

Regina, 11 de Octubre de 2001

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Re. Informe final de la evaluación del proyecto Training for Regional Development (CIDA /UPCD. Tier 2 098/S47074-244).

Estimado Dr. Pacheco:

Le adjunto a esta carta el informe final de la evaluación del proyecto de cooperación internacional para su información.

La versión final de este informe fue preparada por el evaluador, Dr. Martín Mújica, durante el mes de Septiembre y distribuido en los primeros días de Octubre. Copias de este informe fueron mandadas a la Dra. Ana Maria Balbontin, directora del proyecto en la Universidad Nacional, Dr. Hugo Bodini, director del proyecto en la Universidad de La Serena, al oficial encargado del proyecto en AUCC, y a nosotros, como co-directores del proyecto en la Universidad de Regina.

Atentamente

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Dr. David Gauthier

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Dr. Polo Diaz

**UPCD Tier 2 Project 098/S47074-244**

**Project Mid-Term Progress Assessment  
Preliminary Report**

**Presented by**

**Martín Mujica**

**August 2001**

## **Executive Summary**

(This text will be included only in the final version)

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## Introduction

This Mid-Term Progress Assessment Report is presented according to the structure proposed in the Terms of Reference for Project Mid-Term Assessment<sup>1</sup> and submitted, according to the same Terms of Reference, "to the Canadian and overseas project directors and AUCC simultaneously for comments" (TOR, p. 7).

This preliminary report is complimentary to the different partial reports that the leaders of the project have presented on a regular basis to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). Therefore the objective of this report is not to present the results contained in the above mentioned reports. This report will try to provide an overall vision of the results of the project and will give details only in the cases in which those results differ or complement the reports presented by the project officials.

An overall appreciation of the main themes is also present in the comments regarding the three participating universities. When the observations permit it, the comments refer to all three universities. As these observations are developed, comments regarding a specific university will be presented. However, if possible, ties between different results will be drawn, so as to identify points of convergence. In some cases the comments will be restricted to the cases of the two Latin American universities. This is not an oversight of the achievements of UR. Since the work of UR is in many cases instrumental to the objectives of the project in Costa Rica and Chile, it is normal that it is mainly the results in these two countries that are highlighted in the report.

Total confidentiality was guaranteed to the participants during the interviews that were carried out as part of this assessment. This implies that when the opinions of these participants are cited, they are not cited literally and no references, names nor affiliation that would permit to identify the sources are provided. Information that is not related to opinions can have a greater degree of detail but the full names of the informants is provided only when the objective is to give credit to publications or other products for public diffusion.

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian International Development Agency, University Partnership in Cooperation and Development Program (UPCDP Tier 2). *Terms of Reference for Project Mid-Term Progress Assessment*, revised version, 2000-11-14, 9 p.

At this point and before entering the particular aspects to be considered in this assessment, even if this report will not proceed in the same way as these reports presented by the project leaders, let us draw a first overall observation. It emerges when visiting the three participating universities and interviewing project participants at the light of the documents studied, including the mentioned reports.

In a single sentence we must say that the project delivered what their leaders promised, the work plans were accomplished, the budgets were respected, the outputs were reached.

We confirm also the accuracy of the semiannual and annual reports produced, the seriousness and carefulness of the budgets and the high standards reached in documents and products.

The contact with the project leaders and participants gave the impression of a very fitted endeavour where the parts understand the whole, where each participant has a role, even far beyond the breakdowns that existed in the past.

## **Project abstract**

Two Latin American universities and a Canadian one are participating in a five-year (1999-2004) project funded under the University Partnerships in Co-operation and Development (UPCD) program by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The project is focused on sustainable development and its main objective is to strengthen the institutional capacities of the concerned universities to become involved on a permanent basis in regional sustainable development (RSD) activities.

The three universities are:

- Universidad de La Serena (ULS), in Chile,
- Universidad Nacional (UNA), in Costa Rica, and
- University of Regina (UR), in Saskatchewan, Canada

The project title is "Training for Regional Development". It adopted an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional approach with the assumption that this kind of intervention has a greater effectiveness at the regional level in a long term sustainable perspective. The inter-institutional approach does not only include the three concerned universities but also local, regional and national governments, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and others. A very important part of the project activities are being and will be undertaken in a micro-regional setting in both Latin American countries, in the municipalities of Paihuano in Chile and Sarapiquí in Costa Rica. In both cases, regional advisory committees are being formed in order to obtain the participation of local or regional institutional actors.

The project has three main components:

1. The development of expertise to create geographic information systems (GIS) and databases applied to RSD activities.
2. The enhancement of the interdisciplinary research activities applied to RSD and the training of research teams in new methods and techniques.
3. The development of an institutional assessment process of the capacity of each participating university to become involved in RSD projects and activities, on a long term basis.

These three main components are complemented by two others, one which was preparatory for the core objectives of the mentioned components, and one which should be seen as an element of continuity and sustainability of the project. These are:

4. The enhancement of the internationalisation of University of Regina and the participation of UR trainers in training activities in Chile and Costa Rica. This component includes the discussion of sustainable development issues, approaches and experiences as well as the building of a common understanding of the problems and solutions associated to this domain. This component occupied a great part of the project activities during the two first years and it was carried out through two one-month seminars in which the discussion of theoretical aspects was combined with intensive training in methods and techniques of research and intervention.
5. The development of a series of training activities aimed to students, local leaders, members of NGOs and local, regional and national governments professionals. This includes a variety of workshops, seminars and university courses.

## Methodology used

This assessment was developed according to the methodological specifications, the calendar and the budget presented by the evaluator and approved by the appropriate authorities from UR and AUCC (see Service Contract, signed April 25, 2001). The only activity of those originally planned that was not carried out is the focus group in Universidad de La Serena, as a result of the problems that were originated by the student occupation of the university premises and the resulting reorganization of the schedule of activities and work locations. In any case, the people that should have participated in the focus group have all been interviewed individually, in sessions that were long enough so as to permit a discussion of all the themes that were presented in the interview guides.

The interviews carried out in each university correspond to the following breakdown:

University	Team individual interviews (n)	University executives (n)	Focus Groups (n)	Participants in FG (n)	Total people contacted (n) *
ULS	11	2	0	0	13
UNA	10	5	2	7	22
UR	8	1	1	7	9 *
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>44 *</b>

\* People who were individually interviewed and then participated in focus groups are counted only once.

Besides the interviews in the three universities, two visits to the field activities of the project were carried out, to the municipalities of Sarapiquí in Costa Rica and Paihuano in Chile. Contacts with local authorities (in Sarapiquí with the Mayor and in Paihuano with the Municipal Council, that includes the Mayor and the Councillors) and with leaders of settlements organisations beneficiary of the project were established. Transportation in both cases was provided by the universities.

The evaluator also established contact through e-mail with one of the members of the UR team that is presently living in another province. This person provided complete answers and comments to the requests

of the evaluator. The possibility of meeting in August or September of this year was also discussed with this participant.

In UR the evaluator had the opportunity to meet two other people who are now participating in the project activities but who were not formally interviewed. The total number of people contacted in the course of the evaluation process ascends to 47, including the two new participants from UR and the person mentioned in the previous paragraph but excluding the people encountered during the field visits.

In the case of UNA, the reference to "University Executives" includes a former Faculty Dean whose comments were important due to the fact that the new official in place recently took office.

The interviews themselves did not present any problems since the evaluator counted on complete collaboration by the co-ordinators of the project and the people interviewed, including university authorities.

The evaluator also received the necessary printed material and had access to all the requested documentation.

The scope of the evaluation as well as the participatory and formative style of evaluation were well understood by the participants. The evaluator had the opportunity to explain that one of the objectives of the process was to improve different aspects of the project itself, as well as the independent character of the evaluator in relation to the universities involved, AUCC and CIDA.

The contacts with ULS and UNA were carried out in Spanish and in English in the case of UR, with the exception of a few project participants from UR whose mother tongue is Spanish.

A few of the originally planned interviews were not carried out (two in UR, two in UNA and five in ULS). The number of interviews that were not done in ULS may seem high but it was due to the student strike and occupation of the university buildings and the resulting difficulty in contacting these people. The people from ULS who were not interviewed are two project assistants, one who is precisely President of the student association that was leading the student occupation of university premises, one Dean who was not available at the phone numbers provided since he was constantly busy in urgent meetings related to the student strike and two people who were not in La Serena during the

evaluator's visit. One of the participants who could not be interviewed in UR is the Director of the International Office, who like the other participant who could not be interviewed, was out of town. However another participant who was interviewed provided most of the information that was going to be requested to the Director of the International Office. In the case of UNA the participants who could not be interviewed are a member of the team who was absent and a teaching assistant.

In this type of report it is difficult to center all the analysis according to the Results Based Management (RBM) approach. First of all because this is not a management report. The RBM methodology is more adequate for the day to day management of a project and for monitoring the advances of the results obtained. Given that the partial semiannual or annual reports already use this methodology, using it once again would result in a repetitive exercise. Secondly, constantly referring to the appropriate indicators of this methodology would result, in the context of this evaluation, in losing sight of the overall picture that we have tried to obtain. It would be like having trees preventing to see the whole forest. At this stage of the project it seems advisable to try to reach an overall vision, without distractions.

## **Assessment of the progress made toward the expected results**

### ***Partnership***

The context in which the project evaluated in the University of Regina is one in which internationalisation is defined as one of the core values of the institution. There are numerous demonstrations of the importance of international development and co-operation for the university. The last University of Regina President's Report to the Community contains a sample of the various international development projects undertaken by the university. Although this project is not one of the most important in UR in terms of funds, it is related to important aspects of the university's activities. In fact, one of the Canadian Co-Directors of the project is the Director of the Canadian Plains Research Centre, an important academic entity directly related to the environment in which the university is inserted.

Although important, the support for the project received by UR authorities is not unanimous. Some members of the team have referred to the difficulties they have encountered in trying to have the project recognised as pertinent activity for tenure or promotion purposes. In at least one of these cases, the decision was taken on the basis of a distinction between the projects funded by CIDA and those funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). According to some administrators, only the latter can be considered research activity.

The project initiation on November 1, 1999 represents the culmination of a long series of contacts and small projects that were carried out since 1990 with Universidad de La Serena and later with Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, since 1996.

The formulation of the project was carefully designed since it had gone through various previous versions. After many rejections for funding on the part of CIDA, the project initiators went through a deep revision of its formulation, certainly enriching its contents. This reformulation process also permitted to deepen the partnership with ULS and UNA.

The project has received support from UR and the synergy of other activities, such as the visit of the Saskatchewan Trade Mission to Costa Rica in 1998. The visit of both Presidents of the Latin American partner universities to UR has also helped consolidate the commitment of all three institutions to support the project.

The nature of the support to the project provided by the officials of ULS and UNA is not similar to the support received from UR. The international sphere does not have the same importance in these two Latin American universities as it does in the case of UR. UNA defines itself as a national university, and this is reaffirmed in the institution's name. Its main campus, where the President's office and administrative services are located, is in the city of Heredia, although it has campuses in other regions of the country. Even if defined as a national university, UNA has a very important presence in different regions of the country, with teaching and research activities focused on regional issues and responding to regional needs. Along with the Universidad de Costa Rica, located in the capital San José, it is one of the largest public universities of the country. It is within the frame of this national institutionalisation that UNA has a certain degree of inclusion of activities of international scope within its academic life. UNA's commitment with the project has been affected by the change of administration. The President of UNA who traveled to Regina to meet the project leaders and the Presidents of the other two participating universities was replaced by a new President a few months ago. Fortunately another change in UNA's administration offset the first: one of the members of the project team was elected Vice-President (Academic). Although this has resulted in losing a member of the project staff, a point we will refer to later, it has permitted the project to have a presence among the university authorities and access to the new President of the university, which could eventually be very beneficial for the project.

On the other hand, ULS has an essentially regional vocation. It is the only public university in the region of Coquimbo, of which La Serena is the capital. The international aspect appears therefore as a complement of its academic activity and of its regional projection, but it is not at the core of university activities. The continuity in the post of President of the person who originally visited Regina and signed the agreement between the universities is certainly an advantage. However, it would be advisable to try to reach a renewal of this official's commitment to the project, in order to guarantee its successful continuation. A great opportunity to do this would be during the VI Seminario

Latinoamericano de Universidades y Desarrollo Regional, sponsored by the Red de Universidades Regionales Latinoamericanas (UREL), to be held in ULS on November 5 to 7, 2001. This activity would highlight ULS's regional vocation in an international context and the presence of representatives from participant universities and the leaders of the project would certainly be beneficial for the project. During this event, it would be possible to organize a new meeting between the Presidents of the three participant universities and the directors of the project.

On the other hand, it is sometimes difficult to hide the instrumental character that the international aspect may have for one or the other participant institutions. In the case of UR, as in the majority of Canadian universities, international projects permit the inflow of new funds in a context of financial crisis, as well as the incorporation of new students (and therefore of grants associated with registrations) in a demographic context of ageing of the population and of a diminishing student population.

In the case of ULS and UNA, as in the case of other institutions in developing countries, international projects also result in an inflow of new funds and opens up the possibility of renewing the pool of professors and researchers, and of equipment, such as computers, as well as representing also a source of prestige and legitimacy for the university and its environment.

Fortunately in the case of all three universities, the instrumental character of the funds that result from international cooperation has a correspondence in academic contents and in the definition of the university objectives. In the case of UR, as we have already mentioned, this is expressed in the university's growing internationalisation and in the case of the two partner universities in Latin America by a definition of the university in relation to sustainable development and the commitment of the institutions with their environment.

The notion of partnership is associated with building trust and it is remarkable how, despite the difficulties of the project, there is a mutual trust between the three teams and in particular among those who coordinate the project. The UR team had the opportunity of playing an important role in the organization of the two seminars that were held in Costa Rica and in Chile in the first years of the project. This allowed them to gain the respect of the other two teams, based on their intellectual and professional qualities, although some of the informants

were somewhat disappointed with the poor Spanish skills of some of the members of the UR team.

During these seminars the ULS and UNA teams also became acquainted and although there have been changes in the composition of these teams, the relationship between them has consolidated over time. It must be pointed out however that the bilateral relationships between these two Latin American universities are weaker than the relationships each have with UR, although this is slowly improving. The organization of two training seminars in 1999 and 2000 in each of the Latin American universities permitted each of these institutions to show their own abilities and deepen their understanding of other realities. Despite these positive aspects, there is still much to be done in improving the partnership between the three teams. As far as we know, there are no common research projects nor organised exchanges of knowledge, of experiences, of learned lessons or obstacles found in sectorial themes or in common fields of specialisation.

Some of the people interviewed have indicated that there was some progress in the partnership relations in the period between the first and the second seminars. While in 1999 there were no shared ideas concerning the seminar's contents, in the case of the second seminar the different teams had a greater participation in different aspects of seminar design and delivery. The challenge today, as the project enters a phase in which each of the teams will work more in their respective countries and on the field actions that have been programmed, is to find instances that permit to further develop and deepen the partnership between the three teams.

### ***Relevance***

Despite the problems that we will discuss in other sections, the project has achieved a relevant presence in all three universities. In each of the participant institutions this was confirmed by university authorities as well as being the conviction shared by the project teams and the leaders of the project.

In the case of UR it has resulted in the institutional strengthening of the Canadian Plains Research Center and the Department of Sociology, as well as an important achievement in terms of the institution's objective

of internationalisation. This has generated a renewed expertise in the university staff in relation to international matters, it has permitted to discover new interests in this field on the part of undergraduate as well as graduate students and has projected the subject matter of the project beyond the three countries involved.

In relation to the first point, that of a renewed expertise, the leaders of the project have demonstrated that they have been able to look for the necessary expertise beyond the two units in which the project originated (CPRC and Sociology) reaching other disciplines (economics, political science, adult education and vocational training, environmental studies, regional studies) An example of this is the participation of a professor from the Department of Geography, Research Co-ordinator at the Prairie Adaptation Research Collaborative (PARC), in the training in environment impact assessment offered to both Latin American teams as this evaluation was being done.

This ample search for expertise by the UR project team has led them to look beyond the University of Regina. In fact a professor from the University of Saskatchewan, expert on Rural Sociology and with great interdisciplinary background, was invited to the workshops held in Chile and Costa Rica. This resulted in an important contribution to these seminars, in particular to the discussion of the concepts of region and community. His participation in the project permitted this professor to develop new perspectives and an interest for Chile and Costa Rica, countries in which he eventually spent 6 months of a sabbatical leave. He developed a new research subject related with this new experience.

On the other hand, the participation of students is mainly reflected in the courses offered by members of the team, in which material originated in the project is used and by the presence of a graduate student from UR who will soon spend a long period of time working in Sarapiquí, Costa Rica. One of the informants from UR highlighted the importance of the participation of graduate students from El Salvador and Sudan in those courses. This could have a snowball effect of the experience of the project.

Another graduate student from UR worked in San José, Costa Rica during the first year of the project, under CIDA's young researchers program and the supervision of a Canadian project participant and the Costa Rican project co-ordinator.

The projection of this experience beyond the three countries concerned is possible thanks to the networks in which members of the project staff from UR (particularly the co-ordinators) participate. An example of this is the organization of an international workshop on regional sustainable development in which representatives of the three participant universities as well as an expert from Zimbabwe participated. This workshop was open to interested members of UR and University of Saskatchewan, experts of the federal and Saskatchewan governments and members of local NGOs. The project leaders from UR have published a report of this workshop.

Sustainable development has been defined as one of the main themes in the objectives of all three participant universities. Despite this common principle, the concept of sustainable development has had different interpretations and has compromised the understanding of the scope of the project. Some of the informants indicated that the topic of sustainable development was more adequate for taking the path of an academic exercise, leaving behind practical aspects of the project. These comments highlight the necessity of developing an intervention framework that uses the notion of sustainable development but that translates into concrete actions that make it real. In some cases, some participants have indicated that one of the reasons that would explain this lack of practical application is the predominance of social scientists in the composition of the project teams. The solution would therefore be not only a greater interdisciplinarity but also a strengthening of the presence of biophysical disciplines related with the management of natural resources. One possibility in this sense would be hiring part-time consultants from these specific disciplines.

At ULS sustainable development shares with education the condition of being a priority area for this institution, which has proven to be beneficial for the project. One of the three research topics of the project is community education, an issue being worked on by two senior researchers, the other two being associativeness and rural tourism. But at the same time, the generalization of the concept of sustainable development leads to the emergence, within the university, of a number of programs in various sectors, such as "architecture and sustainable development" and "mining and sustainable development", programs with which the project we are evaluating apparently has no contact.

At UNA, the presence of the project is relevant, by the participation of the team members in teaching, by that of students as assistants, by the

linkages to the local realities in communities and by the participation of the team co-ordinator in international networks.

### ***Management / Efficiency***

The problems related to management are mentioned frequently and in detail by the people interviewed for the evaluation. The main problems are found in both Latin American universities, where the difficulties inherent to the project management team are multiplied by different or changing management styles on the part of university authorities.

At this moment, let us say that the management of this type of project is a very difficult matter. First of all, project leaders are not always managers by appeal and most probably the contrary is true: project leaders are academics and they are mainly interested in research, teaching and community promotion. Secondly, to work in the context of a transdisciplinary, interinstitutional, international project is completely new for most participants. Usually, management styles and practices encouraged by the project sponsors do not correspond to those to which the participants are used to. Not only management styles are different but also are organisational cultures, administrative procedures, time management, social relations in the workplace, gender and age relationships, local, regional and national sensibilities and many other aspects. All that must be considered when analysing management issues in cases like this one.

The management situation in the case of UR appears stable, given the autonomy of the co-ordinators with respect to the university authorities and where there is an administrative support that has already proven to be efficient.

Despite this positive aspect, the flow of funds to ULS seems particularly problematic. In various interviews the informants identified and commented this problem. The responsibility was in part attributed to the organisational structure of ULS but also to a lack of communication between UR and ULS. The payment delays were solved on one occasion with an advance payment from ULS general funds, but this generated interest costs that could not be charged to the project's budget. It is, for the evaluator, difficult to say if the problem is mainly originated at ULS,

at UR or at AUCC, but probably a communicational aspect is at the origin of the problem.

Some informants in ULS also highlighted the need to have funds available to promote the project in local media and to undertake other public relations activities. This observation seems to reveal a misunderstanding of the project budget since even if items are well defined, the possibility to reallocate funds by decisions taken by the coordination committee always exists.

There were also at Universidad de La Serena some comments (by several interviewees) regarding the need to consolidate the management and the logistic basis of the project in this university, before further changes occur, such as an eventual withdrawal of project participants that have been in the project since its origin. These same comments show the need to formalize and depersonalize these change processes, to avoid the problems provoked by previous decisions that were based heavily on personal factors, which resulted in critiques from these same people. It is not certain if these critiques were made public at the appropriate moment, but to the evaluator it is clear that they persist. It seems, always from the evaluator's point of view, that a climate that would permit an open discussion of these opinions does not exist at the moment. As an anticipation, let us postulate that if these changes are brought about in an impersonal way, probably through various steps, with a plan that anticipates the events, with participation of the team in the incorporation of new participants, then the dramatic climate typically associated with these changes would be reduced, therefore assuring a consolidation of the team and the continuity of the project.

Besides, we may add that since the team at ULS is very young, this process must consider the integration of senior project participants and some delegation of functions to young project participants and professors. The delegation of functions must include aspects of representation of the project team at superior levels and the relationship with authorities within the university, the community and the region. This would permit the younger team members to become more aware of their own capabilities and would strengthen the experience they have gained through their participation in the project, making it less dependent on senior researchers. During our visit we had the opportunity to meet with some of these young project participants who present a great potential that they are starting to demonstrate.

This change process in the management of the ULS team certainly will require a strong support from the university authorities. Support from the President of the university is especially important, but also from the Deans of the faculties of Social and Economic Sciences and Humanities, as they are closer to the team. It is also important to have a good communication with the Directorate of Research.

On the other hand, to face the difficulties in obtaining a greater availability of the team staff, the coordination of the project at ULS has suggested the possibility of creating a centre that could generate data, information and resources that would guarantee the continuity of the project. The implementation of this idea, which seems very appropriate, also requires support from university authorities. Apparently this support is not guaranteed: at least two informants from ULS commented the difficulty that a traditional administration has to understand the importance of new instruments of scientific research, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), as well as the human and material resources that these tools demand. This implies that in order to face the situations that could occur in the future and in order to assure that the project fulfils its objectives, the project needs a strong commitment from the authorities that could be obtained through the construction of alliances between the leaders of the project and other actors, either from within the university or beyond it.

An informant from ULS indicated that the funds spent by the university on the project do not reach the maximum returns since in the case of some of the professionals who participate in the project there is not a sufficient number of hours dedicated to the project. The comment referred to some professionals who are paid for two hours of work per week on the project, in circumstances when this time allocated is barely sufficient just for the exchange of information. A "marginal" investment of a few extra hours, doubling these two hours for example, would increase the returns by a greater amount, permitting the project participants to work on more substantial contents. This comment is irrefutable but the application of a solution in this sense requires a full understanding of the problem on the part of university authorities and a good relationship between them and the leaders of the project. This example is an excellent illustration of the necessity to establish alliances that will guarantee the continuity of the project.

The problem of the lack of profitability of the project was also mentioned by at least two people in two universities, in terms of the links between the different components of the project. In one case the comment pointed out that the GIS equipment was being under-utilised due to a lack of information that was to be provided by the research teams. In the other case the problems in the area of institutional assessment which we will comment later, resulted in a lack of efficiency in the other two work teams.

In the case of UNA, there is also a need of greater openness of the coordination to the needs and suggestions of the team, although the general climate is one of consolidation of the team after a period a great instability. Through the contacts established in all three universities, various interviewees referred to the coordination problems in UNA to explain different situations that have arisen, such as the organisational problems at the seminar in Costa Rica, the desertions in the team and the different expectations of the team members regarding the project. Many of these opinions show, on the other hand, that presently these problems are being solved, leading us to think that the desertion of some participants, while having presented a problem in a certain moment, is today part of the positive climate that is developing.

However, it has already been mentioned elsewhere in this report that this stability is fragile. We highlight this fact once again so as to make it clear that this stability requires a healthy management. This problem with stability should not be used as an excuse to avoid innovating in management styles. The problem could rise once again if no attention is given to the dynamic of the team, the relationship between its members, the different components of the project, the role of young researchers, the equilibrium between different disciplines, the relationship with the university authorities, the faculties, the schools and so many other details of the daily life of a project of this nature.

Some problems with the efficiency of the teams in both Latin American countries are due to the lack of precision regarding the number of hours of availability to the project by some participants. It can also be explained by the fact that the low wages of the project participants lead them to make their own interpretation of their availability for the project, often resulting in a reduction of the real number of hours dedicated to the project. This situation creates some feelings of unequal treatment on the part of partner universities, which certainly has a negative effect on the internal cohesion of the groups and the

confidence between partners. How much of this perception corresponds to what really occurs is difficult to determine, but although the problem may not be as serious as some have pointed out, it is a problem that exists and that has to be dealt with by the leaders of the project. Once again, this requires a common base of understanding.

Due to the student occupation of the university, the evaluator could not witness the resources in terms of administrative support available at ULS. In the case of UNA, the project has an duly identified office, which seems appropriate for the needs of the project. One of the informants expressed however that administrative support was inadequate and that the frequent use of an answering machine gives a bad impression to the project.

## ***Results***

The stage of the project that concludes with this evaluation is characterised by the emphasis placed on training the work teams and the staff itself. The two most important training activities were the seminars that lasted almost a month each and that were held in ULS in 1999 and in UNA in 2000. During these seminars the project participants from UR acted as trainers and the members from the ULS and UNA teams were the trainees. These seminars were attended by almost the totality of participants from the different teams, the exceptions being only a few cases of health or personal reasons. As we have mentioned in the introduction of this report, we will not repeat all the information that is available in the semiannual reports and the annual reports of the project. However, it is important to highlight the results obtained after the last report and that relate to the start of a new stage that is presently underway, the stage of fieldwork in the two selected communities in Costa Rica and Chile.

In terms of training, the activities that have been held lately are:

- An advanced training session on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to a representative of each of the Latin American teams. This activity was held in Regina in May 2001 and lasted two weeks. According to the participants and the people who held the training sessions, this method of working in Regina instead of the countries of origin of the trainees has

been particularly successful. This has allowed the trainees not only to work in UR laboratories but also to visit related entities (such as the Prairies Farm Rehabilitation Administration and the Municipality of Regina) that work with GIS. It has permitted them to be in contact with a culture of information treatment that is based on partnership and availability, very different from the model of control of information and security prevalent in their countries of origin.

- A four-day training session in June 2001 in each of the partner universities in Latin America on the use of a qualitative analysis software (*N-Vivo*). Both research teams attended this training session that was held by a member of the UR team in their respective countries.
- A four-day training session on Environment Impact Analysis, also held in June 2001 in each of the Latin American partner universities. Both research teams attended this training session that was held by a member of the UR team in their respective countries.

The GIS training session included the participation as trainee of a professional from ULS with a background in GIS and a professional from UNA who had a basic knowledge of this technique but who had expertise of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The person in question holds a Master degree in Computer Science, is a statistics professor and will soon teach a course on GIS to sociology students. The possibility of establishing a link between these two techniques presents new opportunities for the project and in general to students, project participants and professional's comprehension of reality. The future development of this expertise includes the definition of indicators and the formulation of a methodology that would permit an interpretation of poverty and development indicators on a geographical basis and a better spatial analysis of the demographic variables.

In terms of teaching, one of the greatest contributions of the project in ULS has been the participation of two members of the team in a group of three people in charge of the elaboration of a methodology program for the teaching of social sciences. This program aims the training of around 200 History, Geography and Social Sciences professors in the regions of Atacama and Coquimbo. The participation of two members of the team in this activity assures a relationship between the contents of

the program and the topics of sustainable development and alleviation of poverty of the project.

Besides this activity, in the case of ULS a diagnosis of the perception of sustainable development was elaborated through three different documents that were published together<sup>2</sup>. These three documents are:

- Sonia Salas. *Desarrollo Sustentable ¿Utopía o Realidad?*, p. 9-26. It contains a theoretical revision of the concept from different approaches, socioeconómico, environmental and educational.
- Ana María Vera & Sonia Salas. *Percepción académica del desarrollo regional sustentable en la práctica docente*, p. 27-56. This study contains a quantitative analysis of the perception of sustainable development and its ties with the teaching practices of 30 university professors.
- Valeria Tognarelli & Ana María Vera. *Percepción del desarrollo sustentable en la práctica del docente: análisis cualitativo*, p. 57-84. It consists of an analysis of the participation of 8 professors from ULS in a focus group on sustainable development, which concluded with a systemic model of the perception of professors regarding the relationship between university and regional sustainable development.

The outreach of the project in the field of education by the team from ULS has also reached the elementary level. In the municipality of Paihuano, a member of the team (a cultural anthropologist) gives workshops on ethnography in four schools (Horcón, Paihuano, Tres Cruces and Quebrada de Paihuano). This activity is supported by the Regional Government of Coquimbo, therefore permitting the publication of a magazine<sup>3</sup> containing the work produced in these workshops.

Another result of the work carried out by the ULS team is the diagnosis of the Municipality of Paihuano, contained in a preliminary report<sup>4</sup>. The

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<sup>2</sup> Sonia Salas (editor). *Desarrollo Regional Sustentable. Definición y percepción académica*. La Serena, Proyecto Capacitación en desarrollo regional sustentable, s.d., 88 p.

<sup>3</sup> *Paihuano, tradiciones en movimiento*. s.d. (2001), 16 p.

<sup>4</sup> Universidad de La Serena, Proyecto de capacitación en desarrollo regional sustentable (UR-ULS-UNA), *Informe sobre Paihuano*, versión preliminar, s.d. (2001), 22 p.

final version of this report is currently being written but a cartographic series that will constitute an annex to the report is very advanced.

Finally, to conclude with the achievements of ULS, the project team participated in the elaboration of a CD-ROM about the region of Coquimbo that was used in the *Seminar on spaces and resources for a sustainable development* in 1999, organised by the Centre of Regional Studies of ULS. The CD contained 15 descriptive documents that represent an excellent source of information about the region and the resources available. Some of the documents deal with governmental services, regional competitiveness and the participation of the private sector in regional development.

On the other hand, the UNA team has also elaborated a series of documents of the region of Sarapiquí, where the fieldwork for the project will be carried out. A cartographic mapping of the same area is presently in progress. The main reports produced recently are:

- Ana María Balbontín, Glenda Carvajal & Helmut Johnson. *Tenencia de la tierra, mujeres y pobreza en algunos asentamientos campesinos del cantón de Sarapiquí, Heredia, informe parcial* Heredia, Universidad Nacional, Convenio UNA-Regina-La Serena, 2001, 20 p. This document also contains a PowerPoint presentation which shows important data concerning the settlements.
- Ana María Balbontín & Glenda Carvajal. *Reseña histórica geográfica de la provincia de Heredia y sus cantones 1985-1990*. Heredia, Universidad Nacional, Convenio UNA-Regina-La Serena, 2001, 27 p.
- Glenda Carvajal. *Políticas nacionales de trabajo de las diferentes instituciones*. Heredia, Universidad Nacional, Convenio UNA-Regina-La Serena, 2001 24 p.

### ***Sustainability***

The activities carried out in the context of the project bear a potential for their own sustainability. It is highly likely that they continue beyond the life cycle of the project, in Regina, Heredia and La Serena. Some

components seem to show a sustainability potential that is unquestionable:

- The internationalisation of UR and in particular the delivery of undergraduate and graduate courses in regional sustainable development.
- The growing interest of UR and of affiliated or related institutions (Canadian Plains Research Center, Prairie Adaptation Research Collaborative, Prairies Farm Rehabilitation Administration) in continuing their collaboration with projects in Latin America or in other regions of the world.
- The commitment of Latin American partner universities with sustainable development and in particular with the development of the regions of Sarapiquí (Costa Rica) and Paihuano (Chile).
- The interest of the leader of the institutional assessment component of the project in creating, as part of his new post as Principal of the Truro Campus of the Nova Scotia Community College, a Centre for Sustainable Development which he hopes will participate in international projects with UR, ULS and UNA.

What might exactly be the sustainability of the project results is difficult to state at this point in time, beyond these general projections. It greatly depends on the course that the project will take in the next years, under conditions that we have in more than one occasion qualified as fragile.

An encouraging aspect at this crossroads situation is that it appears that there are no great uncertainties in terms of definition of the contents, except for what will be referred to elsewhere in this report concerning the institutional assessment component. The project benefits from a great intellectual leadership in the domain of regional sustainable development, and the conceptual, methodological, technological and certainly ethical and political basis of the project are solid. Those who conceived the project in UR, ULS and UNA are the source of this strength. It seems that the passing of time and the difficulties encountered did not affect this strength. In this aspect the project will continue to count on this leadership and with the potential for sustainability we have identified.

The threats to this sustainability seem to stem mainly from problems with management styles and practices and in the weak relationship with allies that this type of project requires. This impression is shared by a number of the interviewed participants, who despite providing lengthy testimony of these problems did not lose their objectivity and recognised the important contributions of the co-ordinators.

It seems to us that the challenge is to self-critically accept these limitations and adopt appropriate measures to avoid that these problems are converted into situations that threaten the viability of the project and its own sustainability. In other words, adequate actions related to management styles will permit a greater impact of the concrete actions of the project in terms of sustainable development as well as guaranteeing its sustainability.

### ***Poverty alleviation / reduction***

From a restricted point of view, at this stage the project cannot show results in terms of poverty alleviation or reduction, since the actions that aim this objective are considered in the second half of the project. The first stage of the project was essentially of configuration of the teams and human resources training. It is only when initiating the fieldwork, in particular in the municipalities of Sarapiquí in Costa Rica and in Paihuano in Chile that the project will carry out activities that will contribute to poverty alleviation or reduction.

The choice of the two areas in which the fieldwork will be carried out in Chile and Costa Rica took into consideration the poverty variable. In both cases this variable coexists with a development of tourism that can certainly produce positive effects on employment and on the standard of life of local populations, but that also represents huge challenges from the point of view of sustainable development, especially the protection of the physical and social environments.

The areas chosen have a great potential of work in a gender perspective, in actions that can also lead to poverty alleviation or reduction through a participation of women in local and regional sustainable development. The project has interesting entry points in this

field and the training of its members assures that this perspective will be used in the planned activities.

It is important to point out that although at the moment these locations count on the support of the project teams, there were before the final choice was made other proposed locations that were not sufficiently discussed and which represented a preoccupation concerning a better utilisation of the project resources in terms of lower costs of transportation and a greater impact on the reached populations and in the type of solutions the project could contribute with.

Now in a wider perspective, we could say that the training activities which have been carried out have contributed indirectly to poverty alleviation or reduction. The training received by the teams had contents related to awareness of the reality of poverty. As a result, this variable was taken into consideration in the selection of locations for fieldwork and research projects and the adopted research methods and techniques will try to gain a new insight on this phenomenon.

This indirect action towards poverty alleviation or reduction can be seen in all three cases, UR, UNA and ULS, in an important contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon of poverty through teaching, publications and diffusion activities.

All three universities have developed courses and seminars on this issue, at the undergraduate as well as graduate levels. At UR, Sociology 314, Sociology of Development, has been reorganised and taught with new content related to Regional Sustainable Development since the Winter 2001 session. Also at UR, CPS 801, Transdisciplinary Course on Sustainable Development, a graduate course of the Canadian Plains Research Center, is scheduled on a regular basis and offered by members of the project staff and other instructors and guest lecturers. ULS and UNA have also begun the elaboration of introductory courses on RSD. In the case of ULS, it is a collegiate course offered to first year Social Science students by a team of professors in which some project participants from the project participate.

On the other hand, the printed or digital publications that have been elaborated in the context of the project refer to this problem and can be used as dissemination tools to reach the university population, members of governmental and non-governmental institutions and the public in

general. Examples of these types of instruments are the publications we have referred to previously.

Another contribution to poverty alleviation can be seen in the advisory councils that both Latin American partner universities will organize in the locations where fieldwork will be undertaken in the second stage of the project. In the case of Costa Rica, this advisory council is already in place and has held its first meeting on March 2, 2001. The institutional and popular leaders of the region are participating and have the opportunity of debating the orientations of the project in their area. These instances, if they are successful, can contribute to the solution of local and regional problems and guarantee a contribution of the project to poverty alleviation and its own sustainability.

## **Main successes**

The interviews for this evaluation, as well as the field visits and observations were carried out with the objective of obtaining the fundamental elements that characterize the life of the project. In this section we will focus only on some of these points, that represent the main successes of the project. These comments are based on a knowledge of the life of the project and its context and a systematisation of numerous conversations, interviews and observations.

1. The project has been successful in creating a transfer of knowledge, initially in the direction of North-South, but also in the South-South direction.
2. The project has made it possible for disciplines that are not at the avant-garde of scientific activity in the Latin American context to reach in both partner universities higher levels of development than the standards in the region for these same disciplines. This is particularly clear in the case of Sociology and Geography, the two most representative disciplines of the project, both in its origins as in its present state.
3. In the case of Sociology, a discipline that in many cases in the Latin American context is characterised by ideological rather than scientific approaches, the project has permitted the training of professors and researchers in advanced research techniques and in the formulation of projects that use these techniques in a creative manner.
4. In the case of Geography, a discipline which in this same academic context appears as a discipline that describes observable facts in a rather superficial way, the project, through the incorporation of GIS methodologies and techniques, has permitted that these new approaches and skills be applied to the analysis of realities that are not necessarily visible through an elemental observation, therefore encouraging interpretations that go beyond a simple description.
5. The project has been able to generate interest in its activities. This is due fundamentally to the scientific value of the activities undertaken. In academic environments it is common to find cooperation projects that generate a great deal of interest and

respect, but in many cases for reasons that have nothing to do with academic purposes. To say this more clearly and in a rather cynical manner, in many cases the prestige of projects and the scientific value that is attributed to them is directly proportional to the funds that the project makes available and to the material benefits that their members obtain. This is not the case of this project. The project has achieved, despite its problems, a great deal of respect in all three universities. Additionally, the different criticisms regarding the management of the project make it clear that these opinions do not concern in any way the scientific value of the project. There is a general agreement on the scientific value, the academic honesty and the intellectual rigor of those who participate in the project, particularly its leaders.

6. The project has been successful in finding a practical application for fieldwork. At the moment this is expressed in the selection of two locations where regional and local sustainable development activities will be carried out. There are still many elements concerning these activities to be determined, but a step in the right direction has been made and it is clear that it will now be impossible to have the project return to an ivory tower.

## **Main problems**

The analysis of the main problems must not produce the image that problems are more important than successes and accomplishments. In some cases they are simply a manifestation of day to day challenges, the breakdowns associated with the initiation of a new enterprise, with growing and with the integration of new people, activities or partners. Another reason why this section of the report is more extensive than others, is precisely because these points can be addressed by the project participants at this stage in order to redress these situations and improve the quality of the overall experience of the project, including its output and fulfilment of objectives.

That is the reason why, in this part of the report, rather than enumerating a long list of problems, we have chosen to center our discussion around two main problems that can be considered the most important that the project faces as it enters its second phase. The first problem is related to the resources chosen to carry out the project and the second one with the contents of the project. These are respectively:

- The stability and continuity of the teams, and
- The definition of the institutional assessment component

### ***The stability and continuity of the teams***

The main problem, both in ULS and UNA, is the stability and continuity of the teams. We have identified it as such because it is one that represents the greatest threat to the existence of the project. The other problem mentioned in the introduction to this section is also important but it does not represent a threat to the project as a whole, but rather only to a component of it.

The problem of team stability, although having in common the effects they produce on the project, has different manifestations and causes in each of the universities.

In the case of UNA, the problem is desertion, for different reasons, of members of the team who participated during the first year of the project. Not all the cases of desertion are attributable to the management styles of the project. The democratic organisational culture

of the university is certainly related to the manifestation of this problem within the team. The fact that university authorities are elected after long and very politicised electoral campaigns and the fact that a new administration generally implies a complete change of the governing team has affected the project. One of the senior members of the team had to leave aside his participation in the project given that he had decided to present himself as candidate for the post of Vice-President of the university. His victory led him to a complete withdrawal from the project team. The cost for the project in this case is attenuated by the fact of having in the new university administration a former member of the project team, although this still implies a few uncertainties. The electoral campaigns that occur in UNA are developed according to a very open game of support and alliances that reveals the preferences of almost all the members of the university community. Furthermore, the exercise of power makes new alliances and the granting of favours necessary, either as a retribution for the support received during the campaign or in order to gain new supporters to guarantee an administration that will not have to face great obstacles. For example, the new team that is presently directing the Faculty of Social Sciences, where the project originated, offered during the campaign an evaluation of the different cooperation projects and of the activities and programs of the Faculty, which is perceived by certain members of the project team as a threat.

Other problems with the continuity of the UNA team are related to the composition of the team itself in terms of experience and expertise. On one hand, in relation to experience, the team has lost some of its senior members which have been replaced by young professors or researchers. Two of the senior members who are presently part of the team have management responsibilities in two university offices that require great dedication, therefore reducing their availability for the project. The young professors or project participants have, on the other hand, a position that is more unstable in terms of contract, salary and status within the university.

The desertion of some members of the UNA team has also led to the loss of a variety of expertise, weakening the multidisciplinary character of the team. This has resulted in a greater participation of the Faculty of Social Sciences, in particular the School of Sociology at the level of students, and a weaker presence of the School of Planning and Social Promotion and the faculty of education, which at UNA receives the name of Centro de Investigación y Docencia en Educación (CIDE).

The issue of stability and continuity of the ULS team is essentially related to the status of some of its members at the university and with the disciplines that are represented in the team. The ULS team is also, to a large extent, young, even more than UNA in its age average. This has in the Chilean case an additional difficulty: ULS has gone through, as other Chilean universities, important budgetary cuts that affect the possibility of hiring new personnel. This implies that young professors or project participants will most probably have to stay in this unstable position for some years. This situation has led some of the team members to accept external contracts that give them work and economic stability but that force them to reduce their participation in the project (there are already two such cases that are representative of this growing tendency).

The ULS team is essentially composed of geographers and psychologists, disciplines corresponding to both people who originated the project in La Serena and who presently compose the local management team. The new stage of the project that has now started, in which fieldwork in the locality of Paihuano will be carried out, requires a diversification of the team in terms of expertise. It is difficult to determine at this moment what exactly are the needs that will emerge out of this new experience but it is likely that it will be necessary to attract new expertise in social sciences, management and regional development.

To conclude this section regarding the composition of the teams with a common idea regarding both Latin American university partners, we could say that in the near future both teams will have to face the tension that emerges from the necessity to take measures related to the management of the teams on one hand, and on the other, consolidate the fragile stability of the teams. This tension emerges within a climate of institutional change in Costa Rica, of lack of renovation of the staff of professors in Chile and the need of acquiring new expertise that correspond to the needs of the project in both cases.

Each university will have to face these challenges in a different manner. In the case of UNA this would probably require a greater flexibility in adapting to the necessity of establishing new alliances with the authorities of the university. The team should consider the possibility of redistributing the management responsibilities within their own team, a solution that if not adopted as a result of the team's own initiative will

most probably be imposed by the authorities of the university or of the Faculty of Social Sciences. In this same vein, opening up to other disciplines could limit the strength that this faculty holds and which allows it to impose its own decisions and orientations.

The issue regarding the management team should also be dealt with at ULS. First of all, because from a formal point of view the problem has arisen as a result of the director's retirement. This does not imply that the project will no longer benefit from the intellectual leadership that this person has provided to the project and to its staff. In this sense, the La Serena team feels that this leadership should be maintained. But in order to face the incorporation of other disciplines to the project, a medium-term plan to reinforce the management at ULS should be elaborated.

In both universities, UNA and ULS, the project itself would be strengthened by a more active team dynamic and a greater participation of the members in the decision-making process, at least in those decisions that are relative to the continuity of the project, the incorporation of new members and the representation of the team before university authorities and other instances. A dynamic group is certainly complimentary to a good team coordination, since it allows for participation in the daily activities of a project without the need of constant consultation of these actions, in so far as the actions correspond to the orientations discussed and agreed to by the team. This requires the definition of domains of action in which the co-ordinators delegate responsibilities to other members of the team.

### ***The definition of the institutional assessment component***

The main problem from the point of view of the contents of the project is that of the contradictions that arise in the execution of the institutional assessment component. The rationale of this component within the program of sustainable development as a whole is well explained in a series of documents that have been distributed and especially on the web site (<http://uregina.ca/~quinlank>). After reading these documents the feeling is that this rationale, the objectives formulated, the method, the assessment issues and the planned activities have been sufficiently socialized by the team co-ordinators.

However, when this impression is contrasted with the daily life of the project it becomes clear that this socialisation has not occurred, that the institutional assessment teams do not exist as teams and that the leaders of the project in ULS and UNA have tried to interpret this component in relation to their own needs in an effort that is praiseworthy but that does not guarantee the fulfilment of the objectives of the project in this field.

The institutional assessment component has both in ULS and UNA the condition of "neglected child", to use a popular expression, within the context of the project as a whole. The other two components, the development of expertise in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and the enhancement of research capabilities in sustainable development have a privileged position for different reasons. Among them we could mention the fact that these components have a niche in academic units (departments or faculties) that are at the origin of the project itself, that they correspond to the disciplines of the leaders and the senior participants of the project and that they are related to a methodological and technological deployment that generates great academic and professional prestige, being therefore the source of a great deal of power.

The institutional assessment objective that in the specific case of this project refers to the self-evaluation of the universities and its professors and project participants "to demonstrate their current capacity for sustainable development and be better positioned to make informed decisions about their involvement in the development process"<sup>5</sup> can appear, when it emerges from a project, as a threat to the institution. It can also be perceived as a threat by project participants and professors in a context of lack of self-criticism, of absence of evaluation methods and of budget cuts or changes in the authorities of the university.

In the case of ULS, the present team of officials which has experienced little changes in the last few years is the product of the recent history of the university and particularly the changes that occurred in the university as a result of the reorganization of the university system during the transition from the military dictatorship to democracy in the early 1990's. The university authorities also have had to face various student protests, the last one occurring precisely when the evaluator was visiting the university. The institutional assessment team at ULS, as

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<sup>5</sup> "The University, Institutional Assessment, and Sustainable Development", in (<http://uregina.ca/~quinlank>).

it is stated on the web site, is composed of two people. Actually one of these people is no longer working on the project, although she actively works on evaluation issues and presently directs the Department of Education of ULS. The other person has worked on other activities of the project (preparation of documents and material for courses) but up to now has not demonstrated a specific contribution in terms of institutional assessment. This seems to be due to structural reasons, rather than to the skills and expertise of the person in question. In fact, the institutional assessment "team" never functioned, since when one of its members quit there was no knowledge or information transfer to the person who would be in charge of this components, the person who left was never replaced, there is no program of activities in institutional assessment and this component does not have assigned student research assistants. Despite these difficulties, the vision of institutional assessment held by the only person formally working on this component coincides with the vision proposed by the project and published on the web site. Therefore the conditions to develop serious work on this matter are present at ULS. This depends on a series of conditions enumerated below:

- the designation (certainly in consultation with the only person working on this component) of new members for this team,
- institutional support in terms of resources,
- the incorporation of the objectives of institutional assessment to the research programmes of the project,
- a greater presence of the leader of this component from UR, and
- a careful selection of the methodologies to be used, moving beyond the theoretical level to that of applications.

In the case of UNA the difficulties in terms of institutional assessment have two manifestations: the composition of the team, as in the case of ULS, and the comprehension of this component.

One of the people mentioned on the web site who was the co-ordinator of this area and who works at the School of Planning and Social Promotion of the Faculty of Social Sciences, has ceased to be for some time now a collaborator of the project. Two people are currently working on the institutional component of the project in Costa Rica. One of them at the Heredia campus of UNA, associated to the Centro de Investigación y Docencia en Educación, which as we have already mentioned is the equivalent of a faculty of education, and the other one

at the Guanacaste campus of UNA, more precisely in the locality of Nicoya. The area of institutional assessment does not count on any additional project participants and only has one assistant in Heredia. There is little communication between the two members of the team, other than the meetings held with the whole project team.

Institutional assessment has in the case of UNA a scope that is different from the one originally intended and published (final version of the project, documents on the web site, etc.). Neither the project coordination, nor the university authorities, nor the members of the team adopt the orientation proposed in official publications. On the contrary, all these actors assume that the orientation taken in Costa Rica is the one that better suits their needs and integrates better with the other components of the project.

The UNA team has defined this component as an environmental education area, to which they have integrated activities within the framework of university education, workshops to community leaders and the creation of material for these activities. If we refer to the interviews that were carried out, we may state that the work team seems to be comfortable with this vision, although one informant mentioned that this aspect of institutional assessment should be defined in relation to sustainable development. Even in that reference there is a certain ambiguity to the meaning of "institutional", which sometimes appears to refer to the institutions that work in and with the community more than the university as an institution, which is the meaning that it takes in the project publications.

The concept of environmental education was also adopted by the members of the UNA team in a very wide sense, obviously including the most relevant aspects that concern the protection of the environment and a rational management of resources, but that also includes other topics, whose relevance we will not discuss, like domestic violence.

That the institutional assessment of the university is not part of the concerns of the members of the UNA team and the authorities they depend on (Vice-President, Deans), seems clear in the face of these two indicators:

1. The university has carried out in the past different assessment activities. These experiences have not been considered by the project team as a baseline for their discussions on this matter.

2. Recently, the university has undertaken a process of strategic definition, called the Third University Congress, that includes an evaluation of the institution. Despite the fact that this activity benefits from an important support by the authorities, a reference to this process or to the relationship between this process and the project was not found in the interviews, with only one exception.

The education perspective within the institutional assessment component is still predominant in the case of UNA, since different actors request a reinforcement of this approach and the incorporation of new members to this component's team, understanding that it means new people with a strong background in education.

The condition of neglected child of the institutional assessment component also reaches the project at UR. The fact that the person responsible for this component is presently working in another province and in another institution (although he maintains links with UR) does not contribute to solving this problem. The disciplinary origin of the leaders of the project in UR (a geographer and a sociologist) apparently lead to a preferred and natural attention to the areas of GIS and research. On the other hand, the participation of only one person in this area, despite transitory participation of other people, does not permit the weaknesses of this component to be diluted amongst many people, such as the capacity to fluidly communicate in Spanish. Recently the Regina coordinators have made significant efforts to diversify the offer of expertise available under this component, bringing new trainers to participate in project activities. The upcoming visit of the responsible of this area at UR to Costa Rica and Chile should contribute to strengthen this component, to define its orientations and obtain adhesion to these orientations by the Latin American teams and the project participants working on institutional assessment. Finally, this visit should permit the integration of the new elements participating in the institutional assessment component to the past and current activities in order to assure a continuity in these activities, rather than a superposition of new activities over the old ones.

The interviews confirmed some of the interpretations formulated in this part of the report. In one of them, the informant indicated that institutional assessment did not receive support from the university authorities due to their own insecurity. This same idea was restated in

another interview in which the autocratic structure of the university was commented. More concretely this person talked about a monarchical structure in which many of the responsibilities are distributed among a small group of people and with little or no consultation to the concerned actors.

The testimony of the responsible of the area of institutional assessment in UR is rich in elements that explain the difficulties that have presented obstacles to this component.

The instability of the institutional assessment teams is even more evident given the fact that the participation in the seminars held in Chile and Costa Rica was extremely irregular, to a point in which some of the people who attended the first seminar were not present for the second one and that some of those who replaced them had personal motives that did not permit them to participate. The fragility of these teams is certainly accentuated by the fact that they are composed usually of two people which explains why a change in the participation of one person greatly affects the team, which is reduced to one person.

## **Lessons learned**

It is on the basis of the interviews that the we can identify some lessons learned by the project participants. Many of these are certainly not exclusive or original to this project but they anyhow represent a conclusion resulting from the experience of the project:

1. Interdisciplinarity is not easy. The researchers and professionals who work on sustainable development seem too influenced by their own disciplines. On the other hand, it is difficult to integrate different approaches. There are aspects that cannot be included into the prevailing approaches. In this sense it seems paradoxical that generally biology, physics and chemistry are referred to as "hard" sciences. In many cases the sciences that could appear as "hard" (for their difficulty in opening up to different approaches) are social sciences in general.
2. Sustainable development depends on the human factor and in particular on the development of human resources. The participants of the project declare the importance of educational and training aspects of the project. They have lived it through their own training and they are starting to observe it through their contact with the locations where they are carrying out their fieldwork.
3. The project's leadership requires communications skills, both within the team as well as with the institutional and social contexts.
4. Working with mixed teams that combine young and senior project participants requires particular respect of the skills of each member and towards the contribution of each to the group as a whole. Young professionals can easily become the target of manipulation, due to the fragility of their occupational status.
5. The participation of team members, the contribution of each participant and their permanency for the duration of the project should not be taken for granted. This implies that when faced with the incorporation of a new member an ample discussion within the team should take place, in particular with those who work on the area in which the new member will be assigned. This consultation should also include the unit (faculty, school, department, centre) to

which this person is associated. To avoid that the participation of a new member in the team is reduced to a short period of time due to that person's attraction to other projects or posts, this participation should ideally be conceived on the basis of a career plan. It is true that this vision is not very developed in the organisational culture in Latin America, but nothing impedes this specific project to innovate in this sense.

6. International cooperation work in Latin America requires, on the Canadian side, a knowledge of Spanish. In Latin America the notion of second language does not exist (and in the few exceptions where it exists, the second language is an indigenous language). English is a foreign language and should not be taken for granted when planning activities, especially training. There are certainly many Latin American academics who have studied in English-speaking countries and who are competent in this language, but training activities should be planned according to a "minimum common denominator", which generally is unilinguism.

## **Recommendations**

This section outlines some important recommendations. Other recommendations to a specific university or to a sectorial aspect of the project are disseminated throughout this report.

Those that should be considered as a priority are, in our opinion, the following:

1. That the coordination team adopt as a first priority in the near future the clarification of the institutional assessment component, the configuration of teams in this area in partner universities and the organization of a visit of the UR leader of this area to Costa Rica and Chile.
2. That special attention be given to the improve management procedures especially in terms of ensuring the democratic functioning of the teams, to the delegation of responsibilities, to avoid centralising decision-making in the coordination and to permit the expression of initiatives from the teams.
3. That student assistants be provided with a clear idea of their role, with an overall picture of the project and that a recognition of their contribution to the research projects be made.
4. That special attention be given to complete the teams so as to assure an adequate balance between different disciplines and levels of experience of senior and junior professionals. In particular, we recommend a stronger participation of applied biophysical sciences to address the issue of environment and sustainable development.
5. That the incorporation of new members be consulted widely within the teams, especially with the people who work in the same area in which the new member will be assigned. That this consultation reach also the university authorities at different levels.
6. That the notion of career plan for the members of the teams be implemented, in order to assure their permanence, the continuity of the project and their satisfaction with their participation in the project.

7. That the possibility of continuing training members from Costa Rica and Chile at UR be explored, including the possibility of granting some scholarships for doctoral studies. That these activities also be considered in the perspective of a career plan.
8. That the training contents have, in the future, a more practical and instrumental approach, rather than theoretical and conceptual.
9. That the possibility of establishing permanent training and communication methods through Internet be explored, as the institutional evaluation web page. That before undertaking new initiatives in this sense, this experience be evaluated.
10. That the teams give sufficient importance to guaranteeing university authorities' support to the project, in particular fulfilling their commitment of personnel availability to the project and the adequate remuneration for the hours worked.
11. That UNA further develop the experience of an advisory council in Sarapiquí and that ULS constitute the advisory council as soon as possible in order to count on its collaboration in defining the work that will be carried out in Paihuano.
12. That as a result of this fieldwork the possibility of establishing partnerships between the municipalities of Sarapiquí, Paihuano and a municipality in Saskatchewan be explored.
13. That the project coordination study the possibility of meeting in La Serena in November 2001, as part of the VI Seminario Latinoamericano de Universidades y Desarrollo Regional, sponsored by the Red de Universidades Regionales Latinoamericanas (UREL) and that the possibility of encouraging the participation of the Presidents of UR and UNA at this event be considered.
14. That the teams give special care to a balanced development of the three work components of the project (GIS, research and institutional assessment) in order to guarantee greater efficiency and best results.
15. That a global development plan relative to GIS be elaborated, including aspects of training of students, leaders and local decision-

makers. That this plan consider a relationship between the development of GIS and the advances of the project as a whole.

16. That the GIS development plan take into consideration the needs that might arise as a result of the advances in this field, due to the emergence of new resources and the development of this technology.
17. That this plan bring back to the discussion the idea of creating GIS centres in ULS and UNA, with a self-financed research orientation eventually turning into a source of generation of new funds.
18. That the planning in terms of GIS have an adequate correspondence in the formulation of research projects. In other words, that the search and treatment of data of these projects consider sufficiently a georeferential basis provided by GIS.
19. That the leader of the institutional assessment in UR, study mechanisms of integration of the new trainers in this area to the whole component work plan, including the integration of web based resources to the component web site.
20. That resources permitting the diffusion of the work of the project and other public relations activities become available. That this include the diffusion of the research work of the team members and other academic products.
21. That a schedule for the transfer of funds be elaborated, taking into account the different academic calendars between the Northern and the Southern hemispheres and the fact that the vacation periods are different in all three universities, which could lead to delays in the transfer of funds.

## **Conclusions**

After two years and half and at the beginning of a new stage, the observer must conclude that the project has taken the right direction. The new period might be of more productivity in terms of training beyond the teams, production of research (published documents, mapping, web publishing), fieldwork and partnership development with local communities, governments, NGOs and the private sector.

The foundations of what must be accomplished from now to the end of the five years life span of the project are built and it seems that they could accommodate the changes to be undertaken. This can be done without pain. The project leaders and participants are people with solid convictions and with a clear identification of the meaning of what they are doing in the project as well as with the role of the project in the development of their communities.

The co-ordination team (Canadian, Chilean and Costa Rican directors) is well integrated. Issues are discussed in a very open way and decisions are taken on a consensual basis, respecting the interests, the specificity and the sensibility of each one. This means that the direction for the next years will be able to address the challenges and give the orientations needed by the project at this moment.

It seems to us that the agenda for success could be defined by two words: participation and partnership.

Participation is the main characteristic that needs to be guaranteed in order to consolidate the teams. Participation does not mean a dilution of the decision-making process with the absence of leadership. It means leadership with orientation, consultation of strategic decisions and delegation of executive powers.

Partnership building is the main strategic tool for the consolidation of the project and to gain sustainability inside each one of the participant universities. Partnership, in this case, must be understood in terms of alliance building, mainly with the university officials and with the university units that correspond to the main disciplines represented in the project.

Being in contact with the project leaders and participants, participating in its activities, reading its documents, gives the impression of witnessing a project which is not common. It is not easy to align in the same direction different cultures, nationalities, disciplines, experiences, recent and past history, local particularities, institutional context and so on. To work under these conditions is challenging and this project is not an exception. But it seems to us that the project leaders and participants have built from these challenges, new experience and new strengths that will most certainly lead them to the adoption of the necessary changes and to consolidate the success they have obtained so far.