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Workshop on Environmental History for Central America and the Caribbean El Salvador, 2019

Final Report

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Abstract

The Workshop on Environmental History for Central America and the Caribbean was held at San Salvador, El Salvador, from October 21st to October 24th, 2019. On October 21st, there were a set of lectures by several scholars. On October 22nd, participants collectively designed a course on Environmental History of Central America and the Caribbean. On October 23rd, participants established the “Environmental History Network for Central America and the Caribbean”. On October 24th, attendants participated in a field trip to the San Andrés´ archeological site. The workshop was held at the Universidad de El Salvador (UES), San Salvador. The venue had three advantages. First, the strong cooperation programs shared by UES and the Universidad Nacional (UNA, Costa Rica) facilitated the workshop organization and logistics. Second, San Salvador´s proximity to other Central American countries eased students´ participation. Finally, the Universidad de El Salvador had the infrastructure and technology to host the workshop. The workshop gathered seventy six participants, mostly undergraduate and graduate students, as it follows: thirteen attendants from Honduras (five faculty members, eight graduate students), three attendants from Nicaragua (one faculty member, two graduate students), ten attendants from Costa Rica (three faculty members, seven graduate students) and fifty two attendants from El Salvador (three faculty members, forty nine undergraduate and graduate students).

Schedule

October 21st: Opening Lectures

The workshop started with sixty-minutes lectures, followed by a short period for queries and comments. Lectures gathered 76 assistants, including undergraduate and graduate students as well as researchers from Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and El Salvador. Dr Micheline Cariño (Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur, Mexico) delivered a lecture on the role of Environmental History for understanding the relationship between human societies and the planet during the last century, as well as the importance of writing history from a multidisciplinary perspective. Dr José Fernández (Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica) analyzed the relationship between political and economic dynamics in Central America history and their impact on the environment, from Spanish colonization to the present. Dr Reinaldo Funes (Universidad de La Habana / Visiting Professor, Yale University) delved into Environmental History of the Caribbean, identifying the links with Central American and Global History. Dr Wilson Picado (Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica) analyzed the state of research in Latin American Environmental

History based on the SOLCHA symposiums, tracing its main topics and trends. Overall, the lectures sought to frame Central America history within continental and global historical processes, particularly from the perspective of Environmental History's theory and methods.



Illustration 1. Attendants to October 22nd and 23rd sessions. Universidad de El Salvador Campus, 2019.

October 22nd: Design of a course on Environmental History.

During the second day, forty attendants collectively contributed in designing a course on Environmental History of Central America and the Caribbean, which will be part of the curricula in the universities across the isthmus. The session was attended mostly by undergraduate and graduate students from different Central American universities, including UES (Universidad de El Salvador), UNAH (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras), UNAG (Universidad Nacional Agraria de Honduras), BICU (Bluefields Indian & Caribbean University, Nicaragua) and UNA (Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica). This was the last stage of a process that began two months earlier, in which the participants from the different countries supplied papers, conferences, newspaper articles and so about each country's Environmental History and problems, using virtual communications such as email, Zoom and WhatsApp (See Illustration 2).

During the morning session, participants were asked to make a list of the environmental and social problems currently affecting Central American societies, in order to discuss the potential contributions of Environmental History in identifying solutions. In the afternoon, participants debated about the availability of historical sources for Environmental History. Finally, attendants established the goals of the course on regional Environmental History. In a follow up, Professor Maximiliano López prepared a draft of the course, based on the transcripts from the October 22nd session. This draft includes: 1. A brief description, 2. Goals, 3. Methodology, 4. Contents, 5. Bibliography. The organizers will share this draft among the participants through virtual platforms in order to get feedback; the organizers expect that the final document will become part of the curricula in Central American universities.

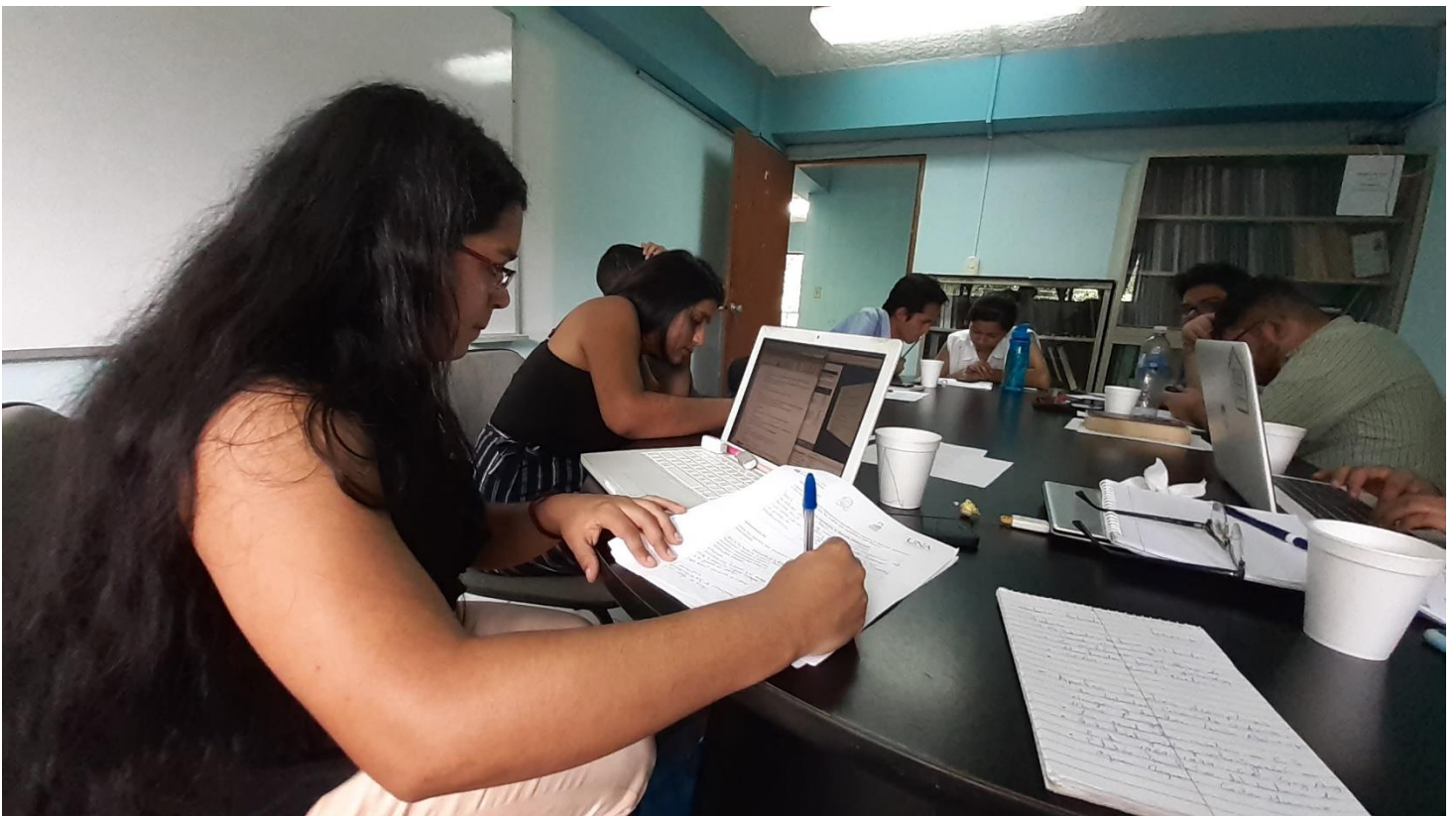


Illustration 2. Students from the Universidad de El Salvador filling worksheets provided by the workshop staffers, September 19th 2019.

October 23rd: Establishment of the Environmental History Network for Central America and the Caribbean

During the third day, participants set up the basis for the establishment of an Environmental History network. Each participant contributed in designing the goals of the net, its organization and means of communication. The net may provide the promotion of Environmental History in Central American and Caribbean universities – either through transnational research projects or through theses on this disciplinary area -, the creation of a specialized regional bibliography, encourage meetings through virtual means and the creation of a digital newsletter for young researchers. Finally, it was agreed to hold the next Workshop on Environmental History in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in 2021 as a prospective date.



Illustration 3. Dr Reinaldo Funes (Universidad de La Habana / Visiting Professor, Yale University) addressing participants to October 22nd and 23rd sessions.

Achievements and Prospective goals

In light of the isthmus’ ecological diversity and social problems, Environmental History is a rising disciplinary area in Central America and the Caribbean. By gathering top researchers and students from the countries, the workshop became a hub, from which both groups will share news and research results on Central American and Caribbean Environmental History. From the organizers’ perspective, the workshop’s greatest achievement was to encourage young researchers in designing projects and theses on Environmental History. The event posed numerous challenges to participants and organizers, among them:

1. The implementation of courses on Environmental History at the undergraduate and graduate curricula.
2. A region-wide cooperation policy in designing regional research programs.
3. The promotion of Environmental History among thesis and dissertation candidates.
4. The organization of meetings centred on Environmental History of Central America and the Caribbean in the future.