

Transdisciplinary approaches: a seminar to integrate diverse kinds of scientists from the Americas

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The Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research (IAI) organized the Professional Development Seminar (PDS) to Transdisciplinary approaches to integrating policy and science for sustainability. Funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and co-funded by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), Sao Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) and the Michigan Technological University, the event was divided in two sessions, the first was held from November 28th to December 2nd, 2016 in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, and the second was held from October 3rd to 7th, 2017 in Calgary and Banff, Canada.

The main objective was to train future leaders in science, policy, and global change management, offering practical training on skills to encourage teamwork and interactions between scientists, society and decision makers. The initiative came from the complexity of climate change phenomena, its problems and impacts on society in socioeconomic, biophysical and technological dimensions, and the needs for effective communication and collaboration between scientists and those who are affected by sustainability policy.

"I feel far more equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be successful in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research."
Caitlin Quarrington - MindFuel (Science Alberta Foundation), Canada

The Seminar had 27 participants from 15 countries in the Americas: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and USA. The group was composed by professionals from private sectors, government, research institute, NGOs, indigenous community and academia. The diversity of the group contributed to the success of the event.



Seminar group – Banff, Canada - Photo by Igor Jakob.

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"Since I'm already in the role of policy maker, the Seminar brought me tools to acknowledge and engage other stakeholders in the process and try to enlarge the participatory level as much as possible." Gabriel Lui - Ministry of the Environment, Brazil

In both sessions, participants attended several presentations throughout the week, participated in hands on exercises and group discussions on themes related to the Seminar. The Dominican Republic's field trips were divided in two different places with examples of sustainability: an ecological dairy farm in Las Caobas, that presented its history, area, milk production and derivatives. The other one was the organic cocoa plantation in Altamira, where everyone could hear about the work done and the importance for the environment. In Canada, the field trip was focused on making connections, they visited two sacred places for the indigenous community in Canada: Sundial Hill Medicine Wheel (goo.gl/dhD5GD) and Women's Buffalo Jump (goo.gl/VCp5if). The group was led by Ramona Big Head of the Blackfoot Nation community and director of Kanai High School and Dwayne Donald, Cree First Nation, University of Alberta. They were able to share not only beautiful places, but part of their history and culture, the life of the native Canadians and the importance of these places to ensure the perpetuation of its history and identity.

"In Puerto Plata, we focused on integrating disciplines, how to do and to learn the best practices, and in Banff it was more about connecting people, how to engage people, and how the communication is important for that. It is important people to understand each other, to know their limitations and potentialities, and how it brings strength to the relationship and to conduct a transdisciplinary work. The result will be much better, people connected for a common purpose." Tatiana de Souza - Conservation International (CI-Brazil), Brazil

As part of the program, the participants had group activities that were designed to develop proposal writing skills, encourage networking, and promote the application of training provided to urgent, real-world problems that have a significant global change dimension. Four collaborative groups were established and they have worked on a research project proposal. The projects will start in 2018.

More information about the IAI and the Seminar you can find at the website: <http://www.iai.int/?p=24364>



Cocoa plantation in Altamira. Photo by Mariana Toledo.