

## **Amazonia in Transformation: History and Perspectives (Amazonia em Transformação: História e Perspectivas)**

A Project of the  
Instituto de Estudos Avançados (IEA) at the University of São Paulo (USP), Brazil

### **Background**

Amazonia holds immense rainforests and the world's largest and most species-rich freshwater system. It is characterized by highly varied, sub-regional environmental, socio-cultural and institutional conditions and, over recent decades, by major environmental and economic transformations, among them massive land-clearing and urbanization.

A foremost public objective is to manage the environment in ways that will assure continued environmental services related to water and basin management, climate, and biological diversity. A deep, differentiating, and locality specific understanding of approaches and outcomes to date is a key element in developing sustainable development scenarios within the region.

Much research is underway, but far more could be enabled and brought to bear on future strategies, programs and policies. In the past, only comparatively small fractions of the information gathered and analyses carried out on Amazonia have found their way into formal, easily accessible publications. It is a characteristic outcome of the complex institutional interplay over the course of developments in Amazonia that only a small part of the analyses generated over the years has found their way to researchers through publications.

The bulk of surveys and papers have remained at the level of public or private projects, programs and entities. Many field studies and reports have remained in the archives of companies, agencies, institutes and universities, or are held privately by former researchers themselves. There is a vast and scattered body of unpublished multi-media documents – field reports, research, occasional papers, strategic discussions or plans, maps, inventories, film and other visual materials. Many are un-catalogued, hard to find, and poorly preserved. Some may be virtually lost at this stage already.

### **The Project**

The origin of the recently launched “Amazonia em Transformação: História e Perspectivas” program coordinated by Instituto de Estudos Avançados (IEA) at the University of São Paulo (USP) is the desire to salvage important information on Amazonia for current and future research and policy making. This has given rise to a four-part project, as follows.

**1. Salvage (History & Perspectives).** At the core, and during a first phase, the project will:

- ❖ retrieve private and institutional archives
- ❖ carry out a small series of interviews with protagonists of historic developments in Amazonia from the 1960s onwards, to register the views and objectives they pursued in their time, from most varied political and social perspectives.
- ❖ digitalize hitherto unpublished materials, turning them accessible to academic institutions and policy makers alike.

**2. An IEA – USP Internet “Amazonia em Transformação” Internet Platform** is being designed to offer:

- ❖ a major Amazonia *database, screened for academic use*, which
  - offers digitalized versions of significant, hitherto unpublished materials
  - continues over time to include new, emerging information & materials
- ❖ A second, *open source Amazonia “Wikipedia” type platform*, enabling information exchanges among researchers and practitioners alike
- ❖ In addition, the “Amazonia em Transformação” Internet Platform will *offer links* and be at the service of other topical information systems and archives of leading institutions within Amazonia, Brazil, and beyond.

**3. Strategic Dialogues.** The project will seek to inspire intensified research, especially at graduate and post-graduate level among USP students. Under the associated **Amazonia 2050** series which is being developed at the IEA, academic policy forums will be hosted, always in close cooperation with other expert institutions, as the topic may require. The forums will bring together leading experts, next generation students and decision makers, thereby directly linking the retrieval of past research on the one hand to strategic debates on current issues and options on the other. First topics will include challenges and opportunities related to river basin management, climate change within Amazonia, and sustainable business development.

**4. An archive & library** (History of Amazonia Center) – offering a **physical repository of materials on Amazonia**. Several leading, life long Amazon researchers have already offered their collections. This part of the project will be strictly contingent on space and special financial support.

## Project status

First preparatory analyses were carried out in 2008. Program development has been launched in 2009. First funding for salvage of documentation and establishment of the digital data base has been approved by FINEP (Financiadora de Estudos e Projetos – Federal Foundation for Brazilian Research and Development).

## Partnerships

Inter-Institutional Partnerships will play a vital role. While originated at IEA/USP, the project must ultimately aim at developing the broadest possible institutional base. The objective from the start is to develop the project inclusively and cooperatively, with specialized institutions and programs, nationally and internationally.

## Funding

Significant funding will be needed to implement and maintain the program. Some of this funding is required over the short term, for the urgent salvage of documentary materials.

Therefore, funding is presently sought:

1. First, and “now”, **for the salvage of materials**, and for live interviews with change agents, to gauge the spirit of the times during which they shaped the development and conservation, as the case may be, in Amazonia.
2. **for steady state program continuity and** management of the Amazonia Internet Platform
3. for the IEA **strategic dialogues** (and related publications) on Amazonia
4. For the establishment of an **History of Amazonia Center (Archive & Library)**

The Project addresses the geographical space of the Amazon River Basin in Brazil and beyond.

*On behalf of the Instituto de Estudos Avançados – University of São Paulo*

Prof. Dra. Maritta Koch-Weser, Coordenadora Geral [amazoniea@usp.br](mailto:amazoniea@usp.br); [mkochweser@earth3000.org](mailto:mkochweser@earth3000.org)  
Prof. Dr. Jose Pedro de Oliveira Costa, Coordenador Adjunto - [jpocosta@terra.com.br](mailto:jpocosta@terra.com.br)