

SDG Graduate Schools in profile: German-Peruvian Cooperation Against Social Inequalities



United stand for greater justice: planning workshop at the trAndeS Graduate School in Peru's Cusco

The DAAD programme “Bilateral SDG Graduate Schools”, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), also supports German-Latin American cooperations. Sustainable solutions to social challenges are the focus of research conducted by a joint Graduate School run by universities in Berlin and Lima, Peru’s capital city.

Populated by a small and enormously rich upper class, followed by an urbane middle class at risk of social decline – and lastly a huge number of less privileged people who crowd the slums of the cities and live out in the country: Peru is marked by severe social inequality like hardly any other country in South America. Researchers at the Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin) and the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) in Lima are united in seeking ways to redress this imbalance. TrAndeS is the acronym for the programme which will be focused on the topics of Sustainable Development and Social Inequalities in the Andean region until the end of 2020. In this it hence particularly tackles the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) that seeks to reduce inequality within and among countries ([SDG 10, Reduce inequality \[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg10\]](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg10)). The DAAD promotes the German-Peruvian cooperation as part of its “Bilateral SDG Graduate Schools” programme.

Anthropologist Prof. Gerardo Damonte, member of the seven-member board of trAndeS, considers the Graduate School’s approach to be unique. “The topic of sustainability is actually abstract and very difficult to communicate”, says the PUCP professor. Yet he believes that by focusing on a certain region, namely the Andes, with its very own history, the programme not only focuses on concrete solutions to problems but is in itself unique.

Essential Soft Skills for a Career in Science

As director at the PUCP, Damonte was able to pull the strings on the Peruvian side from the start of the project in September 2016. During his year in office he saw to it that researchers, predominantly from Social Sciences and the Humanities, and also students developed an enthusiasm for the said

subject. A total of 15 Master's and doctoral students are participating in the programme at the PUCP, 10 of which are on scholarships funded by the project. Parallel to their Master's degree or doctorate, participants will additionally receive the trAndeS certificate. In doing so they will attend seminars, lectures, and in workshops learn important soft skills for a career in science such as writing research funding applications or formulating reviews.



Focus on the future: participants at a colloquium in Lima

Diego Geng Montoya counts among those who have successfully applied for a scholarship at trAndeS. The 33-year-old, who has already studied Sociology and Water Resources Management, is now studying for a doctorate in Sociology. "For me the programme provides an opportunity to do what I love", he says. Diego Geng is researching the consequences of water reforms in the Tacna region, which is seen as a significant mining region in Peru. The reforms are supposed to pursue a democratic and intercultural approach and hence properly address the requirements of the local population. But this has so far not been felt much in people's everyday lives. "Conflicts about water and the consequences of climate change are a very important subject for a country in which mining is a growing business field", explains Geng.

Doctoral student Ady Rosin Chinchay Tuesta has chosen a different research subject. The trained lawyer is interested in how Peru's government is implementing a new territorial structure in two districts of the country and what social conflicts regarding the environment, the use of natural resources, and social development might arise from this. "TrAndeS is a perfect fit with my doctoral thesis because it enables me to receive feedback on my work from researchers around the world", she enthuses.

TrAndeS at the Freie Universität Berlin

In November 2017, trAndeS scholarship holders will travel to the Latin American Institute (LAI) of the FU Berlin. "The students and doctoral students will present their research projects to us", explains Dr. Bettina Schorr. The political scientist heads the graduate programme at the LAI and is, among other tasks, responsible for developing the curriculum, shaping the research and networking strategy of the programme, as well as for organising academic events. "Social inequality has long been a subject at our institute", comments Schorr. However, she points out that a new element in the debate on social equalities is the inclusion of sustainable development issues.



Visiting a 'sustainable campus': in November 2016, a delegation from the FU Berlin inspected eco-friendly building designs und recycling projects at the PUCP

The FU Berlin is over the moon at having gained the PUCP as a partner for trAndeS since the PUCP is regarded as Peru's premier university and counts among the best higher education institutions in Latin America. It is hence an ideal fit with the internationalisation concept of the FU Berlin, which is focused on cooperating with other higher education institutions of excellence around the world. In addition, according to Schorr, the German-Peruvian cooperation at the Graduate School represents a new regional focus on the Andean region for the LAI. She outlines an additional benefit of the cooperation: "The format of this Graduate School could be a model for future research projects in regions where higher education institutions have a lack of resources and the overall university infrastructures are weak", explains Schorr. She believes the research cooperation with the PUCP also has an inspirational effect on neighbouring countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, or Colombia. "This is a big benefit for the research and debate on sustainable development."

Driving the Social Debate Forward

The acronym trAndeS is a combination of "trans" + "Andes" + "Sustentabilidad" (sustainability), thereby communicating its commitment to advancing the debate on social sustainability throughout the entire Andean region. For trAndeS seeks to do more than offer good research and teaching. Its concentrated scientific expertise is directed towards triggering political action. "We want to promote a societal debate on the status of social inequalities and sustainable development in the Andean region – and how to improve things", says Damonte, who is currently attending the FU Berlin as a guest scientist as part of the programme. Establishing a network that reaches beyond the academic world is therefore extremely important, he argues. TrAndeS researchers cooperate with think tanks that are well-connected to policy-makers. Numerous non-governmental organisations are also involved in the work of the programme. "We seek to bring these various groups together and thereby put our research results into practice", Damonte explains.

Proof that such practical implementation can succeed is also shown by a convention to be staged at the end of October 2017 in Lima, with invitations coming from trAndeS in cooperation with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and the Mountain Institute (MI); the thematic focus is on energy, water, and food security in the Andean region. Attending the event will be policy-makers and also development cooperation workers and members of international organisations. trAndeS researchers thereby seek to gain influence as a way of triggering sustainable development in the Andes. "We're very optimistic that we will succeed", enthuses Damonte.

Benjamin Haerdle (26 September 2017)