

Dr. Raquel Gutiérrez Nájera.

Instituto de Derecho Ambiental, A.C.
Paseo de los Filósofos #1175 int. 209. col. Colinas de la Normal
C. P. 44270. Guadalajara, Jalisco. México.

Idea03@prodigy.net.mx

Tel: (+33) 38 24 03 12

Fax: (+33) 38 54 87 71

Lake Chapala: It's impact in the development of the river dweller communities.

Lake Chapala is the biggest lake in the Mexican Republic; it has an extension of 80 kilometers long and 25 kilometers wide.

It is of great importance in the social, cultural, economic and environmental aspect due to he "*hydro-environmental*" values it has. It represents the most important hydrologic ecosystem in our country, refuge for migratory birds (like the white fish endemic specie), it is also one of the climatic regulators in the metropolitan zone of Guadalajara and it constitutes the base of the water supply for human use in this city. In addition to its landscape beauty the Lake Chapala Rivera has a huge population import, primarily from near towns as Chapala, Jocotepec and Ajijic.

The "*Cuenca Lerma Chapala*" Foundation and the "*Amigos del Lago*" Society have been working during 4 years in different fields; in the field of public politics to give the Lake a legal and permanent protection and to guarantee the environmental use of it; in the social and economic fields to fortify the power of the communities in the use of some attributes of the Lake, like the landscape, as a main source of economic incomes; and in the field of communitarian participation to create a culture of ownership of the Lake. In the future we hope we can obtain a declaration of the Lake as a Primary zone of alternative tourism.

Also, some works to include in public politics the vision of a deep valley had been done. Lake Chapala is not an isolated ecosystem, it is part of a hydrologic deep valley, and in consequence, the management of it affects in a positive or negative way the Lake. In this order of ideas, it is important to say that Lake Chapala is part of the Lerma-Santiago-Pacífico deep valley, and it is administratively divided into two micro deep valleys to have a better management of it.

All the partners of Living Lakes in Mexico are working in a coordinated way with the Congress (legislative power) to prepare a law which regulates article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, in order to give the lake legal protection so it can recover.

Today, due to the generous rain temporal the Lake is in 4,300 mm³ and we still have two rain temporal months to go, so we hope it gets to a level of 4,500 mm³. This recovering has been reflected in the number of tourists and visitors from the metropolitan zone of Guadalajara that visit the lake. This has helped to reactivate the economy of the place at such a level that some Sundays the offer of services in Chapala is not enough to satisfy the demand from visitors.

The current situation opens new paths so that some Mexican partners start planning to reinforce the environmental tourism promotion, mainly in Mezcala, and to influence in different governmental programs to contribute to the recovery of the lake.

The future work is in contradiction with the projects of the deep valley due to the new agreement to distribute water because it only gives Chapala in the future the water from the natural drains of the dams, which means that if they do not exist Chapala simply will not have storage water. On the other hand the state government has suffered a political wear down due to the building of the Arcediano dam, project that does not solve the water supply for Guadalajara and meanwhile it can contribute to a severe water extraction from Chapala because of the growth of population.

So, one of the aspects that Mexican partners and I should quote is the legal political work with some productive projects that may help us to have a relaxed federal and state government relationship, therefore the presence of Living Lakes will be fundamental next year in Chapala.