

**Chapala Lake.
Same policies for a new crisis**

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Introduction

Chapala Lake did not recover this year despite the reasonable good rainy season. As we speak, she holds less than 50% of its total capacity. Non-fulfillment of the water distribution agreements, industrial, agricultural and urban pollution, illegal extractions, unregulated tourism and fisheries remain her basic problems. Chapala is in a deep coma again...just like in 2002, when Mr. Manuel Villagomez, Dr. Manuel Guzmán Arroyo and myself presented Chapala Lake for the Living Lakes network in Johannesburg, South Africa.

A new face of and old crisis

So, is there anything new? Yes there is. In politics, they say, form is substance. For the first time, the government has openly declared its will to privatize water. In recent weeks, at the 2014 World Water Conference held in London, David Korenfeld, the president of the Mexican National Water Commission, announced the main goal of the current administration: To pass a new law to allow the participation of private capital in the water management agencies across the country. The official press release states that Korenfeld

“Detailed a new scheme to create a new financial system for water, which includes the private participation in private public associations in the construction, operation and maintenance of water infrastructure, as well as the possibility to create metropolitan water administration facilities, and the

incorporation of regulation organisms for water supply and sanitation”.

In passed years, citizen's organizations denounced the attempt to privatize water in Mexico. They identified the hidden agenda behind the regulations and programs of previous administrations and the logic behind the corruption and impunity in the water sector management in last decades. They were right.

Now, in 2014, the privatization of water is consistent with the overall economic policy of the Peña Nieto administration. Similar reforms have been implemented in the education, health, labor and energy sectors. Now, the time has come for water. Together with its public schools, hospitals, and petrol reserves, Mexican public water has begun to disappear as a public good.

The privatization of water is at the basis of Chapala lake crisis. This is not difficult to understand. With the increasing scarcity of water, the liquid finds a better economic allocation in high value export commodities. If we look closely, we can see that most of socio-environmental conflicts in the Lerma Chapala Santiago basin are linked to this logic of hemispheric integration. Water, as a cheap productive resource, has become a source for the competitive advantage for Mexican exports in agriculture and the industry. The lake has been sacrificed for the sake of economic growth and for the North American integration process.

Corruption & market...bad combination

I had the wonderful opportunity to talk with Professor Gerhard Thielcke in one of the Living Lakes Conferences. He told me that the optimal water volume of a lake was one of those impossible questions of modern science. The important question, however is, to define “the proper use for the lake.” The answer to that question, I learned then, is the most important step for the survival of Chapala. It should be a product of a high quality democratic exercise and an act of real environmental community governance. The use of a lake shouldn't be decided as a result of a market mechanism ONLY, as market will always choose the maximal economic efficiency over life itself.

Nevertheless, this is not the case of Chapala. Market *is not* the cause of the lake's deterioration. Of course, Chapala water allocation depends mostly on its economic value in the market. The lake has to compete with other users, with the thirst of Guadalajara's 5 million inhabitants, with the production needs of an export-oriented economy, with the growing need of energy generation. Old and new threats such as traditional leather industry of Guanajuato and the fracking initiative are present in the lake's current situation. But no, the main risk for Chapala is not global market, it is plain corruption: Chapala enemy, as for Mexican society as a whole, is the immorality of a government that has been infiltrated by

criminals, by the business of the kidnaping industry and arms smuggling, by prostitution networks and the industry of death.

Under these circumstances, you cannot expect anything from governmental environmental policies. On the contrary, Environmental destruction has become a business for the Mexican mafia. In my country you will find all possible environmental crimes: From timber and animal illegal trade to irregular mining licensing and direct occupation of community natural resources. The list goes on, and on. On the other hand, international reports show that Mexico has the worst record of the world in assassinations of environmental activists. They are part of the war carried out by the government, a war that has caused more than 100 thousand deaths since the year 2000. More casualties of the war in Afghanistan and Irak put together.

For these reasons, I want to congratulate our friends and colleagues who have been defending Chapala Lake over the last decades. It is a risky job to defend Chapala.

Small steps for a lake, huge steps for environmentalism

The environmentalist organizations that have been defending Chapala Lake achieved a great success by submitting the case to the Environmental Cooperation Commission of the Free Trade Agreement. As a result, the

Mexican government had to accept its responsibility in the mismanagement of the Lerma basin, and in the water crisis of the Chapala Lake. A new distribution agreement has been issued as a federal mandate.

This year, the new water distribution agreement obliged the federal and state water authorities to provide Chapala with what is written in the law: 240 million cubic meters of the liquid, regardless of the capacity of the situation of the dams based upstream.

Unfortunately, the latest news is not so optimistic. As the actual director of the federal basin commission, Elias Chedid stated recently, the new authorities up stream failed to accomplish the law. Despite the fact that the dams built upstream are over their limits, water to Chapala does not flow. The agreement is not working, again.

The evaluation of the environmental groups of Jalisco is straightforward. The Chapala crisis is a deliberate and criminal policy created by the water authorities. The objective is to justify the construction of a new multimillionaire dam at the community of El Zapotillo. The water is needed for the export industry in the neighbor state of Guanajuato. An empty Chapala lake, facilitates political support for a new dam as the government justifies it also as a source of fresh water for the city of Guadalajara.

The worst plan is no plan at all

Environmental groups and the Lerma Chapala Foundation will continue to confront the aggression of the governmental water authorities against our lake, even in the worst conditions. As always, they will find the ways to do what they do.

But, ¿what is the role of our international networks and in particular of Living lakes network? We have great support in favor of Chapala. Now, we learned in the 2014 Living Lakes Nanchang Conference, we might be entering a new stage, a stage of intervention projects, world community involvement and activism. We are ready for the new approach.