

# International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE) 15<sup>th</sup> International Congress

**The David Suzuki Foundation** sponsored our first roundtable at the Congress. This contribution includes their summary report, as well as statements by Mexican and Canadian indigenous participants.

## Summary Report

The David Suzuki Foundation was pleased to be contacted by ISEE conference organisers about participating in the 15th International Congress. Our organisation and ISEE share similar objectives concerning the inclusion of ecological factors in economic models and societal decision-making as well as appropriate collaboration with Indigenous people.

DSF hosted a plenary session at the congress that brought Indigenous voices from around the globe to talk about how Indigenous world views incorporate concepts of ecology and economy. We focused on appropriate ways for researchers to engage with Indigenous communities and people.

The congress was an incredibly valuable and enriching experience for those of us from DSF and for our invited Indigenous speakers. Our time in Mexico offered us the opportunity to meet with, and learn from, leading researchers, educators and practitioners in ecological economics who study and test solutions to some of the same challenges we face in our work. It was an honour to meet people who have pioneered and developed ideas we use in our conservation and sustainability work. Attending field trips, working sessions, plenaries and social gatherings gave us new information, ideas and colleagues to share with and learn from. Friendships and professional connections were made on all fronts.

In conversations with our invited Indigenous presenters about the ISEE Congress several key messages resonated with us. The following reflections are our own and do not speak for our invited speakers who will file their own reports. One moving observation was the recognition by our Indigenous colleagues from Mexico, Canada and Africa that their cultures shared many similar stories, rituals and teachings related to respectful interaction of people as part of nature. Another benefit was meeting academic researchers and learning about study results relevant to issues in their home territories. Many projects profiled at ISEE 15 are creating information that could support the work of Indigenous people trying to help their territories and communities recover from centuries of ecologically destructive colonial governance and economies. Our Indigenous guests also conveyed the importance of opportunities to share their lived experiences and their peoples' histories with ISEE members. People do not always pay attention to or understand the implications of these histories. The ability to share these experiences with people who had open minds and an understanding of the flaws in the dominant economic model was a pleasure.

There were numerous opportunities to share important insights on Indigenous world views, thoughts about ecological sustainability, knowledge about the economy and best practices for academic researchers working with Indigenous people. We shared concerns that elements of a colonial / compartmentalized mind set continue to hold sway in academic research involving Indigenous communities. A key point our guests made repeatedly was about the need to engage more deeply, meaningfully and directly in Indigenous communities before, during and after developing research

proposals. It was emphasized that one could not see research as an independent and disconnected activity from an Indigenous perspective.

The David Suzuki Foundation has four main recommendations to offer ISEE based on our own journey with Indigenous partners and our experiences at the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress.

- Embed research in communities, not in academia, and move away from solely focusing on the academic community to help bring and test real world solutions to communities in need;
- Get permission to study a community or aspect of their economic life **before** finalizing and funding studies;
- Design studies with knowledge-holders from Indigenous communities (this will ensure important assumptions are tested, proprietary information is not violated, areas of knowledge are not missed and existing information is properly interpreted); and,
- Ensure the research leaves the community with something of value. It is wrong to take their knowledge, convert it to public knowledge, personal or professional benefit (a degree, a publication, a new posting) and leave the Indigenous community with no tangible benefit of meaning to them.

## Note from an Indigenous participant from México:<sup>i</sup>

By [Albert M. Chan Dzul](#), coordinator for Mesoamérica of the ICCA Consortium

On 11, 12 and 13 September 2018 the XV Conference of the International Society for Ecological Economics was held in Puebla, Mexico with the theme: **Ecological Economics and Socio-ecological Movements: Science, policy and challenges to global processes in a troubled world.**

The primary objective of ecological economics as a transdisciplinary space seeking to undertake analysis of the interactions of the economy with the ecology from angles that classical economics alone cannot achieve. It was broadly evident in the various discussions conducted during the conference, such as: transdisciplinarity, ecological economics in support of alternatives to development, agroecology, food sovereignty, social metabolism, social and environmental conflict, environmental and climate justice, ecological macroeconomics, economics of care, feminist economics, rights of indigenous peoples, among many others. There is a danger in the institutionalization of these discussions and concepts as a “fad”, taking away their political significance (Giraldo y Rosset, 2016; Pimbert, 2018) or, even worse, justifying new, less apparent, forms of appropriation (e.g., economic valuation of ecosystem services, payments for ecosystem services, as well as other manifestations of the so-called green economy). Further heightening the problem is the absence, our absence, of the indigenous peoples and local communities in the academic spaces where it is precisely these topics that directly affect us are discussed.

It is precisely in this sense that it is worthwhile recognizing the work of the organizing committee of the XV Conference of the International Society for Ecological Economics, led by Dr. David Barkin. True to his promise to bring academic institutions closer to their social reality, to integrate them into peoples’ social movements, and especially with indigenous peoples, Dr. Barkin organized three plenary roundtables: 1) Indigenous Autonomy, 2) Agroecology, and 3) Social and Solidarity Economies of Workers. The first roundtable, in the form of a message to the scientific community, opened the Conference. In this event the participants were: from México, María de Jesús Patricio Martínez (Marichuy), an indigenous Nahuatl

woman, who is the spokesperson from the Indigenous Council of the governing body of the National Indigenous Congress<sup>ii</sup>, and myself, Albert Maurilio Chan Dzul, an indigenous Mayan, Coordinator of the Mesoamerican regional of the TICCA<sup>iii</sup>; Tamara Goddard and David Fierro of the Okanagan Nation of Canada; Joseph Ole Simel from Kenya, and, finally, in a virtual presentation, the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz.

For my part, I had the opportunity to talk about our initiative to link ourselves, through a global network of territories and areas conserved by ourselves as indigenous peoples and local communities, giving meaning to the expression “TICCA” as “territories of life”, since we indigenous people and local communities conserve them as a priceless patrimony. For many indigenous peoples, these areas coincide with the whole of their territory. For others, they are vital parts of their territories; for example, the water basins, sacred forests, springs, and the habitats of totemic animals. For all the indigenous peoples, however, they are their identity and culture, their means of life and self-determination as expressed in the 17<sup>th</sup> session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Questions of the UN. Although this struggle is from below, we also demand that the States and other actors, as well as other participants in the UN family, such as the Permanent Forum itself, the Convention of Biological Diversity, the UN Convention on Climate Change, and the Objectives of Sustainable Development, support the TICCA – territories of life – by reinforcing the ability of indigenous peoples to govern themselves as custodians, including formal collective titles and/or other appropriate recognitions of their inviolable collective rights and responsibilities.

I continued, taking advantage of this unique opportunity to present these ideas, an opportunity to meet with people from the academic world with similar concerns (there are many), “because real change will only come from peoples’ organizations from below” as Marichuy said in her presentation. For this we need everyone, in our fashion, “our approach, our time, and our style” as the National Indigenous Congress insisted during its most recent assembly.

### Note from Indigenous participants from Canada:

Tamara Goddard of Sauteau First Nation and David Fierro of Okanagan First Nation, both from British Columbia, Canada were pleased by the David Suzuki Foundation’s invitation to attend the 15th annual ISEE International Conference in Mexico. Fierro and Goddard spoke at the conference about the need for Indigenous People’s inclusion at inception tables concerning the developments on Indigenous lands, long term planning to restore ecological systems. Further, Fierro and Goddard spoke of the need to share Indigenous knowledge of natural cycles and ecological economic models so this can be incorporated to ensure future generations will survive and prosper.

*“We would like to give special thanks to David Barkin for creating the opportunity to address the delegates of the ISEE conference. We immensely enjoyed the opportunity to immerse ourselves in a local community and listen to their story of the revitalization of agricultural lands & long term plan for governance to enable the return and inclusion of members that had left for other career opportunities or education. Listening to their strategy and resolve was as invigorating as participating in their ceremony.”*

*The plenary itself was quite revealing in that there was a strong consensus between the First Nations representatives who attended in terms of common goals, values, teachings and vision. Moreover, many from the academic community in attendance approached us after our presentations to express their gratitude for our input which produced an emotional, human response and validated their own concerns on the state of the globe at large. While there were a few who expressed some discomfort, the vast*

*majority were in accord and could see an opportunity to be more collaborative, which has been sought after by First nations for an extended period of time. We were able to witness this in the presentations we attended during the course of the conference.”*

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<sup>i</sup> Report circulated through the ICCA Consortium in Spanish; Consortium of Territories and Areas Conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. For more information: <https://www.iccaconsortium.org/>.

<sup>ii</sup> She was nominated as candidate for the presidency of Mexico by the Indigenous Congress, but was later disqualified by State authorities.

<sup>iii</sup> TICCA-the Spanish acronym for the ICCA Consortium.