

## **Wenner-Gren Workshop April 2018**

### **Degrowth, buen vivir and other paths toward human-environment well-being**

#### **Abstract:**

This workshop rallied ethnographic research and anthropological theory to widen horizons for thought and action in response to global environmental challenges. It joins growing efforts to shift emphasis from technical adaptation toward transformation of sociocultural systems. With empirical focus on a set of radically diverse efforts to recuperate, adapt, and forge paths toward human-environment well-being, we explored concepts and frameworks that support us to think holistically about each phenomenon and comparatively within a common field. Understandings built across profoundly different ways of knowing and being—expressed in the ethnographic phenomena studied and embodied by workshop participants themselves—pushed us to recognize and imagine more diverse modes of human-environment existence and well-being. In response to American Anthropological Association calls for research and theory engaging climate change, our collaborations have brought long-evolving ideas of holism and cultural relativism into dialogue with intellectual currents including ecological economics, political ecology, and sustainability science. This workshop helped to build solidarity among participants, and to nourish our ongoing efforts to develop cross-cultural research and theory that influence environmental science and policy, to date largely circumscribed by modern/western ways of knowing and being that have come to seem universal.

#### **Contents**

- Abstract
- Report on goals, proceedings, and results of the workshop
- Appendix 1 Workshop Program
- Appendix 2 UF Conference program
- Appendix 3 Papers shared, presented and discussed in workshop
- Appendix 4 Participants

## **Report on Wenner-Gren Workshop: Degrowth, buen vivir and other paths toward human-environment well-being, held April 6-10, 2018 at the University of Florida**

Organizer: Susan Ann Paulson; Co-organizer: Lisa Lynn Gezon

Co-Sponsors: UF Center for Latin American Studies, US Department of Education Title VI, and Bacardi Family Foundation

**The goal** of the workshop was to rally ethnographic research and anthropological theory to widen horizons for thought and action in response to global environmental challenges. It joins growing efforts to shift emphasis from technical innovations toward transformation of sociocultural systems. The workshop brought together people engaged in efforts to recuperate, adapt, and forge paths toward human-environment well-being in very dissimilar contexts. By connecting wide-ranging ethnographic material with intellectual currents from political ecology, ecological economics, and sustainability science, we seek to advance cross-cultural understandings that influences environmental science and policy, to date largely circumscribed by modern/western ways of knowing and being that have come to seem universal.

**Proceedings** comprised five months of collaboration carried out as outlined in Wenner-Gren proposal. In December 2017, invitees chose between challenges of presenting a case study from ethnographic research or facilitating theoretical exploration of a cross-cutting theme. Ten case studiers were asked to submit abstracts in January 2018 and short case studies by April 2018; six theoretical facilitators worked in teams to develop and post questions and activities. Participants were expected to read all materials, posted on a Google Drive, before the workshop.

Four days of face-to-face engagement were also carried out as outlined in Wenner-Gren proposal. On Saturday, April 7, ten participants presented five-minute talks followed by group discussions exploring specifics of each case in relation to themes. In the afternoon, we broke into three groups, and each discussed one of the cross-cutting challenges: (1) to support scholarly-activist synergy; (2) to influence policies, programs, institutions; and (3) to theorize dynamics of change already happening and possible. The day ended with the first of three sessions designed to ignite synergy: two facilitators led activities to help the group better understand and respond to challenges and synergies of scholarly-activist interaction.

Sunday, April 8, two facilitators motivated a discussion about strategies to influence policies and institutions, then two different facilitators led activities to theorize dynamics of change underway and possible. We ended with reflections on ideas and experiences up to that point, and planned our contributions to the UF Conference, launched at 5:00 p.m. with a panel of six Wenner-Gren workshop participants and 160 audience members.

All W-G workshop members participated in the UF Conference Monday morning through Tuesday 1:00 p.m. On Monday afternoon, ten W-G workshop members presented lightning talks on their case studies in a plenary round-table session followed by 45 minutes of eager questions and ideas from the larger audience.

Afternoon of Tuesday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, after the UF conference finished, our W-G group met for a final reflection on the workshop, the UF conference, and opportunities for the future.

**To disseminate understandings** developed in this journey, participants are writing for diverse publics. Organizers committed to sharing group process and results in *Anthropology News*. Acosta will disseminate short papers online for popular audiences. Kothari arranged to publish adaptations of some case studies on website *Radical Ecological Democracy*, and invited some participants to workshop in Himachal Pradesh. Verma and Damaria are developing plans for a Special Issue in *Development and Change*; DeVore, Hirsch, and Paulson have submitted a scholarly article, “Conservation through nourishing human and other nature,” and Paulson’s article emerging from this workshop is forthcoming in a Cuban journal: “La propuesta de descrecimiento en diálogo pluriversal con el buen vivir, agroecología y Zapatismo.”

**Outcomes:** our joint consideration of ethnographic materials and cross-cultural ideas have not (yet) yielded a concerted response to global environmental challenges, but have certainly widened our horizons for thought, action, and collaboration on issues including the following.

Dynamics among **scales of change** from individual behavior to institutional and structural change. Participants agreed that individual actions are important (e.g., political potential of acts of loving kindness), and debated how to make them transformative. Since we humans (re)produce ourselves and our communities through daily practices and relations, by doing things differently we become different people, which can be a powerful form of resistance. We assessed **scaling out vs. scaling up** to spread environmentally-sound visions and ways of organizing social structures, and to sustain them politically, socially, and ecologically.

Current and potential **roles of cognitive models and values** manifest in Ubuntu, Gross National Happiness, Zapatismo, Buen Vivir, Swaraj; similarities and differences in worldviews/practices.

Appreciation of these and other ways of knowing and being facilitated by attention to **pluriverse**, conceptualized as a rainbow of cosmologies and vital worlds that co-evolve in relations of power and difference, and are indispensable for sustainability of people and planet.

**Interplay of economies, ideas, and biophysical worlds:** as material, energy, ideals and ideas are embedded in and moved through commodity chains.

Current and potential **interactions of research, movements, policy-makers.** How do and can people practicing different modes of being and communities living differently connect or conflict with people and groups actively working toward change?

Other **forms of plenitude** (frugal abundance) versus extractive abundance with high eco-footprint. Conceptualizations of the good life, and means to that end, across cultures and contexts. What do priorities of care, sharing, self-reliance, autonomy look like in practice? How do they interact with prioritization of expanding production and consumption?

**Inequality** as deep cause of current environmental destruction, manifest in uneven access to and control over resources, as well as unequal distribution of benefits and burdens of environmental exploitation. How to bring actors together across power inequalities organized via states, economies, ethnoracial and gender systems, and more?

## **Appendix 1 Workshop Program**

### ***Degrowth, buen vivir and other paths toward human-environment well-being***

Wenner-Gren Foundation Theory-Building Workshop

#### **Saturday April 7<sup>th</sup> Ustler Hall, University of Florida Campus**

8:45 Breakfast, materials and nametags

9:15 Opening, introductions, consensus on process

9:30 Yoga experience

9:45 Case studies: each author does a 3 minute lightning presentation provoking a 10 minute discussion.

11:00 Break

11:15 Case studies: each author does a 3 minute lightning presentation provoking a 10 minute discussion.

12:45 Lunch

1:45 Self-organize into three groups, each asks how the cases just discussed can be motivated to advance one challenge: (1) support scholarly-activist synergy; (2) influence policies, programs, institutions; and (3) theorize dynamics of change already happening and possible.

2:45 Break

3:00 **Dianne and Federico** lead activities to motivate learning from our case studies to better understand and support scholarly-activist tensions and synergies.

4:45 Check-in reflection on day one

5:00 Finish for the day

**Saturday April 7<sup>th</sup> 7 p.m. Dinner Party** at Susan's house 719 S.W. 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue, Gainesville Fl.

#### **Sunday April 8<sup>th</sup> Ustler Hall, University of Florida Campus**

8:45 Breakfast

9:15 **Adrian and Alberto** lead activities to motivate reflection on ways in which case studies have influenced policies, programs, institutions, and how such influence can be amplified or scaled up.

10:45 Break

11:00 **Rudi and Ashish** lead activities to think with case studies and other experiences about how dynamics of change are already happening and can happen in the future.

12:30 Lunch

1:30 **Reflection**, plans for contribution to UF conference, possibilities for collaborative book or other.

2:45 Culminating experience

3:00 Finish workshop for the day

**5:00 Opening Panel and Reception for UF Conference –Smathers Library**

#### **Monday April 9<sup>th</sup>**

8:00 Breakfast at Emerson Hall

8:30-5:00 UF Conference

1:15 -3:15 OUR ROUND TABLE: other pathways worldwide: 3-minute lightning presentations in dialogue

5:00 Parade, happy hour, dance party

**Tuesday April 10<sup>th</sup>**

8:30 Breakfast at Emerson Hall

9:00 -12:30 Conference

12:30 -2:00 Wenner Gren Lunch Meeting in conference room 208 for final reflection on workshop and conference, and consideration of future paths.

**Appendix 2 UF Conference program** UF Latin American Studies Conference on Buen Vivir and Other Post-Development Pathways

[http://www.latam.ufl.edu/media/latamufledu/event-images/annual-conference/Buen-Vivir-Program\\_Web.pdf](http://www.latam.ufl.edu/media/latamufledu/event-images/annual-conference/Buen-Vivir-Program_Web.pdf)

### **Appendix 3 Papers shared, presented and discussed in workshop**

Jonathan DeVore. “Convivial Conservation among Rural Squatters in Brazil’s Atlantic Forest” Global South Studies Center University of Cologne. [jonathan.devore@gmail.com](mailto:jonathan.devore@gmail.com)

Angus Lyall. “Post work Ethics in the Andes: Agro-ecology, Gender, and Values in an Agro-Industrial Enclave” Graduate Student, Department of Geography, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. [angusl@live.unc.edu](mailto:angusl@live.unc.edu)

Ragnheiður Bogadóttir. “Time and Space in the Inka Empire” Assistant Professor, History & Social Sciences, U. of Faroe Islands. Tórshavn. Human Ecology. [ragnheidurb@setur.fo](mailto:ragnheidurb@setur.fo)

Jixia Lu. “Assessing Alternative Food Networks in China: Trends and Challenges to Sustainability” Assoc. Professor, Humanities & Development Studies, China Agricultural U., Beijing, China. [lujx@cau.edu.cn](mailto:lujx@cau.edu.cn)

Eric Hirsch. “Abundance Songs and Climate Change in Peru’s Andes” Asst. Professor, Department of Earth & Environment, Franklin & Marshall College. [eric.hirsch@fandm.edu](mailto:eric.hirsch@fandm.edu)

Charles Bassey. “Food Sovereignty and Informal Economy in Abuja, Nigeria” Senior Manager, Central Bank of Nigeria; Tutor, U. Leicester. Abuja/Nigeria. Sociology of Development, Econ. [charles.bassey@gmail.com](mailto:charles.bassey@gmail.com)

Elisabeth Skarðhamar Olsen. “The Faroese foodscape - a “modern/traditional” hybrid” Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University. Lancaster, UK. Human Geography, Anthropology. [elskard@gmail.com](mailto:elskard@gmail.com)

Lisa L. Gezon. “Tiny Social Movements in Health and Wellness in Georgia, USA” Professor and Chair of Anthropology, University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA. Anthropology. [lgezon@westga.edu](mailto:lgezon@westga.edu)

Vasna Ramasar. “Reconstructing African knowledge traditions of living well: From decoloniality to Ubuntu” Researcher, Lund U. Sustainability Studies. Sweden. Sustainability Science, Environ. Management, Development. [vasna.ramasar@lucsus.lu.se](mailto:vasna.ramasar@lucsus.lu.se)

Ritu Verma. “Gross National Happiness: Experiences and Learnings from Bhutan of a Holistic and Sustainable Alternative Development Pathway in Engaging Climate Change” Associate Professor, Royal Thimphu College, Bhutan. Anthropology. [rvermapuri@gmail.com](mailto:rvermapuri@gmail.com)

#### Appendix 4: Participants

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12. Christine LeJeune	Anthropology, University of Florida	319 Grinter Hall PO Box 115530 Gainesville, FL 32611	cmlejeune@ufl.edu

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16. Vasna Ramasar	Sustainability Studies, Lund U., Sweden	Ängelholmsgatan 6, Lgh 1103, Malmö 21422 Sweden	vasna.ramasar@lucsus.lu.se
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18. Elisabeth Skarðhamar Olsen	Lancaster University, UK	Kristiansgota 18, 188 Hoyvik, Faroe Islands	elskard@gmail.com
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