academy of Sciences (Nichols)
ASUPMATOMA, A.C. (Gonzales-Ayam)	PROFEPA (anonymous)	ProPeninsula (Dean)
Eco Amigos de Mulege, A.C. (Garcia)	Municipalidad de San Jose del Cabo (Tiburcio)	WiLDCOAST (Dedina)
Grupo Ecológico y Tortuguero de Pescadero, A.C. (Sotelo-Amaya)	Autónomas Universidad de La Paz (Koch)	
Grupo Tortuguero, A.C.		
<i>La Paz</i> ** (Maldonado; Lucero)		
IEMANYA, A.C.* (Rangel)		
<i>Laguna San Ignacio</i> ** (Mayoral)		
Niparaja, A.C. (Acevas)		
proCaguama, A.C. (Peckham; De la Toba)		
Punta Abreojos Coastkeeper, A.C. (Villavicencio)		
<i>San Juanico</i> ** (Romero)		
Tortugueros de Las Playitas, A.C. (Cota)		
Vigilantes de Bahía Magdalena A.C.- Waterkeeper Alliance (Solis)		

* Research, Education, Management, and Advisory: named after Yemanjá, the celebrated Afro-Brazilian Goddess and guardian of the sea, and mother of all life (IEMANYA, 2009)

** Signifies community sea turtle group operating under Grupo Tortuguero

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