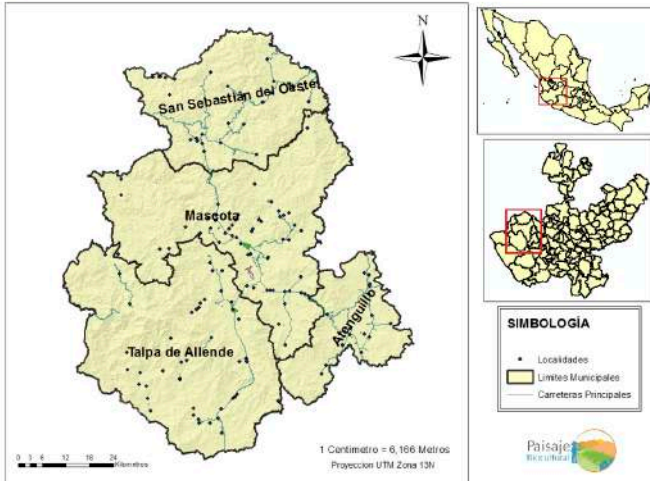


Institutionalisation of the RNP model abroad: Mexico

MAPA DE UBICACION DEL PAISAJE BIOCULTURAL



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The Mexican National Commission for Protected Nature Areas (CONANP) has expressed its wish to adapt the French RNP (Regional Nature Parks) model to the Mexican context by setting up a pilot project in the Ameca River basin.

Indeed, under the Strategic Plan for Biological Diversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi targets, the country faces the **need to define new preservation patterns**, distinct from the established protected areas which are meeting growing problems of social acceptability, in order to widen the extent of its territory devoted to the preservation of its various ecosystems.

The Auvergne Volcanoes Regional Nature Park carried out a mission in 2012 on behalf of the French Federation of Regional Nature Parks, at the request of the French Development Agency (AFD). This identified the local players and determined the conditions which would make the RNP model's adoption possible in Mexico.

Further to the findings of that mission, the French Fund for the World Environment (FFEM), the AFD and the Mexican Government validated the mounting of a three-year project (2013-2015) entitled "protection of the biodiversity and ecosystems of the Ameca-Manantlán corridor". The aim of the project is **twofold**: firstly **the creation of an RNP pilot project** and secondly the conduct of an **enquiry on how to incorporate the regulations governing these protected areas into the national laws**. The objective of the project is to enhance sustainable management and conservation of natural resources in Mexico as well as biological connectedness, through the actuation of innovative mechanisms for concerted territorial management and of innovative instruments for financing conservation. The project includes the technical support of the Parks Federation, in particular the Auvergne Volcanoes RNP.

TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION

Mexico is a federal republic. The territory is made up of 32 independent federal entities (the States) including one Federal District. Each state is in turn divided into municipalities whereas the Federal District is divided into delegations. In all, Mexico has 2445 municipalities and 16 delegations of the FD.

ORIGIN

Under a scheme of co-operation with the French Development Agency, Mexico through the CONANP is considering the possibility of adapting the RNP model to the national context. In fact the country seeks to define new preservation patterns differing from the conventional models. However, within the system of traditional Areas under state jurisdiction, Mexico has no **model of conservation landscapes**. This **conservation "vacuum"** has been seen as an opportunity to introduce a territorial management concept allowing optimisation of the interaction between nature,

culture and society, and aimed at long-term sustainability of conservation efforts.

Following a Mexican delegation's mission to France in 2011, chiefly involving a visit to the Auvergne Volcanoes RNP, the RNP model was considered the most viable for application in the local context. The **voluntary nature** of the approach, the importance attached to **consultation** between players and the implicit idea of **economic development** presented a significant focus of interest for transposition of the RNP model.

Thus, since 2012 a territorial management pilot project covered by the RNP model and an analysis of institutional feasibility concerning the adaptation of the model from a legal, political and institutional standpoint are proceeding with the support of the AFD and the FFEM.

The State of Jalisco appeared a suitable territory for the pilot project, owing to criteria of biological wealth and to the number of support schemes and players already present in the area. Environmental and social criteria were also taken into account in defining the area intended for the pilot project. The territory contemplated for the pilot project concerns the zone known as the "core" of the Sierra Occidentale de Jalisco, corresponding to the highest basin, where landscape, localities and socio-economic forces are the most representative of Jalisco State, which should allow testing of the model's capacity for replication and systematisation.

Following a study, the name under discussion for the pilot project is **Bio-cultural Landscape (Paisaje bio-cultural)**. The main idea intended to be conveyed is that of a **voluntary approach based on consensus between different players**. Moreover, it was important for this category not to be identified with the restrictiveness inherent in the conventional categories of protected areas; the word "Park" was therefore rejected. Finally, there is also an effort to turn to account nature-conscious and environmentally friendly ancestral skills. The name is not yet settled; some criticise it for not adequately reflecting the idea of sustainable development.

The model chosen is meant to "represent a natural and landscape entity embedded in the assertion of a strong territorial identity" and to be sustained **voluntarily at the level of the municipalities** alongside the system of protected areas managed at the national level. A tentative definition of the bio-cultural landscape is given as "a territory sharing distinctive landscape and identity, managed under a unified territorial management system allowing economic development to be promoted through the protection and optimisation of nature and local culture. Its territorial management will be defined and adopted on a voluntary basis by the municipal and state governments and the representative bodies of social groups involved. This project will be formalised under a "constitutive agreement" (charter)"¹.

LESSON TO BE LEARNED

The French RNP model forms a worthwhile alternative to the traditional categories of protected areas in certain contexts. It allows emphasis to be placed on sustainable economic development and environmental protection within a territory having noteworthy natural and heritage features.

The initiative to create a bio-cultural landscape is voluntarily sustained by the municipalities and formalised by the Constitutive Agreement.

ESTABLISHMENT PROCESS

Two components are developed concurrently: firstly the setting up of a pilot project for a bio-cultural landscape and secondly the feasibility study on institutionalisation of this model. **Several exchange visits** between the project's Mexican stakeholders and the French Nature Parks have

¹ *Análisis del panorama institucional mexicano para determinar la pertinencia y factibilidad de adoptar y adaptar la figura de Parque Natural Regional al contexto mexicano, como nuevo instrumento de gestión del territorio para la conservación de los ecosistemas naturales, su biodiversidad y sus valores culturales*, The Nature Conservancy, Dec 2012

taken place since 2011 in connection with this project.

The pilot project for a bio-cultural landscape was approved for funding by the FFEM in 2012 and launched as from July 2014. Activities have consisted particularly in breaking ground: liaison with the local players, the municipal governments, other players, producers, etc., while the institutional analysis has been proceeding since 2012.

a) Institutional analysis

- Legal and institutional analysis

The first part of this phase involved a review of the lessons learned from French experience, by studying the functioning of the RNP model in France, the Federation's specific role and the way in which the apparatus could be legally adapted to Mexico with the existing institutions.

In Mexico, protected areas are regulated by the **LEGEEPA** (General Law of Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection). The institutionalisation project is looking into the **possibility of reforming this law** to have a new category of protected area recognised under it. A proposal to reform the law has been drawn up, and is to be the subject of consultation in the ambit of the project before its official validation and presentation to the authorities. However, an anticipatory consensus must be achieved regarding the status of the future bio-cultural landscapes: new category of protected area or other form. If it is decided not to regard this model as a protected natural area, however, it will effectively be **outside the jurisdiction of the CONANP** which is the present lead agency for the project.

- Adoption of a similar instrument to the "Park badge"

The use of a badging system similar to the **Park badge** in France was considered to be one of the key factors for the success of the project in the Mexican context. Indeed, the badge is perceived as an instrument which will **encourage voluntary commitment** to the project. Recognition of sustainability in the products, services and traditional skills would be one of the principal benefits of the bio-cultural landscapes.

However, securing certifications is a complex and costly process in Mexico. Furthermore, the government institutions (such as the CONANP) are not empowered to grant badges. An analysis is therefore in hand to determine a **distinctive sign of conferment** of the sustainability criteria on products and services of a given territory.

b) Setting up the bio-cultural landscape pilot project

The process of implementing the pilot project is **led by the CONANP** as the national institution responsible for protected areas and preserving the natural heritage over the territory, the **CONAFOR** (National Forestry Commission) and the State of Jalisco via the SEMADET (Secretariat for Environment and Territorial Development).

The first stage of the pilot project consists in mapping the players and interventions as well as in building relations with the local populations, the authorities at various levels (municipalities, State of Jalisco), and the various socio-occupational players. The pilot project aims at a participative approach and currently concerns **three municipalities** and a small cordillera belonging to a **fourth municipality**.

As from July 2015, the project team wishes to drive the organisation of thematic round tables for analysing the conditions: opportunities, obstacles, and the aspirations of the territory, and to start laying down guidelines for each area of interest: tourism, forestry, forest management... while aiming at harmonisation of the whole. This work should lead to the definition of a **territorial charter**. The project envisages the possibility of arriving at a proposal for a territorial charter within three years.

LESSON TO BE LEARNED

Conducting the pilot project and the institutional analysis in tandem provides insight into the

project's actual functioning, and a test of its relevance since there is constant feedback of information between the analysis and the proving-ground.

CHARTER

The scheme of management to be discussed contemplates the introduction of a **Territorial Management Agreement**, that is a contract defining the plan for protection and development of the bio-cultural landscape over a **maximum period of 15 years**. It would determine the objectives, the strategies and the programmes to be implemented for the protection, optimisation and development of the bio-cultural landscape. This **voluntarily accepted agreement** would be **drafted and signed by the municipalities** involved, with the support of other members of a bio-cultural landscape **promotion group** validated by the CONANP.

The Territorial Management Agreement, if validated, would result in the issuance of a **Secretarial Founding Agreement**, a legal instrument of creation issued by the **Head of the SEMARNAT** (Secretariat for Environment and Natural Resources). This agreement would signify the validation of the Territorial Management Agreement by a Federation (with functions and a role like the Federation of French Regional Nature Parks - FRNPF), and the creation of the bio-cultural landscape for a period of **15 years**, renewable through the submission of a new Territorial Management Agreement. The CONANP would perform the functions of supervising compliance with the conditions laid down in the Territorial Management Agreement.

LESSON TO BE LEARNED

Finding the right legal framework and the proper institutions to sustain the project is a challenge. In Mexico, the choice was made to rely on the existing framework and structures to sustain the project locally.

The Management Agreement is for a term corresponding to two local government mandates so as to permit its continuity through time.

ACCEPTANCE BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND POPULATIONS

The innovative character of this move, the first of its kind in Mexico, has made its appropriation and acceptance by the public arduous. At the beginning there was some public resistance due to **identification of this model with the national protected areas categories**, which convey an idea of restrictions on productive activities in particular. A plan to create a Protected Natural Area in the region designated at present for the conservation landscape pilot project thus met with the refusal of the territory's residents and economic players, particularly the forestry sector. This sector is strongly present in the zone, and its acceptance or refusal is of considerable importance, particularly considering its very extensive land ownership.

However, the solid reliance of the process on **dialogue and participation** by the different players has made it possible to reduce fears. The French RNP model, allowing conservation activities to be pursued at the same time as fostering the economic development of its territory, favoured public support for the project.

In addition, the different players in the territory are aware of the project's attractiveness, particularly for the tourist activities developing in the zone. The local authorities are receptive to this proposal embracing the dimensions of economic and social development.

LESSON TO BE LEARNED

It is crucially important how communication about the project to create a bio-cultural landscape is managed. The population and the socio-occupational players need to have their fears about the restrictiveness of the project dispelled, and to be reassured about the opportunities for

development and visibility which the project can afford them. The inclusion of the different players in a participative approach is also a factor of success.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis and the discussions on the model, the structure, the institutional scheme and the legislative reforms have been proceeding since 2012. If the idea is validated, the bio-cultural landscapes may present themselves as **protected natural areas of municipal interest, subject to validation at the central level**. The governments of the federated entities would also perform an essential role and be involved in all the agencies as well as in the financing of the bio-cultural landscapes.

To carry on the bio-cultural landscape project, it is envisaged that a **promotion group**, a composite official and social structure, be tasked to promote the necessary studies, agreements and financing for the establishment of a bio-cultural landscape.

Moreover, the creation of operating organs for a bio-cultural landscape and the landscapes complex is planned by stages. Initially it is proposed that the governance of the bio-cultural landscapes be ensured by a **governance body**, a **management body** and a **consultative body**. Subsequently, once a critical mass of bio-cultural landscapes has been attained, the management bodies can incorporate an agency for national co-ordination which will assist the creation, management and promotion of these areas.

The **decentralised public municipal or inter-municipal organs**, whose creation is permitted by the Mexican legal framework for managing a specific service or entity, are contemplated as a good option for **governance of the bio-cultural landscapes**.

It is also envisaged that a **federation of bio-cultural landscapes** would act as a national co-ordinating agency tasked to advance the common interests of the bio-cultural landscapes, to co-ordinate common actions, to foster exchange of experience and assist communication to the public.

The bio-cultural landscapes might be financed through a **model of participative investment** between the different players of the federal public sector, the states and the municipalities.

In the course of June 2015, a series of workshops should take place, intended to obtain feedback from the different local players, the organisations of civil society, the governmental stakeholders and the various socio-occupational groups on the results of the institutional and legal analysis.

LESSON TO BE LEARNED

The model examined contemplates the phased creation of structures with a composite official and social makeup to sustain the project at the municipal or inter-municipal level, at the level of the States and at the central level, under the overall co-ordination of a federation with very similar assignments to those of the FRNPF.

MAIN INCENTIVES AND OBSTACLES

One of the chief difficulties identified is the **lack of political continuity** reflected by a change in the priorities and strategies. When environment is not the established government's main priority, lack of institutional support is liable to impede this type of initiative.

Apart from the political support, the short-lived nature of the administrations may also affect the execution of projects in the long term. The municipal teams are only in place for a term of 3-4 years, and the formative periods of a bio-cultural landscape project would be liable to interruption by elections or changes of administration. Hence the importance of establishing a **decentralised inter-municipal body** to sustain the project regardless of changes in the political teams.

From another angle, the opportunities for developing this new approach are many, since there is recognition in the Mexican environmental sector of the **need to establish a scheme of territorial management** interlinking **sustainable economic development, preservation of biodiversity and conservation of natural resources**. This model can help make landscape management more sustainable.

OUTCOME OF THE PROCESS

The process is still in hand, but proposals on the model and its institutional support are formulated and expected to undergo discussion before being validated and adopted. If the option of making bio-cultural landscapes a new category of protected areas is taken, the outcome of the process should permit a **reform of the LEGEEPA and the creation of agencies within the governmental structures already in existence**.

CONCLUSIONS

Institutionalisation of the model is envisaged by adapting an existing law and by creating organs within the established state structures. It should be noted that the institutional framework permits the creation of decentralised municipal or inter-municipal bodies with specific assignments. This

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offers worthwhile prospects for the governance of the project at local level. The bio-cultural landscapes will be recognised as such at the level of the State by the Secretariat for Environment. A national co-ordinating agency would be put in place, with a very similar role to the FRNPF.

The project to create a bio-cultural landscape is led by the state organ in charge of protected areas, on a participative pattern. Backing at the federal level is seen as a way of guaranteeing the project's replicability, while the participative approach is the absolute precondition for its success. It is founded on the principle of a voluntary approach by the local players who consider themselves concerned by a territorial project. The voluntary approach is all the more important since the acceptance of the different stakeholders in the territory has to be secured in a country where up to 50% of the land is owned by municipalities or collectives. Agreement between these stakeholders pledging themselves for the creation of a bio-cultural landscape would be reflected in the Territorial Management Agreement (Charter) which would be drawn up for a term of 15 years.

A point to stress is the appropriateness of a parallel procedure involving a pilot project and a study on institutionalisation, since it allows the study to be fuelled with feedback from the fieldwork. It also allows the conditions for the model's systematisation and dissemination to be defined.

Finally, the introduction of a "park badge" is one of the mainstays of the project in Mexico as a measure of incentive and prestige for the initiative.

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