



Update on scenario work for COMET-LA's summer 2014 newsletter

COMET-LA communities begin to look into the future

The last phase of COMETLA 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 aiding partnerships to make explicit, share and reconcile different knowledges, expectations and aspirations over the management of the socio-ecological systems. The outcomes of these processes, i.e. the resulting scenarios, are useful to stimulate 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.

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.

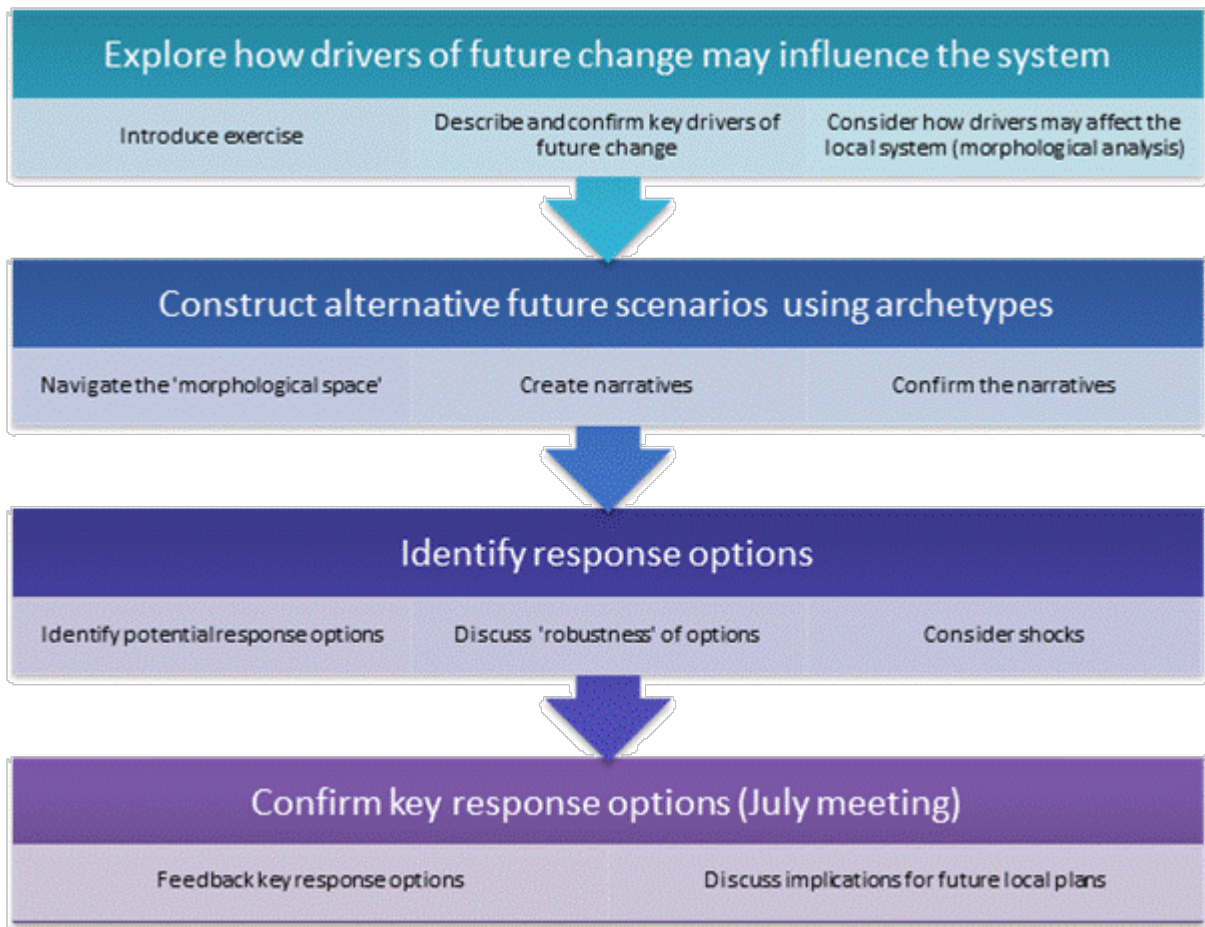
How are scenarios being generated in COMETLA?

This final phase of the project builds on the earlier work of the project in each of the three COMETLA 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 COMETLA 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 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 are contrasting (it is less useful to consider very similar scenarios).

The work of COMET-LA occurs in four stages: at the time of writing the case study teams are half way through this process.



Source: Waylen, K., Martin-Ortega, J., Blackstock, K. and Brown, I. (2013). The common scenario-planning methodology for COMET-LA. EU FP7 Project Community-Based Management Of Environmental Challenges In Latin America. <http://www.comet-la.eu>

First results from stages 1 and 2

Communities across all three COMETLA case studies have now completed stages 1 and 2 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.

COMETLA partners are now preparing and undertaking stages 3 and 4 of the process, looking at response options that can help communities achieve their goals under changing conditions in the future. Together, COMETLA researchers and communities will try to find 'robust' strategies that will increase community resilience to future changes and shocks. Finally, stage 4, where communities will reflect on the implications of the outputs of the scenario thinking process for the government system, will coincide with the visit of COMETLA's international team in July this year.

For more information on COMETLA's scenario work, contact cometla_jhi@hutton.ac.uk