

Sustainable Change by Strengthening Local Producer-Consumer Networks in Rural Regions of Costa Rica

Researchers in Industrial and Organizational Psychology visit the Universidad Nacional

From January to March 2022, Prof. Dr. Karsten Müller, Shirin Betzler and Lena Schmeiduch (Department of Industrial and Organizational Psychology) were invited by the Escuela de Geografía to visit the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica. The purpose of the visit was to intensify a research cooperation with Daniel Avendaño Leadem from the Escuela de Geografía based on the mutual interest in local, sustainability-oriented communities of producers and consumers.

In doing so, the two disciplines tied in with corresponding preliminary work. During the stay, the researchers visited the rural, agriculturally productive regions of Turrialba and Dota in Costa Rica. Another important cooperation partner was the online platform quesoturrialba.com (soon turri.cr). The direct sales website forms an immediate link between small agricultural producers in the Turrialba region and consumers in the metropolitan area of San José. It operates according to social and environmental sustainability criteria by strengthening local stakeholders, short supply chains, and product labeling through certification.

The team conducted interviews with local producers, e.g. of cheese, coffee or baked goods, and consumers of the platform quesoturrialba.com as well as members of the Vive Dota network of the municipality of Dota. The data will provide information about the motivation of the different actors, current challenges and the future potential of the networks and will be used for the development of a further application for external funding. In the future, students from Germany and Costa Rica will be brought together in a tandem program to support local producers with the goal of sustainable change.

The field research stay also enabled the team to build on existing research contacts. The team was hosted by the Escuela de Administración and the Escuela de Psicología at the Universidad Nacional. In addition, the researchers had the special honor of accepting an invitation to the residence of the German ambassador in Costa Rica. A meeting also took place with former ambassador José Joaquín Chaverri Sievert.

In addition to the intensification of new research collaborations, a transfer of previous research findings into practice was also ensured through two teaching events. In interactive workshops, Lena Schmeiduch and Shirin Betzler worked with interested students on the topics of "Intercultural Competence in Practice" and on "Promoting Sustainable Change", thus enriching the range of courses offered at the Universidad Nacional.