

Cuba Trip

Coupled natural and human systems research in Cuba: Establishing international collaborations to meet the environmental challenges of rapidly changing ecosystems



June 24th - July 1st 2018

Conference

The working ideas that came from the working group were interesting and very diverse. The ideas had a great mix of social science and STEM collaborations. We all learned from others topics of work and presentations. Topics ranged from Alien invasive species and climate change: impacts on Biodiversity; Conservation and management of marine ecosystems in Cuba; and Garden cities in America's garden state. This working group added measurable depth to my educational experience, something not many other Ph.D. students have done thus far.

Some of people that presented in the working group were Cristina Díaz López, Amy Savage, John Dighton, Patricia González Hernández, Alina Forrellat Barrios, Alejandro Barro, Alejandro Vagelli, Annele Roque Quintero, Danay Díaz Pérez, Patricia González Díaz, Leandro Rodríguez Viera, Meredith Taylor, Ourania Nikolaidis, Elisa del Oso, Nancy Martínez Alfonso, Barry Pemberton, Mirella Peña Icart, Jorge L. Santana and Josiel Barrios Cossio. I was able to speak to Felix and Eusebio Leal Spengler, they are on board and ready for the conference.

Organopónico, Agroturismo La Picadora Cuba & Caguanes National Park

This Cuba trip was extremely enriching and inspiring while giving me a fresh perspective on where I want my career to go in the years to come. Isis from Organopónico was very informative and her passion translated to the entire group; the work her and her father are doing is impressive. The most inspiring was the visit to Caguanes National Park and the community projects called Agroturismo La Picadora Cuba. The La Picadora community is a sustainable community in Yaguajay municipality

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in Sancti Spíritus Province.

Each house in the community provides something different for the people in the community. La Picadora was a fresh and invigorating scene Cuba offers, with their palm tree walls, fibro roof, and food products grown organically in the community as in the raising of animals; only salt and sugar are introduced and chemical products are never used. There is a lot to learn from this community, and the research and volunteer opportunities to aid in this community and the national park efforts have numerous possibilities.

Outcomes, Follow-Up & Next Steps

I was able to speak to one of the directors of Caguanes National Park, who found out I was interested in tourism and ecotourism and inquired if I could help them in the future. The director and I exchanged information and he wanted me to come back to give them information and to do research on how they can encourage tourism and visitors to the park. They have not done much in regard to tourism and bringing in visitors to the park. They are starting fresh, hopefully, with our help and readily available research, they can implement an effective tourism strategy that is sustainable. Others in the working group were very interested in partaking in this project, helping with the implementation of working sites in the park for research and academic purposes.

Something I want to do for the future if I go back to Cuba is to bring La Picadora books. They have a library for the town, and their book collection has become very sparse and they encourage donations. The community is always taking donations for

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books for all the town to read and enjoy. Something else if I go back to Cuba in the future is helping Isis bring supplies for Organoponico. Isis stated that she needs supplies like compost thermometers and miscellaneous items that she said is hard to access in her area.

In my free time on the weekend and after work I have been researching different ideas and angles Caguanes National Park could use to their advantage, including building on their capitals: Natural, Human, Cultural and Social. They are lacking greatly Financial and Built capital. They are hoping to increase local and international visitors to the park. In particular, they want to have more people in academia come to visit the park for research related endeavors.

The working group has created an email address for all members that participated to send updates on their projects, and to send questions and comments to the group on moving forward with different ideas for collaborations that will be managed by Amy. The discussion was very productive and the group is encouraging other collaborations and projects across all disciplines.

This trip opened doors I was not expecting and given me projects to contemplate and work on for the future. Depending on my financial situation if I can go to the conference in November, I would love to follow up and bring items to these kind people who opened up their doors and their culture. I fell in love with Cuba, and I hope I can foster projects and encourage these connections made in any way possible.

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