Geography in the Americas: Exploring International Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration in the Americas

This session explored international interdisciplinary collaboration through a set of exemplary research projects among geographers and other scholars in the Americas. There was an overview of recent research findings about international collaboration among geographers in the hemisphere preface a set of papers that describe ongoing successful interdisciplinary and multi-country projects in detail. Speakers conducting work in Canada, the US, Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, and Brazil offered their insights and highlighted lessons learned from the experience of building and maintaining major research efforts across cultural, national, linguistic, and disciplinary borders. Featured projects addressed a diverse range of interests, from geographic technologies, ecological biodiversity and conservation, indigenous rural land use, to urban historical spaces. A discussion following the papers explored opportunities for collaborative activities among geographers and related scholars of the Americas. The session built upon a long-term initiative of special sessions at AAG Annual Meetings to explore the state of geography in the Americas and build collaboration among geographers in the hemisphere.

An Overview of International Research Collaboration among Geographers and Other Scholars of the Americas: Dimensions, Opportunities, and Best Practices

A study on the state of international research collaboration among geographers in the Americas yields a picture of an active discipline using creative means to connect scholars across the hemisphere. An overview of spatial patterns of joint conference presentations, publications, study exchanges, and funded research projects from data collected by the AAMIGA project demonstrates various dimensions of collaboration in progress while also pointing to yet unrealized opportunities for connections among geographers and other scholars. Qualitative data indicate characteristics of successful collaborations, highlighting the importance of mutually beneficial practices. The AAMIGA project itself was conducted as an internationally collaborative research project, by the Association of American Geographers (AAG) in Washington, DC, with funding the from US National Science Foundation, and in conjunction with the City of Knowledge (CoK) in Panama. The results are already being used to improve mechanisms and quality of international research collaboration through AAG programs and collaborations.
The Tropi-Dry Project: Building bridges across national, cultural, and disciplinary borders

TROPI-DRY is a collaborative research network sponsored by the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research (IAI) under their Collaborative Research Network (CRN-2) program. Its goal is to bring together researchers in conservation biology, ecology and evolution, remote sensing and geographic information systems, sociology, anthropology, policy analysis, and forestry to develop a comprehensive, state-of-the-art understanding of the status of tropical dry forests (primary and secondary) in the Americas. TROPI-DRY incorporates researchers and institutions from Canada, United States of America, Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela and Brazil. The large size of the project implies particular lessons about structuring successful collaborations and emphasizes the importance of communication that transcends both language and disciplinary borders. Experiences of TROPI-DRY collaborators highlight the importance of building ownership broadly from the beginning stages of collaboration and feature innovative means of translating research results to a multinational policy sector.

The AGS México Indígena Project: US, Canadian and Mexican Geographers working together in Mexico

Based on a previous work in the Mexican Huasteca sponsored by the Mexican ministry of the environment (SEMARNAT) and a Fulbright scholarship, the American Geographical Society formed the México Indígena research team in 2005. From the tenek-nahua Huasteca region, in 2006 the project moved towards the zapotec northern Oaxaca region –Sierra de Juárez. Finally, in 2007 the research team moved to the southwestern Chihuahua state, a Tarahumara region in northern Mexico. After three years of intensive lab and field work, implementing the participatory research mapping (PRM) methodology, the research team has achieved most of its goals in terms of undergraduate and graduate student participation, community participation, land use and land tenure assessment, the impact of PROCEDE –an official program to title individual parcels out of collective properties-, participatory map-making, community empowerment, and so on. Based on this experience, this presentation revolves around the following topics: joint publishing, building long-term relationships, graduate-level training, and research involving students and faculty.

Rendering Rio de Janeiro in the Nineteenth Century: Spatial History and Visualization

As a part of an ongoing collaborative research project, this paper offers preliminary visualizations of historical patterns and processes in Rio de Janeiro. This collaboration, involving scholars in Brazil and the US, provides a common ground for the collection of spatial data and the sharing of expertise and tools from diverse research perspectives, including social, cultural, and economic history. Utilizing geographically specific information on occupations, incomes, and rents, among other variables, the spaces of the city are visualized at different scales and across varied time spans. By generating experimental visualizations, including time-series animations in three-dimensional space, this preliminary research allows historians and other social scientists to conduct analysis of historical processes and experiences that otherwise remain obscured in textual or tabular data. Sponsored in part by the Stanford Humanities Center, the project presents an exemplary case of international / interdisciplinary research collaboration using geographic technologies.