

CITIES ON VOLCANOES 7 - COLIMA, MEXICO 19 – 23 NOVEMBER 2012

CONFERENCE REPORT

The Cities on Volcanoes conference series has the aim of bringing together all involved in volcanic risk: including the generation of the hazards, analysis of their impact, risk mitigation, education and studies of vulnerability. The idea is to motivate dialogue between earth scientists, social scientists, Civil Protection workers, insurance analysts, the general public, amongst others. Following on from the most recent conferences in Tenerife, Japan and Ecuador, the City of Colima played host to the 7th event of the series, with the University of Colima providing the necessary infrastructure. The conference was a huge success, not only with many splendid talks highlighting research being carried out in many areas, but also the social programme, and how it managed to rekindle the original inclusive aims of this particular meeting. In total 342 subscribed from 35 countries, with particularly large contingents from the UK and New Zealand. Local participation was estimated to include a further 200 people, meaning a total of about 550 participants.

Being situated on the extensive apron of debris avalanche deposits that originated from the most active volcano in Mexico, Colima was an obvious choice for a Cities on Volcanoes conference. Indeed, it is one of the most prolific producers of flank collapses anywhere. The volcano had only recently finished an eruptive period that lasted from 1998 until 2011. The motivation to submit a proposal was also fuelled by the proximity to an important anniversary: the last large eruption was in January of 1913 and the volcano has been through several cycles of an approximate 100 years repose period between Plinian or sub-Plinian events.

COV7 featured traditional academic sessions, but this was supplemented by a range of alternative activities such as open forums, where the microphone was offered to anyone who wanted to raise an issue, photographic and children's art competitions, and art and photography exhibitions. The forums were particularly successful with many interesting debates covering topics relevant both to the local and international community. The programme was supplemented by both pre- and post-excursions to a variety of volcanic regions in Mexico, including El Chichón, Parícutin and Jorullo, and Ceboruco and San Pedro. Two excursions were offered to the Colima Volcanic Complex, one to study debris avalanche deposits and the other an overview of evolution based upon evidence from tephrochronology, petrology and geochemistry. In addition a very popular traditional mid-conference excursion covered local communities to present the opportunity for interaction with the population and civil protection workers, as well as several stops that featured geology, an overview of recent eruptive activity and the influence of the volcano upon prehispanic cultures.

Workshops included one dedicated to monitoring techniques, another organized jointly by the Volcanic Ashfall Impacts Working Group and the International Volcanic Health Hazard Network, one to show the strengths of the VHub online network and the last on the critical subject of "Volcanic unrest: Interfacing science and decision-making". All were well attended. A pre-conference workshop was also given to members of the local media. The idea here was to discuss terminology and the general concepts of volcanology and risk mitigation. The scientific programme consisted of 17 sessions which were divided amongst 4 symposia: Volcanoes and their hazards; Evaluating Volcanic Risk; Volcanic Risk Reduction in Developing Countries; Volcanoes, Society and Government. In total 372 presentations were made, roughly divided equally between posters and oral.

The cultural highlight was certainly a street party organized in the picturesque local village of Nogueras. Here participants had ample opportunity to sample local foods, drinks and watch dancing and listen to a Mariachi band. Many participants took the opportunity to meet the locals. Other tastes of local culture were provided by the local municipalities of both Colima and Villa de Alvarez.

Report prepared by Nick Varley - Universidad de Colima - Mexico

SVE – UNISDR contact : hgaudru@sveurop.org