



Community-Based Management of Environmental Challenges in Latin America

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COMET-LA communities begin to look into the future

The last phase of COMET-LA has now started, coinciding with the third year of the project. In this phase, communities across the three case studies start looking into the future, by implementing a methodology for scenario-planning created specifically by the project to support community-based natural resource management.

Why is scenario-planning useful?

The process of developing scenarios is thought to be useful for several reasons. The process can help the individuals involved to share and reconcile different knowledges, make explicit different ideas and expectations, and to discuss aspirations over the management of socio-ecological systems. The outcomes of scenario-planning processes, i.e. the resulting scenarios, are useful for stimulating discussions about how the communities and other actors (e.g. NGOs, government and environmental planners) may respond to future challenges. Thinking about the future can also provide a venue that helps people to discuss their goals and interests and negotiate conflicts.

One advantage of using scenario methods is that they stimulate creativity, and allow people to consider new ideas, without being overly conditioned or constrained by the 'status quo'. This allows a more inventive process, openness to new ideas, that is less likely to be constrained by path dependency and existing vested interests. To achieve these benefits a distant time horizon is needed (i.e. beyond 10 years) and careful facilitation is needed. Scenario-planning processes and outputs can take many forms, but all involve identifying external drivers of change (including but not limited to climate change), considering how these may affect the system of concern, in order to generate of several 'scenarios' that represent possible futures. These scenarios can then be used to help to explore possible 'response options' that may allow people to achieve their goals given these changes. In the case of COMET-LA, we hope the scenario-planning process will assist communities to plan resilience in the face of climate change.

How are scenarios being generated in COMET-LA?

This final phase of the project builds on the earlier work of the project in each of the three COMET-LA countries, i.e. the initial characterisation of the social-ecological systems using the Ostromian framework, and the structural analysis of key variables defining these systems. Communities have now started considering how the current system for governing and managing the natural resource in question can respond to potential changes in the future through the construction of plausible scenarios in an exploratory way. The idea is to help communities prepare for global environmental change and to illustrate a route from existing arrangements to robust strategies in the future.

In COMET-LA we are using, in a participatory way, a structured technique called "morphological analysis" in order to create narratives that represent different plausible scenarios. Morphological analysis promotes

What are 'scenarios'?

A scenario is a coherent, internally consistent, and plausible description of a possible future state (including both social and natural aspects). It is not a forecast; rather, each scenario is one alternative image of how the future can unfold.



a systematic exploration of how different external drivers of change can affect the socio-ecological systems. This allows the communities to generate alternative plausible visions of the future, guided by 'archetypes' to ensure these visions encompass a wide range of possible futures.

The scenario-planning work of COMET-LA occurs in four stages; (1) explore how drivers of future change may influence the socio-ecological system, (2) construct alternative future scenarios using archetypes, (3) identify response options (useful actions to achieve goals in the face of future change), and (4) discuss the implications of these response options for future plans and sustainable governance.

First results

Communities across all three COMET-LA case studies have now completed the stages of the scenario thinking process, and a series of specific workshops have already taken place.

Thinking about the future has not always been easy, but in all three cases, the communities have reacted enthusiastically to the opportunity to think beyond day-to-day concerns. The 'morphological analysis' can be onerous but it is considered helpful, as carrying this out is helping stakeholders to think more holistically (i.e. about the connections between issues), particularly in relation to how external factors can affect their community in the future.

We are also encountering some challenges – i.e there is perhaps a common tendency to think of 'all good' or 'all bad' visions, rather than more realistic but nuanced scenarios, but the experiences of the partners are generating interesting ideas about how to overcome these challenges. Thus, we hope the experiences of COMET-LA will give useful insights as to methods that will be useful for other communities who would like to use scenario-planning to help plan in the face of change.

COMET-LA partners have looked at response options that can help communities achieve their goals under changing conditions in the future. Together, COMET-LA researchers and communities have tried to find 'robust' strategies that will increase community resilience to future changes and shocks.

Finally, during the visit of COMET-LA's international team in July, communities have reflected on the implications of the outputs of the scenario thinking process for the government system. For more information on COMET-LA's scenario work, contact cometla_jhi@hutton.ac.uk or visit www.comet-la.eu.



Protagonists of COMET-LA

Some of the protagonists in the COMET-LA project living in the three case study areas wished to express their opinion on the project and on their view of the environment in their areas. Please find below some extracts from these interviews.

“UZACHI and Comaltepec have done a lot for forest management in Oaxaca”

Fernando Mondragón, member of GEOCONSERVACIÓN and CORENCHI (México)

Q: How do you rate the COMET-LA project in Comaltepec?

A: Comaltepec is an example of forest management. UZACHI and Comaltepec have done a lot for forest management in Oaxaca and CORENCHI (the Natural Resources Committee of the Upper Chinantla) turns to them when they are analysing success stories in this area. Those of us who work at a local level are often unable to process the data, and this is something that COMET-LA is doing. It is important to assess and document the case under analysis, like COMET-LA does, in order to be able to study and evaluate the process itself, with its strengths, weaknesses and threats.



“The common use of resources is a good system”

Laura Hernández López, community member of Comaltepec



Q: How do you rate the COMET-LA project in Comaltepec?

A: I think it is very interesting. Comaltepec has to open up to this kind of initiative so that it can share experiences with people from other places.

We have information about our own community but we don't know how to analyse it in order to identify the things that affect us. If we don't embrace these initiatives, we will be left completely on our own. Besides, other people can offer different views on things, which can be very enriching for us.

Sometimes I have doubts about the benefits of the common use of resources, but when I see other real-life situations (such as the Argentine case in the project) that don't have this common use system and are trying to implement it, I see that we are on the right track and that it is indeed a good system.

It remains to be seen what we can do to ensure that our way of life does not affect future generations here, we cannot jeopardise our children's future. I have taken part in the workshops for the sake of my two children and the future that awaits them. I really hope we can achieve something important for everyone with this project, and that we can live to see the results.

Q: How do you see the future of the environment in Comaltepec?

A: Regardless of the forest being managed well, there are other areas in which we have failed to find the way to work as successfully. We are sustainably managing the forest because we receive support, but what would happen if we didn't receive this backing? I think the problem is that people are not aware of this issue, and that is why I feel it is essential to focus on children.

“AMDA and Bajo Calima have common problems and we need to work together to solve them”

David Celorio, co-researcher of the Community Council (CC) of Upper and Middle Dagua (AMDA)



Q: How do you assess your participation in the COMET-LA project?

A: The level of participation has been excellent so far. I have been collaborating as a co-researcher from the start and it is proving to be a very positive experience. I feel passionate about everything to do with the conservation of natural resources, that is why I chose to take part in the COMET project. I think the most positive thing has been to take the necessary steps and transects to discover and compile the elements needed for our research. Also, the tutors, particularly Bryan (Avendaño) and César (Ortiz), have made our work a lot easier.

Q: How do you see the state of the environment in AMDA?

A: You have to get “stuck in” because there are resources that are disappearing and we need to see how we can get them back. For example, there used to be a wealth of flora and fauna that simply does not exist any more. Also, the water resources are dwindling at an alarming rate and we have to stop them disappearing forever.

Q: How is the collaboration between the Community Councils working for COMET-LA?

A: I feel that this exchange of ideas between the Upper and Middle Dagua council and the Bajo Clima council is very important, as we have common problems and we have to work together to try and solve them.

“The most positive thing about the COMET-LA project is all the learning it can bring to the community”

Elisabeth Alfonso Rincón, member of FUNDAPAV and

Coordinator of the COMET-LA drawing competition in the Community Councils

Q: How do you assess your participation in the COMET-LA project?

A: FUNDAPAV’s participation in the COMET-LA project is proving to be very positive, as we are accompanying the Councils in the field work. We suggested that co-researchers join the project and we are supporting them, but at the same time allowing them to carry out their own activities.



The most positive thing about the COMET-LA project is all the learning it can bring to the community and the exchange of knowledge between countries and cultures. Even so, one obstacle we have come across is language, because English sometimes makes it difficult to achieve direct communication.

Q: What was the drawing competition like in the Community Councils?

A: The competition was a really lovely experience, particularly seeing how much talent the children from rural areas have, and seeing the children themselves also realise they had that talent and for them to use it for all to see. It was also quite special to see the children realise that, even though they live in a rather remote territory, children in other countries do the same things as them.

“The scientists involved in the project listen carefully to the residents and let us voice our concerns. We feel they are with us, looking out for us, and it gives us hope”

Jorge Alberto Carballo, neighbour of the Bahía Blanca estuary and director of Hola Pehuen TV

Q: How do you rate the work of the COMET project in Argentina?

A: Our television programme HOLA PEHUEN! started out in 2009 and its origins were related to a forest fire in the heart of our precious town of Pehuen-Có. The cause of the fire was never established for certain, but I remember the unusual heat we felt at a time of the year in which we never usually have such high temperatures. From that moment on, and given the magnitude of the incident and its aftermath, I made the decision to search for an alternative to help raise the residents' awareness and to try and prevent this type of situation from happening again.



We have come a long way. We have seen how the whole community has gradually got involved and made a commitment to the environment and to the Fire Brigade, to help improve their operational and professional performance, all of which gives us great satisfaction and peace of mind.

My own property was very close to the coast, so I began to use television to observe and research the behaviour of coastal erosion, which was growing more and more serious, as well as other environmental issues in the area.

I have to say I can only award the COMET-LA project a highly positive evaluation, as the body of scientists involved in the project listen carefully to the residents and allow us to express our observations and concerns, which makes us feel that they are with us, looking out for us, and it gives us hope that they will get results that may be significant for the decision-makers in our region. These decisions will enable us to be better prepared to deal with climate change, to which all of us are witness.

Here, once again, I must stress the opportunity offered to us by HOLA PEHUEN! to give the COMET-LA project the publicity it deserves.

Q: How do you see the future of the environment in the Bahía Blanca estuary?

A: As a resident of this particular area, I am very alarmed and worried about the lack of information coming from the major refinery companies, petrochemical plants and industries that have been located here for almost 30 years. These companies do not inform the residents about the levels of contamination they produce, or how they manage their contaminating elements or the environmental safety measures they have in place.

In one of our programmes, a skin specialist reported that the number of cases of skin cancer and other pathologies related to respiratory problems had increased threefold in recent years.

Most of the people living here no longer eat fish from the estuary as we believe they have heavy metals such as mercury inside them.

A very recent case, and one which is getting a lot of attention, is the appearance of an oyster known as the Pacific cupped oyster, which unbelievably showed up on our coast, but seeing as we know they filter a lot of water when feeding and build up toxic elements, they are not recommended for human consumption.

Also, the movement associated with the boats coming into the port, the level of industrial waste and the failure to treat urban waste before being thrown into the sea are cause for even greater concern.

Consequently, I believe that the future of the environment in the Bahía Blanca estuary is highly dangerous and harmful for the people living in this region.

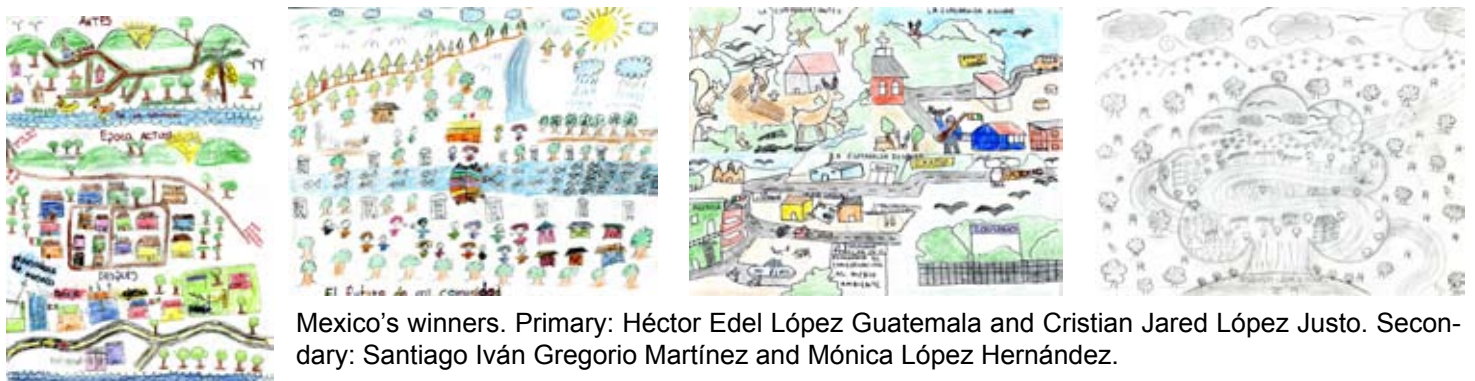
The COMET-LA youth paint the future

In 2013, COMET-LA organised a children's drawing competition in the three case studies, which turned out to be very popular. The aim of this competition was to involve children and young people in the project, gathering information about their vision of the future and what they expected to happen in their communities. In Mexico and Colombia the competition was held in the months of March to June 2013. In Argentina, the competition was not judged until December of that year, so the awards were not handed out in that country until the international project team's visit in July 2014.

The winning drawings have been published in COMET-LA's 2014 calendar. Below you will find a compilation of the winners' artistic views of the future.



Colombia's winners. Primary: Luz Karina Hernández Caicedo and Erika Katherine Patiño. Secondary: Danna Fernanda Miranda y Valerin Dayana Rentarí.



Mexico's winners. Primary: Héctor Edel López Guatemala and Cristian Jared López Justo. Secondary: Santiago Iván Gregorio Martínez and Mónica López Hernández.



Argentina's winners. Primary: Nora Belén Martino, in Bahía Blanca, Cindy López Etchard, in Villa del Mar, and Joaquín Bellei, in Pehuen Co.

COMET-LA photography competition

Given the success of the drawing competition among the younger members of society, we decided to offer a new contest in 2014, this time focusing on photography and with no age restrictions. The purpose was to raise awareness in the population about the importance of caring for the environment and remembering the project phases. So the participants were asked to send in photographs related to the following three topics: the characteristics of their socio-ecological system; the key factors and problems in those systems; and the community's good practices in dealing with them.

The photographs that were entered in the contest were displayed during the COMET-LA international team's visit to Comaltepec, Buenaventura and Bahía Blanca at the end of June and beginning of July, dates on which the names of the finalists and winners were revealed and the corresponding prizes awarded.

The winning photographs (and the authors' names) will be exhibited in Mexico during COMET-LA's final policy conference, which will be held at the end of 2014.

Below you can see the photographs that won first prize in each country.



Martín R. Sotelo, winner in Argentina. Pictures: "Bioengineer", "Rubbish on the beach" y "Animals rescue"



María Eugenia Moreno, winner in Colombia. Pictures: "Water sources, our community's pride and paradise"; "Landslides", and "Nature's recovery as a source of oxygen for our community"



Judith Olivera, winner in México. Pictures: "Uses and customs in Comaltepec", "Uncontrolled use of the forest" and "Forest surveillance and protection"



INTERNATIONAL DISSEMINATION OF COMET-LA

23 European and Latin American entities have joined COMET-LA's Stakeholders Board

COMET-LA believes it is essential to establish a dialogue with other local, national and international agents in order to improve institutional permeability, acceptance and diffusion of the project results, to promote the actors' negotiation capacities and to make the results more relevant. For this reason, the Spanish Committee of the IUCN is promoting a Stakeholders Board, whose members represent a range of organisations, institutions and decision-makers with an interest in natural resources management at different levels: local case-study agents, national agents from participating countries, and international intermediary members from the "learning arena". This panel is backing COMET-LA's activities, sharing the members' experience in community-based or participatory management of natural resources and helping to ensure that the project results are useful in other socio-ecological systems. Furthermore, different queries are being conveyed to the Stakeholders Board regarding the project, its results and its replicability in other areas or countries.

23 entities have already joined, including different national agents from COMET-LA participating countries. In Mexico, the Mexican Government Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, the University of Guadalajara Institute for the Environment and Human Communities, the Chinantla Regional Environmental Fund and *Reforestamos México* have all come on board. In Colombia, participants include the Intercultural Studies Centre at the Cali division of the Javeriana University, the SENA (National Learning Service) Fishing Centre, the Pacific Social Agri-Environmental Foundation (FUNDAPAV), the Alexander Von Humboldt Biological Resources Research Institute, and the General Directorate for Climate Change at the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development. Lastly, in Argentina, the Environment and Natural Resources Foundation, the *Hola Pehuen!* television programme and the Natural Patagonia Foundation have all joined the project.

The Stakeholders Board means that the COMET-LA project is reaching other countries, through Bolivian national agents, such as the Environmental Defence League; German agents, with the addition of the Institute for Socio-economics at the Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research; and six Spanish entities that are members of the Spanish Committee of the IUCN, the *Aula del Mar* aquarium museum in Malaga, the University Extension and Environmental Outreach Centre in Galicia, the Oxígeno, Mare Terra and Catalunya La Pedrera Foundations, and Malaga City Council.

The project has also caught the attention of international intermediaries such as the ICCAS Consortium and the IUCN head offices in Switzerland and its regional offices in Mesoamerica and the Caribbean. For further information, please contact comite@iucn.es or visit www.comet-la.eu

COMET-LA shares experiences and lessons learned in FAO Family Farmer Newsletter



To promote family farming means to stimulate economic development in the region and fight against hunger and poverty. For that reason, the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, FAO RLC, publishes the Family Farming Newsletter for Latin America and the Caribbean, a quarterly publication that seeks to disseminate information on family farms through interviews systematization of good practices and presentation of various information about the reality of family farming in the region. The last issue of the newsletter shows the COMET-LA project as an example of good practice.

To read the Family Farming Newsletter, please click on the picture.



INTERNATIONAL DISSEMINATION OF COMET-LA

COMET-LA presents its outcomes in the Workshop Research meets diplomacy: *Europe as a Global Actor*

COMET-LA was invited to be part of the debate on the role of *Europe as a global actor*. The workshop, organised by the European Commission and FLASH-IT project, was hosted in Brussels on 5th June. It gathered scientists and policy makers to present the research developed with EU support in different regional areas, such as the Mediterranean, Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific and to analyse the main future research and policy challenges.

COMET-LA participated in the session: The EU's relations with the wider world - sustainable governance of natural resources in the framework of EU-LAC relations. The Project Coordinator, María del Mar Delgado, highlighted the outstanding stock of natural resources of Latin America and the role they play in the global Planet equilibrium and in addressing global challenges such as climate change, food production, CO2 sequestration, water harvesting, etc.



She also underlined the need of new governance models that recognise the role that local communities, as first direct managers of natural resources, play and can play in halting degradation and fostering sustainable management models. However, these communities face important dilemmas like preserving natural resources or extracting them to solve their household needs. **The lack of recognition of environmental costs makes to pay the cost of sustainability to those who offer, and not to those that demand and enjoy it!**

Special Session on Trade-off and synergies: what do we learn from community-based management of environmental challenges? In the 2014 Resilience Conference, Montpellier, France 4-8 May

COMET-LA together with the other 4 projects (COBRA, ECOA-DAPT, CiVi.net, y COMBIOSERVE) funded by the EC in the same call have organized a Joint Session at the *Resilience Conference 2014, Resilience and Development: Mobilizing for Transformation*. The conference organized by the "French node" of the Resilience Alliance network (CIRAD - CNRS - IRSTEA - INRA), Agropolis International and their partners of the campus of Montpellier, has gathered almost 1000 scientists, academics and practitioners, creating a vivid arena for exchanges and discussions around the challenges of resilience and development in the actual context of global change.



The joint session attracted the interest of many participants and represented a unique opportunity to disseminate the results and methodologies used by the 5 projects and to explore new opportunities of strengthening collaborations among them.



INTERNATIONAL DISSEMINATION OF COMET-LA

COMET-LA invited to participate in the *Strategic Policy Dialogue between countries of both shores of the Mediterranean*

The experience of COMET-LA in North-South cooperation in research was presented in an event in the framework of the *Strategic Policy Dialogue between countries of both shores of the Mediterranean* hosted by the French Ministry of Education and Research, the 11th of June in Paris. This 5+5 policy dialogue gathers to the following countries: Spain, France, Italy, Malta and Portugal as European partners, and Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania and Libya as African ones.

COMET-LA Project Coordinator, María del Mar Delgado, presented the experience of joint collaboration between researchers and local communities of European and Latin American countries and the learnt lessons that could be useful to foster the research cooperation between the North-South Mediterranean countries. Research institution representatives from the different countries also explored the collaboration options in Horizon 2020.

The number of scientific articles about COMET-LA continues to increase

The publication of scientific articles about the project continues. To date, at least 11 papers have been published in a range of specialist publications, such as "AGER Journal of Depopulation and Rural Development Studies", "Cuadernos de desarrollo rural", "Ocean & Coastal Management" and "Weather and Forecasting". Furthermore, other articles are in the pipeline for publications such as "Ecology and Society", "Journal of Institutional Economics" and "Habitat International".

Among the most recent examples is an article written by the project's Argentine team, focusing on the increase in coastal erosion, particularly on the role of local institutions and social capital in coastal management. [Read article.](#)

The scientific journal REDESMA publishes a special edition on the COMET-LA project

The REDESMA [Environment and Sustainable Development Network] journal is a quarterly scientific online publication that is distributed to over 150,000 subscribers in America and Europe, including representatives of public and private entities, NGOs, international cooperation organisations, academic institutions and grassroots organisations. Thanks to an invitation from José Blanes, member of the project's Advisory Board and REDESMA editor, the COMET-LA project has produced a special edition. It includes ten articles on climate change and socio-ecological systems and it will be available soon both on the [REDESMA](#) and [COMET-LA](#) websites.

This edition will also include articles about projects that have been approved by the European Commission in the same funding area: COBRA, COMBIOSERVE, EcoAdapt and Civi.Net.

COMET-LA partners will attend the *Ecosystem Services Partnership Conference*

Several COMET-LA partners will attend the *Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP) Conference*, which will be held in San José, Costa Rica, in September 2014. The ESP is a worldwide network to enhance the science and practical application of ecosystem services assessment.

COMET-LA's participation is linked to the final conference of the CiVi.net, COMBIOSERVE and COBRA initiatives, which are backed by ECO-ADAPT. These three European Commission projects come under the same funding area as COMET and they deal with the challenges of community-based management. The event will be a great opportunity to share experiences and results with them and the scientific community.

OTHER NEWS OF THE PROJECT

Field work of the COMET-LA team in Latin America 2014

COMET-LA's international team visited several study cases during the months of June and July, in order to do the follow-up of the project in its final stage: building future scenarios. Among other activities, several workshops and meetings were held with internal and external stakeholders in each of the communities in order to discuss how to face those future scenarios. We also awarded prizes of the photo competition and we also talked to the media. We recorded a special programme on the project for the indigenous radio "XEGLO, la Voz de la Sierra Juárez" (XEGLO, Sierra Juárez's voice), with 4 groups of interviews: one on the general progress of the project and one per study case. This is the third special programme this radio records on us, and it broadcasts the programme in over 20 community radios in the State of Oaxaca.

Must be pointed out that Comaltepec and Communities Councils representatives were met with Bahía Blanca Stakeholders by means of this field work. Both representatives shared their experiences in their respective Countries and expressed their willing to continue working together after the end of the project activities. In Argentina, where the community tradition is not as strong as it is in México and Colombia, was very encouraging to learn about these experiences in order to continue the works forward a better social cohesion. All local communities share their will to continue the dynamics open thanks to COMET-LA Network.

A complete list of the activities carried out is available in our [on-line field log](#).

Comaltepec creates the website of its community

The community of Comaltepec, supported by UNAM and the association "Estudios Rurales y Asesoría Campesina" ERA, both members of COMET-LA, has launched its website. The internet page has been conceived and designed by the community in order to disseminate, mainly among people living outside Comaltepec, the decisions taken within the community and systematize those activities developed in the COMET-LA project framework. The website shall contribute to the development of COMET-LA learning arena encouraging the dissemination of good practices and lessons learned in the field of forest management and land use. Visit the Comaltepec website on this link.



COMET-LA attracts the attention of the German press

Special correspondents in Brussels from the German magazine Deutsche Welle interviewed COMET-LA Project Coordinator, María del Mar Delgado, on the future of community-based management of natural resources in Latin America. The magazine wrote a joint article about the European projects tackling this subject. [Read article](#).

OTHER NEWS OF THE PROJECT

The COMET-LA international team held its annual coordination meeting in Faro



The COMET-LA partners met in Faro, Portugal, from 12 to 14 February to discover and discuss the methodology for the final phase of the project: the construction of future scenarios. The James Hutton Institute drew up an initial proposal on this matter, which provided the basis for discussion on how to develop the stages of this phase in each case study. Likewise, the progress made in the phases of socio-ecological systems characterisation and prospective structural analysis, and the actions to be developed as part of the project in 2014 were planned.

FINAL POLICY CONFERENCE

COMET-LA will present its results on 10 and 11 November at the project's Final Policy Conference

The COMET-LA Final Policy Conference will be held on the 10th and 11th of November at the Ignacio Chávez Seminar Department of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. During the conference, the research results will be presented to managers and those in charge of preparing public natural resource management policies; the methodologies and lessons learned in the different phases of the project will be shared; and the models of sustainable governance arising from the project, regarding forest management and land use, coastal and marine management, biodiversity and water resources management, will be disseminated.

The needs to set up shared decision-making bodies among nature resources users and public policies managers or, to improve community management competitiveness will also be topics to deal with during this event.

Apart from the sessions dealing with the project, Leticia Merino, President of the IASC (International Association for the Study of the Commons) and José Sarukhán, President of the CONABIO (National Commission for Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity in Mexico) will speak about the Mexican experience in the community-based management of environmental challenges and the importance of that management in public policies.

As a parallel event, there will be a workshop to agree on the fundamental aspects of a global motion on the governance of natural resources, which will be presented at the next IUCN World Conservation Congress (Hawaii, 2016). The agreements reached to that effect in this Conference will go on to be discussed at the IUCN international forums, such as the World Parks Congress 2014 or the IUCN regional forums, in order to join forces with other international actors working on this same subject.