

Who are the Zapatistas Resource

The Daily Practice of Building Autonomy: the Zapatista example a participatory workshop

The Daily Practice of Building Autonomy: the Zapatista example (a participatory workshop)

Every day through daily life practices the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico are building a peaceful sustainable alternative. They are living a concrete autonomous experiment in mindful and collectively organised communities. This workshop explores what we understand by Zapatista autonomy and autonomy in our own lives. What practices and inspirations do we share? What does autonomy look like in our everyday lives here in the UK?

Basic aim of the workshop is to share what we know and learn more from each other about

- the Zapatistas – who they are, what they believe, how they do it, and what their experience might mean or teach us for using in our groups, communities. What does my activism/personal life look like when viewed through the lens of *zapatismo*?

Useful materials and tips

- markers, flip chart paper or white board (some way of recording the group's responses), tape or blue tac, chunks of recycled cardboard (cut to A4 size or slightly larger for easy group viewing). Use the latter for writing up the milestones and big events of Zapatista history for creating the Zapatista time-line
- Available on the London Mexico Solidarity Group website are a number of supporting documents to give participants. The simplest is a 2-page hand-out on Zapatista history and autonomy, to more lengthy, academic articles.
- As described in these notes, this workshop runs for one hour, but it can easily be extended by allowing more time for discussion, or adding on any of the options suggested at the end.

Before the workshop

- Find out as much as you can about the group before doing the workshop, and consider as much as you can about the general group dynamics and what the group's knowledge about the topic might be? How will you pitch the topic? Think of the questions you need to ask to draw out the information from the participants. Keep in mind that people come to meetings/events with their own personal pre-occupations and feelings as well as interest in the subject at hand.
- Facilitate the discussion in a way that includes everyone and keep in mind there are no such things as right and wrong answers, only different opinions. Bear in mind that some people might be more comfortable sharing in pairs or small groups rather than the whole group so you might want to use a variety of groupings to create that space for everyone to speak before opening up to a group discussion.

At the workshop

- Think about how you want to start. A welcome and a few introductory remarks outlining what the workshop will cover usually helps people settle in and focus on the topic at hand. If you think it will help, you can write the workshop aim on a flip chart or white board. Explain that the workshop is deliberately structured to draw on and share the group's knowledge. You are not an expert, but a facilitator and your role is to create ways for the group to share and learn from each other.
- If the group is small enough, think about opening up with a go-round of names and an ice breaker question like *'What is one word/sentence about what autonomy means to me?'* or *'What do I hope to get out of the workshop?'* With a large group invite participants to turn to their neighbour(s) and in twos, threes and fours (however the groupings work out) and introduce themselves and respond to an ice breaker question.

Getting into the content

- Next explain we're going to begin by sharing in small groups what we know about the Zapatistas. Tell the groups they have about 10 minutes to share with each all they know about the Zapatistas (if necessary broaden it to social movements in Mexico). The aim to this sharing is help the people feel comfortable with each by talking with one another, to share with one another what they know about the Zapatistas. We'll begin to get a sense for the group's understanding of *Zapatisimo* and *autonomy*.
- When appropriate (about 10 minutes, or when the discussions start to go quiet) invite the small groups back to whole group, and ask them to share the highlights of their small group discussions. What does the group know about the Zapatistas?
 - It's possible that participants' responses will fall into three types. One, a description of the Zapatista movement (milestones and landmark events), 2.

things the Zapatistas do (characteristics or description of the movement), or third, the occasional question about background or context, like 'why do they wear ski masks?' Use opportunities like these to invite the group's knowledge to answer these questions. .

- Record the characteristics of Zapatistas on flip chart paper and the milestones on the chunks of cardboard.

Here is how one workshop group responded to the question 'What do you know about the Zapatistas?'

<u>we titled and wrote on the flip chart</u>	<u>on chunks of cardboard we wrote</u>
Zapatista Movement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • autonomous health projects 	1910-1917 Mexican Revolution, Emiliano Zapata was rebel leader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indigenous social justice movement, Mexico 	1994 - Jan 1st the up-rising, about 12 days of armed conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marcos frequent speaker for the Zapatistas 	later 1994 - the first web page I ever saw was the EZLN's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in Chiapas, Mexico Mayan people 	late 1990s - Women's Revolutionary law - stating men & women's equality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not in favour of any formal political parties 	1996 - the first Intergalactic encounter for humanity and against neo-liberalism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they issue 'declarations' ... from the Jungle Lacandona 	1997 / dec / 22 Acteal massacre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sometimes keep silent 	1999 - Indymedia + WTO protests Seattle
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • still relevant, active? 	2001 - March of the those the colour of the earth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-sufficiency in food and livelihoods - own traditions, practices 	2006 - establishments of the Councils of Good Government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rotating leadership roles, everyone serves, and military command is in the hands of the communities 	2006 - the launch of the 'Other Campaign'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • autonomous territory/autonomy important 	2011 - Zapatistas join Mexican civil society march denouncing narco-violence

Wrap-up this bit of the workshop with a time line

Let the group's feedback run as long as they have energy and information to share or until time runs out. To wrap up invite the placard holders to arrange themselves in chronological order spaced across the room and then invite each person to briefly re-cap the Zapatista milestone they represent. Thank everyone for their contribution and move the discussion towards the next bit.

Use the topics on the flip chart to make the link to the next bit

The next bit of the workshop explores connections between the Zapatista way of living autonomy and how we live autonomy in our everyday lives. Use the topics from the flip chart list to kick off the next round of small group discussion. You could be vague in your directive to discuss, or kick off by giving an example drawing from the list the group generated. *'So autonomous health-care, what does that look like in your life? Alternative medicines, herbs, etc?'* Or *'the power of silence - what have you learned in your experience in organising and activism about the dialogue, negotiations, demands and silence? Where does the power lie?'* The value in this small group work is the exploration, exchange and connection of ideas, there is no right or wrong answer.

Ending / Closing / Beginning

To finish the workshop, invite the small groups back to whole group and depending on the time remaining do some sort of final wrap-up, thank the participants and close. A wrap-up could be inviting reflection on 'What did you learn today?' or 'What did you hear that inspired you?' or 'What do you want to go away and think more about?' 'Comments, reflections on our way of structuring the workshop?'

Additional resources to extend the workshop

2-page hand-out about who are the Zapatistas and a selection of milestones and landmark events

short films by Zapatistas about Zapatistas, using modern media tools to record and disseminate their own story

<http://www.londonmexicosolidarity.org/videos>

Paths through utopia - stories of resistance and autonomy in Europe