

## **Final Report: University Alliance for Sustainability**

### **Student Research and Study Stay at UBC**

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Under the auspices of the University Alliance for Sustainability, I completed a three-month research stay at the University of British Columbia from October to December 2015. My aim was to explore contending discourses, or ways of seeing and talking, about climate change to help bridge divergent opinions and suggest possible policy solutions. I hoped to gain a better understanding of how individuals perceive climate change, communicate about it and work to shape policy solutions in Canada particularly in British Columbia. Central questions included: what types of discourse surround policies and climate-change action plans in Canada, and specifically in British Columbia? Second, are there observable differences in discourse across different regions of British Columbia? Third, can the results of this research point to commonalities or discourses which may increase the opportunity for coordinated cooperation and support among divergent perspectives about dealing with climate change?

To carry out my research, I conducted a Q Methodology study with the Advisory Committee on Environmental Sustainability (ACES) in Nanaimo, British Columbia. Nanaimo is a city of approximately 80,000 people located on Vancouver Island. Nanaimo was chosen as a target city based on the Climatological Environmental Justice Index (CEJI) and the city's classification as a vulnerable community in Canada according to the German Canadian FFU research collaboration "CC-Visages". The CEJI index is based on a combination of variables in the Climate Stress Index (CSI) and the Human Stress Index (HIS). The ACES acts as an advisory body to Nanaimo city council on the initiation or development of programs to create or enhance sustainable practices within the community. From the beginning the ACES was extremely supportive and open to participating in the research, which is ongoing and will be completed by the spring of 2016.

Although my research was focused on Nanaimo, I was based in Vancouver and during my three-month stay I had the opportunity to visit both the University of British Columbia

in Vancouver and the University of British Columbia Okanagan. At the Vancouver campus, I audited environmental sociology courses, which greatly complemented my research. Doing so gave me the opportunity to deepen my knowledge of environmental issues in British Columbia and the overall environmental discourse in the Canadian context, as well as ways of talking about the discourse and framing it. I also increased my knowledge of qualitative and quantitative methods in sociology.

The Student Environment Centre (SEC), a resource group that provides environmental and sustainability resources to the UBC community, offered a great introduction to the various student groups, initiatives and events on campus. As this was the first year of the University Alliance for Sustainability, SEC offered a good overview of different initiatives on campus and acted as a point of contact from which to reach out to them. Similarly, the Liu Institute for Global Issues regularly hosted events on social, political and sustainable topics, held panel discussions and brought in speakers. At UBC's Okanagan campus in Kelowna, I had the pleasure of speaking to professors and learning about sustainability-focused research being done by the Community, Culture and Global Studies department as well as by the UBC Centre for Environmental Assessment Research in and around the Okanagan Valley.

For me, one of the strengths of the Alliance was its focus on mutual learning. Throughout my three months, I learned a lot from speaking, learning and working with my peers and the professors at UBC, both about my own research as well as different topics in the field of sustainability. I think that this experience has given me a more global perspective on how to approach my research and work. I am very much looking forward to welcoming researchers and students from UBC to the Freie Universität in Berlin to continue and strengthen this exchange next year.