

From conference to ongoing engagement

Alumni workshop on responsible leadership in the Andean region



Alumni can build a bridge to practice, can consult students and prospective students, can feed new ideas and societal demands back to the ITT and, last but not least, work and create an impact in their surroundings and thus represent the ITT's strive for a more sustainable world. Nevertheless, this also means that our alumni are active in often oblivious working environments where a majority does not subscribe to principles of sustainable development. Connecting the alumni group into a community of people of similar mindsets, supporting and strengthening each other – in short an epistemic community – therefore becomes the challenge for a long-term relation of all our former students among themselves and with the ITT. This also demands that the emotional bind to the former place of study, the today's TH Köln, is not driven by pure nostalgia and hindsight of each study generation, but by a common inter-generational project facing the future.

On November 26th - 29th, 2015, the Alumni of the Andean region of ENREM, TERMA and PMPCA met in Bogotá for the first regional Alumni meeting, 25 former students now living and working in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela or Panama, with largely similar natural and cultural and socio-economic environments. By scaling the meeting to such a region, a nearly complete alumni group was able to join for four days. This allowed the different study generations to form a connection and helped build the density of network and personal connections needed for an ongoing cooperation among the group.



Feeding the group building and leadership sessions by topics of sustainable development, two external guests presented their practical experience. Julio Andres Roza from AIZO, a Bogotan sustainability consultancy, and Adriana Sarmiento of the Colombian ministry of transport initiates the conference part, with six alumni reporting from their work experience in e.g. traffic systems, water protection, sustainable bamboo architecture or agricultural management. The sessions were moderated by alumni and the inputs represented the width of current activities and the highly responsible positions the alumni fulfil. Similarly, the Sunday field trip displayed the current management of urban waterbodies in Bogotá.

The two-day workshop on 'responsible leadership' was based on the concepts of Theory U, developed by Otto Scharmer and his team of change management at MIT, delivered and moderated by Dr. Jörg Elbers, who has been working in German ODA in Latin America for the better part of two decades. In such a workshop, the team building relies on exercises of active listening and a guided diary approach. This enables the participants to create and open up to new opportunities in looking the inconsistencies of their current (working) situations. Developing these ideas in so-called 'case clinics', i.e. workable and long term projects, the workshop was more process than product based: instead of demanding a defined product as output that often stays solely on paper, the interaction was designed to create working groups of common interests that sustain their activities beyond the event, and grow into an intrinsically driven, pro-active group of ITT alumni.