Woodgate and Oscar Forero based in the Department of Geography at King’s College, London.

Three principal research methods were employed: 1) archival research in Mexico City, Merida and Chetumal, concentrating particularly on the chicle co-operatives’ archives; 2) interviews with surviving chicle workers (chicleros), contractors, co-operative representatives, representatives of INV, and the Mexican government (secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources), and natural gum producers (Glee Gum/Verve); 3) interactive workshops organised in conjunction with the Museum of the Castle War, a community museum in Tihosuco.

**PUBLICATIONS INCLUDE**

Forero O. and Redclift M. *Chicle production in Quintana Roo provoked the Caste War*, a community museum in Tihosuco. workshops organised in conjunction with the Museum of the Castle War, a community museum in Tihosuco.


**CONTACT**

Professor Michael R. Redclift
Department of Geography
King’s College London
Strand
London WC2R 2LS
telephone +44 (0)20 7848 1755
email michael.r.redclift@icic.ac.uk

**PROJECT TEAM**

Michael Redclift
Graham Woodgate
Oscar Forero

**FINDINGS:**

Chewing Gum: transnational histories of consumption and production

The ‘boom’ in chicle production, to meet demands for chewing gum from the United States, began during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and reached its peak in the early 1940s. It served as a marker for the transformation of the landscape and ecology of the east and south of the Yucatan peninsular in Mexico, paving the way for new land uses on the tropical frontier. It led to harvesting and production practices which are of contemporary importance, especially for the two protected tropical forest areas (global Bioskphere Reserves).

**KEY FINDINGS**

1. Chicle production in Quintana Roo provoked internal divisions among Mayan leaders, but it also led to modernising solutions.
2. Sourcing natural chewing gum, and timber extraction began the process of clearing vast areas of tropical forest land in the period 1900-1940. Squatters and cattle ranchers completed this process, after 1940.
3. The chicle industry shifted from a relatively remote forest economy of primary resource extraction, mediated by private Mexican and American entrepreneurs, to a dependency of the Mexican state.
4. The Mexican state extended its control over chicle production and marketing through the development of a natural chewing gum market: for further details take a look at our website www.consume.bbk.ac.uk

**HIGHLIGHTS**

The Union of Chicle Co-operatives has been working to optimise chewing gum production and capture a bigger share of the market. The two aspects are intrinsically related. The main demand for natural chewing gum today is from Japan and the east Asian market. The texture, elasticity and capacity of natural gum to absorb flavours explain the Japanese preference for natural gum over the cheaper synthetic resin based on hydrocarbons, which is of inferior quality in all of these aspects. Therefore the union has emphasised quality controls during the rehydration process, the...
The project involved the use of novel forms of dissemination – systems of personalised social relations and was funded by the ESRC/AHRC Cultures of Consumption research programme and ran from March 2003 to September 2005 (grant number: RES 143-25-007). The project team was Michael Redclift, Graham and Maria Ruiz Barcha.

The research benefited enormously by working closely with a trusted local community museum in Quintana Roo. It remains to be seen, however, whether it will contribute to the development of a buoyant and robust market for natural chewing gum outside Mexico, which would bring advantages to forest workers, the Mexican state and new groups of consumers interested in a natural product that is traded fairly.

MESSAGES FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE
1. Sustainable forest products need to be considered within the context of communities, livelihoods and cultures. There are no 'general rules' in their development, other than the need for grass-roots involvement from the inception.
2. Systems of personalised social relations and networks, such as 'coyotejía' are capable of operating within the structures of the state as well as those of the market.
3. Some products lend themselves more easily to 'fair trade' promotion and marketing – they are often high 'value-added' products, destined for niche markets and associated with high-income consumers. Chewing gum is a cheap product associated with a mass market.

As in other cases of naturally produced goods, the barriers to sustainable development have in part been erected by the industrialised world, much of which pays lip service to fair trade and sustainable sourcing of products.
enlargement of communication with chewing gum manufacturers and assurances on reliability in supplies. The union has worked closely with the University of Quintana Roo to develop a machine that would help the processes of dehydration, through which the moisture is evaporated from the raw resin. There is already a prototype operating and it is expected that three of these machines will be operating during 2005–2006 season. This would enable most of the chicleros working within co-operatives to concentrate on extracting the resin and maintaining quality control. The union is also making arrangements for large quantities of dehydrated resin to be treated in regions of Quintana Roo. However, a complication has arisen, concerning the desirability of further investment in equipment and the formation of a unique consortium would enlarge the opportunities for commercial operations. They had already applied for a government licence under the name of ‘Consorcio Corporativo de Productores y Exportadores de Chicle’ which pays lip service to fair trade and sustainable sourcing of products. However, the union will contribute to the development of a buoyant and robust market for natural chewing gum outside Mexico, which would bring advantages to forest workers, the Mexican state and new groups of consumers interested in a natural product that is traded fairly.

Findings:
Chewing Gum: transnational histories of consumption and production

Another aspect in which the union has advanced relates to fiscal administration. The fiscal regime has been partially reformed in Mexico during the last presidential period. The current federal government under President Fox has launched the ‘Proyecto de Seguridad Social’ (Social Security Initiative), which aims to incorporate all workers in some form of social security. All employers that want to operate legally must obtain the Ceducal Unica de Identidad (CUI), a governmental registered employment code through which employers can claim a contribution from the state for their employees. The state contribution should equal the amount contributed by the employer. All co-operatives and federations have obtained these CUIs as a means to facilitate state investment. The co-operative badly needs central investment of this kind; the marketing strategies of the Plan Piloto Chiclero (PPC) during the year 2002–2003 were funded under a subvention scheme of the Federal Economic Secretary.

Earlier last year (2005) the PPC and the union began a process of merger. Both of them had agreed that the formation of a unique consortium would enlarge the opportunities for commercial operations. They had already applied for a government licence under the name of ‘Consorcio Corporativo de Productores y Exportadores de Chicle’ which pays lip service to fair trade and sustainable sourcing of products. This merger will provide a further boost to development of marketing strategies for natural chewing gum in Mexico. It remains to be seen, however, whether it will contribute to the development of a buoyant and robust market for natural chewing gum outside Mexico, which would bring advantages to forest workers, the Mexican state and new groups of consumers interested in a natural product that is traded fairly.

MESSAGES FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE
1. Sustainable forest products need to be considered within the context of communities, livelihoods and cultures. There are no ‘general rules’ in their development, other than the need for grass-roots involvement from the inception.
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The project team was Michael Redclift, Graham
Frontiers: Histories of Civil Society and the Mexican State

The Role of the Mexican State

By the mid-1980s chicle extraction and marketing had become dominated by multinational companies and American entrepreneurs, to a dependency of the Mexican state. Regulatory measures and product certification served as obstacles to the sustainable production of natural chewing gum.


The ‘boom’ in chicle production, to meet demands for chewing gum from the United States, began during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and reached its peak in the early 1940s. It served as a marker for the transformation of the landscape and ecology of the east and south of the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico, paving the way for new land uses on the tropical frontier. It led to harvesting and production practices which are of contemporary importance, especially for the two protected tropical forest areas (global Biosphere Reserves).


Redclift M. Chewing Gum and the Shadowlands of Consumption, Revista Mexicana del Caribe, Ano VIII, (15), 2003, pp. 159-168.

CULTURES OF CONSUMPTION RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The Cultures of Consumption Programme leads research on the changing natures of consumption in a global context. The Programme investigates the different forms, development and consequences of consumption, past and present. Research projects cover a wide range of subjects, from UK public services to drugs in east Africa (London’s fashionable West End to global consumer politics). The £5 million Cultures of Consumption Programme is the first to bring together experts from the social sciences and the arts and humanities. It is funded by the ESRC and the AHRC.

The aims of the Cultures of Consumption Programme are:

1. To understand the practice, ethics and knowledge of consumption
2. To assess the changing relationship between consumption and citizenship
3. To explore the shifting local, metropolitan and transnational boundaries of cultures of consumption
4. To explore consumption in the domestic sphere
5. To investigate alternative and sustainable consumption
6. To develop an interface between cutting edge academic research and public debate.

For further details take a look at our website www.consume.bbk.ac.uk

Dr Frank Trentmann Programme director Telephone +44 (0)20 7079 0603 Email ftrentmann@bbk.ac.uk

Dr Stefanie Nixon Programme administrator Telephone +44 (0)20 7079 0612 Email snixon@bbk.ac.uk

Chicleros, Cancun, Mexico

Photo: Oscar Forero