ALLSA 2015

1st Latin American Academy of Socio-Environmental Leadership

“TRANSFORMATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING: OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH BIOCULTURAL LANDSCAPES”

Dominican Republic, November 13-22 2015

The struggle is not how to delay or ensure particular events - the struggle is to reinvent the world - Paulo Freire

1. THE BEGINNING

Since 2011, the Global Diversity Foundation (GDF) has organized the Global Environments Summer Academy (GESA) in Europe, which has already become a benchmark event worldwide with close to 100 alumni and 500 applicants each year. As a project that sprang from the motivation of Spanish-speaking GESA alumni, and with the additional support of the Dominican Republic National Institute of Training and Education for Teachers, we present the 1st Latin American Academy of Socio-Environmental Leadership (ALLSA).
1.1 Who did we invite to this event?
Applications are open to young Spanish-speaking people with exceptional socio-environmental leadership experience and motivation from within the academic world, civil society, the private sector or government. Meanwhile, regional and global experts participate as mentors by facilitating a process of co-learning. Participants and mentors are carefully selected to achieve a team with balanced interests and skills. The most impactful learning comes not only from the formal program, but also -- and often more impactfully -- from informal interactions.

1.2 How necessary is this event?

*If nature were a bank, it would have already been saved.*

_Eduardo Galeano_

We share a genuine and informed sense of urgency. *Homo economicus* has created a system that maximizes utility and generates great material wealth, which at the same time generates enormous economic inequality and indiscriminate exploitation of nature. In this system, the richest 80 people in the world possess the same wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion (Oxfam, 2015). Rather than the human as a member of the community of life - as many traditional cultures view humanity - this system has turned humans into a planetary force that is pushing Earth systems toward collapse.

In the case of Latin America, this situation creates specific problems and conditions. Latin America is simultaneously the “biodiversity superpower” of the world and the region with the highest socio-economic inequality, which warrants a differentiated approach in order to define the most appropriate solutions. Forty percent of the Earth’s overall biodiversity is found in this region, as well as six of the most biodiverse countries (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, México, Perú and Venezuela), and 10 of the 15 most socio-economically inequitable countries in the world. The 41
countries in the region also possess great cultural and linguistic diversity, with more than 650 indigenous peoples who speak more than 600 languages. ALLSA aims to honour and work with the challenges that this inequality poses in a highly multicultural and biodiverse context.

At a planetary scale, a group of scientists (Rockström et al, 2015) have established a series of new planetary limits within which Earth will remain in a stable state; in 2015, four systems have already surpassed their limit, including climate change and the alteration of biogeochemical flows. To complement this approach, Oxfam (2012) outlines a version filled with human dimensions which outlines serious trends in global poverty, limited access to energy and potable water, gender inequality and social inequality more generally.

Despite the iconic publication of Silent Spring (Carson, 1962), to the warning in Limits to Economic Growth (Club de Roma, 1972), as well as the long series of United Nations conventions and protocols, the human response to these social and environmental problems has failed. There have been periodic victories, but as a species we have been incapable of achieving systemic change and stopping either deterioration of the planet or the socio economic conditions of the majority of humanity. A profound renewal of vision and effort is imperative, and ALLSA aims to support this process.

On the left the planetary limits (SRC, 2009) and on the right the world’s social inequalities (Oxfam, 2012)
2. **What do we want to achieve?**

The dream is to create a dynamic *space and process* of co-learning that empowers young socio-environmental leaders to act, and inspire others to act, in service of a great *social and environmental transformation*, at scales ranging from small communities to international fora.

- We will share methodologies and knowledge that encourage intercultural dialogue, which we see as a process of meaningful learning.

- We will strengthen leadership skills and motivations, in other words the capacity to facilitate socio-environmental change.

- We will generate connective creative processes and strengthen interpersonal networks which will lay the foundation for collaborative projects after the event.
ALLSA SEEKs TO Awaken, Connect and Empower

3. BEGINNING THE DIALOGUE

3.1 Which styles of learning we hold and share

We locate ourselves close to the large umbrella of constructivism, and warmly sympathetic to the liberation pedagogy of Paolo Freire, which originates in Latin America. We conclude that the mechanistic principles of behaviorism (Watson, 1913) are more a part of the problem than the solution, as evidenced by our thousands of classrooms which are devoid of both joy and learning.

Cognitivism gives us a thorough understanding of thought processes and useful logical tools (Neisser, 1967), but these are abysmally insufficient for confronting complex contemporary challenges.

Constructivism, even with its ambiguities, allows us to open more doors. We understand that learning occurs when new information, experiences and ideas interact with our pre-existing knowledge systems, forcing our minds to build new networks of understanding. Under this approach, learners are "meaning makers" placing facilitators as co-constructors of knowledge, and not just as transmitters of information (Toshalis, 2012).

From Freire (1981) we take his highly relevant "problematic education", which, in opposition to the one-directional system of "banking education", encourages a back-and-forth communication in which educators and students teach each other through dialogue. This dialogue implies a meeting of human beings in order to transform the world, a praxis that involves action and reflection to create the true word (Freire, 1995). At ALLSA we aspire to this liberating and transformational process of co-creation.

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND NEUROSCIENCE JOIN HANDS

A scientist told me we are made of atoms, but a little bird told me that we are made of stories - Eduardo Galeano

We advocate for a pedagogy that builds bridges between ancestral knowledge of the first peoples and the discoveries of contemporary
neuroscience, that validates what our great-grandparents already knew: that storytelling is the best pedagogical technique for activating all parts of the brain associated with learning (Hasson, 2011); and that Gaia's electromagnetic fields overlap with our nervous and cardiovascular systems, meaning that changes in the Earth affect our mental and emotional health (McCraty, 2012). Therefore we do not privilege any single epistemology... we want to place them to dialogue, to challenge one another, to meet.

The meeting of science and traditional knowledge: on the left, a representation of the Inca cosmology in which all life is connected; on the right the magnetic waves of Earth match the rhythm of the human heart (HearthMath, 2015).

WHAT WE MEAN BY LEADERSHIP

We understand leadership as an activity, not as an institutional position. For example, being president of a country is not equivalent to leadership. Leadership is a social function that is necessary when technical solutions do not exist for collective problems, and when adaptive work is necessary (Heifetz, 2009). Illustrating this concept, Mahatma Gandhi and Rigoberta Menchú did not become leaders through a formal position, but rather through their capacity to awaken and mobilize consciousness, and promote social change through an effective system of values.

In the context of this unprecedented socio-environmental crisis, we understand that the idea that “leaders are born, not made” is inconsequential. It is necessary --and possible-- to build leadership attitudes and behaviours in people that promote the great transformation towards an economic and social system that regenerates life. In other words, transformational leadership can be learned (Drucker, 1997). The concept of leadership as a charismatic individual luring the masses is insufficient to deal with the complexity of contemporary problems. We prefer Fritjof Capra's (2010)...
vision of a leadership that facilitates and nurtures the conditions for socio-environmental ecosystems to undergo systematic change through collective innovation.

3.2 Broadening our perspective through a biocultural lens

From a biocultural perspective, human beings are a part of, and not independent from the natural world; and biological, cultural and linguistic diversity are all interrelated and interdependent. We understand that a habitat, its inhabitants and their habits or cultural expressions (language, songs, stories, dances, ways of preparing food...) interact to form an indissoluble unity (Rozzi, 1998).

We speak of a “crisis of convergent extinction” of the diversity of life in all its forms: biodiversity, ways of life and languages. Just in the last three decades, there has been a 25% decrease in the world’s linguistic diversity (Harmony Loh, 2010). Though it sounds apocalyptic we can confirm that we have entered the 6th great extinction, with over 40% of amphibians and 25% of mammals in danger of disappearing forever (Nature, 2014). We are losing both the rich biodiversity that sustains human and non-human life, as well as the traditional knowledge that helps to maintain biodiversity.

From this viewpoint we welcome pedagogical traditions that strengthen the cultural and spiritual connection of humans with the natural world, such as the biocentric cosmologies of the first peoples of these lands, ecopsychology and deep ecology, which are expressed in the holistic approaches inspired by Goethe and Joanna Macy’s Work that Reconnects. At the same time, we incorporate the critical approaches of social and political ecology that aim to transform the relations between humans and the natural world, and between humans themselves. In short, we advocate a comprehensive learning that reaches the socio-cultural, economic and political roots of our environmental problems, and above all empowers conscious and effective action.
4. **How We Will Facilitate Learning**

The methodological approach of ALLSA is constructivist, critical, dialogic, intercultural, dynamic and transdisciplinary. We highlight:

- **Clear definition of activities led** by facilitators and other activities led by participants.
- **Research Cafes** in which participants share their projects and interests in innovative and impactful ways (ex. using the TED-style talk approach).
- **Discussion Circles** in which an expert introduces a topic of interest and facilitates an open discussion for which participants have prepared.
- **Creative Preludes** in which participants share games, songs, art, activities, etc, in connection with the environmental themes we are discussing.
- **Practical Workshops** that teach concrete skills related to media and other outreach strategies.
- **Collaborative Initiatives**, in which participants and experts with common interests develop project ideas.
- **Openness to indigenous knowledge** as a collectively constructed space of organic learning, we maintain an openness to integrating methodological elements introduced by indigenous participants or others.
- **Experiential Learning** in which we interact and dialogue with communities in their natural environment, deepening biocultural learning through practice.
- **Ethnobotany Breaks** are an alternative to conventional coffee breaks where participants share their traditional and cultural foods with the group.
5. THE TEAM OF FACILITATORS AT ALLSA 2015

To facilitate a transformative event we invited an exceptional team of mentors who will help us co-learn and explore new perspectives. We present them in alphabetical order.

**DANIEL ABREU, MA**  
Dominican Republic  
*Co-organizer and facilitator of ALLSA*

I hold a Masters degrees in Development Studies with a concentration in Democratic Governance in the Netherlands, and in International Relations at the University of Barcelona. I have worked and collaborated with a diversity of institutions including the UNDP, UNICEF, The Global Reporting Initiative, Greenpeace, GIZ and Transparency International. Currently I am coordinating a climate change education initiative with the Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic, UNITAR and UNESCO. My personal passions include film, literature, photography and ecological spirituality.

**ANTONIA BARREAU, MSc**  
Chile  
*Co-organizer and facilitator of ALLSA*

I am an emerging Chilean ethnoecologist and a lover of plants and their uses. I am interested in studying traditional ecological knowledge on forest ecosystems, their relationship to food sovereignty, and the intergenerational processes of this knowledge transmission. I have worked in different places within Latin America and I recently completed my Masters degree on forests and communities at the University of British Columbia (Canada). Currently I am in the process of returning to my country with the goal of contributing to biocultural diversity conservation efforts and the revalorization and revitalization of traditional knowledge, practices and skills. I am also a mother, knitter, drawer and outdoor sport enthusiast.
CARLOS DEL CAMPO  
Mexico  

*Invited facilitator*

My academic background is in humanist psychology and environmental anthropology. In 1997 I also received training in eco-psychology with the Nature Connect Project of the Global Education Institute. Since then I have worked with marginalized groups, students and professionals on processes of nature therapy and meditation to connect ourselves with nature and society as human beings. Since 2007 I have also collaborated with GDF and Anima Mundi on community-based conservation support projects, training community researchers to conduct collaborative research and defend their indigenous territory in Oaxaca, Mexico.

YOLANDA LÓPEZ, MSc  
Mexico  

*Co-organiser and facilitator of ALLSA*

I come from an indigenous Mayan community in southern Mexico. I am a human ecologist and I work as a researcher in the Geography Department at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in Germany. Currently I am working on my doctoral thesis analyzing complex socio-ecological subterranean water systems and their regulation mechanisms, in order to model their evolution and evaluate intervention strategies. My mission is to promote the sustainable use of freshwater sources and involve indigenous communities at every stage of this process. I am trying to integrate traditional ecological knowledge from indigenous communities with current ways of doing science, to promote the revitalization and valorization of this knowledge among younger generations. Currently I am working with environmental groups, NGOs and other organizations on clean-up campaigns and outreach on sustainable water management. My other passions include folk dancing and diving.
GARY MARTIN, PHD  
United States  

Invited facilitator

I am the director of the Global Diversity Foundation (GDF), and I have been involved with conservation and ethnobotany work for over 30 years. I have participated in applied research and training in over 45 countries. After studying botany, I received a Masters and a PhD in Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley. Between 1998 and 2011, I was a researcher and professor in the School of Anthropology and Conservation at the University of Kent in Canterbury. United Kingdom. Between 2010 and 2012, I was a scholar at the Rachel Carson Center for Society and the Environment in Munich, Germany. Since 2011 I have been the director of the Global Environments Summer Academy (GESA). I speak Spanish and French, and I am learning Moroccan Arabic.

ANA ELIA RAMÓN HIDALGO, MSc  
Spain  

Co-organizer and facilitator of ALLSA

I am a group facilitator by profession and my focus is the use of experiential learning to address socio-ecological themes. In other words, I facilitate the reflection, collaboration and efficient work of groups through experiential dynamics, art, and exploring networks of influence. I am also a researcher at the University of British Columbia in Canada, where I am studying for my doctoral degree. In my thesis I examine the role of social networks and gender dynamics in the empowerment of individuals and communities involved in community ecotourism projects in Ghana. At the same time I am a student in the Orphan Wisdom school of thought, and an active member of CEHDA, an non-profit organization that works toward the empowerment of communities in northern Ghana. My other interests include musical composition, meditation, and trekking.
Ricardo Rozzi, PhD  
Chile  
Invited facilitator  

I'm a philosopher, biologist, and an associate professor at the University of North Texas (UNT) and the University of Magallanes (UMAG) in Chile. My research combines both disciplines through the study of the interrelationships between ways of knowing and living in the natural world. At UNT my work takes place within the Center for Environmental Philosophy, a leading center for environmental ethics programming worldwide ([www.phil.unt.edu](http://www.phil.unt.edu)). With these universities and the Institute for Ecology and Biodiversity I established the Program for Sub Antarctic Biocultural Conservation. Drawing from my methodological approach of “field environmental philosophy” and the "biocultural ethics" conceptual framework, this program integrates ecological sciences and environmental philosophy.

Alberto Sánchez, MSC  
Dominican Republic  
Invited facilitator  

I am a forestry engineer from the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo with a specialization in forest management from the The Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Centre in Costa Rica (CATIE). For over 20 years I have managed the United Nations Small Subsidies Program for the Dominican Republic, whose management has been recognized on various occasions as one of the best in the world within this program. Thanks to the support of the excellent team I work with, I was honoured as Man of the Year in 2014 by the country's largest newspaper for community and environmental leadership. I am a passionate player of outdoor sports, especially soccer and baseball.
MIRIAN VILELA, MSC
Brazil

Invited facilitator

I have a Bachelor’s degree in International Commerce and a Masters in Public Administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, where I was an Edward Mason Fellow. I worked for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in preparation for the 1992 Earth Summit. I am the Executive Director of the International Secretariat of the Earth Charter, as well as the Centre for Education for Sustainable Development in the University of Peace in Costa Rica. I also coordinate the UNESCO Department of Education for Sustainable Development. Throughout the years I have conducted and facilitated numerous workshops, courses and international seminars on the values and principles of sustainability, recently with Fritjof Capra. I am also a member of the Expert Reference Group for UNESCO on the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD).

EGLÉÉ L. ZENT, PHD
Venezuela

Invited facilitator

I am a Venezuelan mother of two children. My formal academic training has been eclectic (art, anthropology, botany, conservation biology) including PhD studies at two universities in the US: California at Berkeley and the University of Georgia. My research focused on both the high altitude Andean region, and the forested lowlands of the Jotí people. My areas of research cover aspects of human ecology that can be defined as ethnoecological, ethnocartographic or ecogonic (ecological and biological local or traditional knowledge, ethnobotany, ethnomycology, behavioral ecology, self-demarcation of indigenous territories). Since November 2000, I have worked as a researcher in the Human Ecology Laboratory at the Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research. I have published in approximately 60 journals and I have had the good fortune to participate in around 70 international events.
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Transformative Environmental Learning: Our Relationships With Biocultural Landscape