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Expedition Anthropocene

Interdisciplinary expedition to Ecuador is under way

Never before have humans intervened so intensively in the Earth system – they are the driving force of a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. On 22 February, six members of *Die Junge Akademie* from different disciplines embarked on a journey of discovery, in search of signs of human influence on the environment. Just like the expedition Alexander von Humboldt took 200 years ago, their research takes them to Ecuador and the volcano Chimborazo. Using methods from glaciology, biology, chemistry, acoustic ecology, computer science and medicine, they investigate the impact of human activity at different altitudes and in different vegetation zones; exploring the continuing climate change and its consequences for humankind, the retreat of the glaciers, changes in biodiversity, acoustic ecological changes and the potential presence of microplastics in snow and ice.

As an expedition destination, Ecuador offers access to a range of climate zones, including high mountain ranges with glaciers and volcanoes, tropical rainforest and high plains. On site, the scientists will work together with local partners including researchers and representatives from the Universidad San Francisco de Quito, the Universidad Católica del Ecuador Quito and the Universidad Estatal Amazónica. They also aim to establish long-term collaborations that may last beyond the end of the expedition. For all the latest information on the expedition as well as on the team, cooperation partners and the route, please visit the expedition website at expedition.diejungeakademie.de/?lang=en.

“This is the first time that *Die Junge Akademie* has organised an expedition like this – I am very much looking forward to the joint research and exchange with our colleagues in Ecuador. The progression of climate change and the presence of microplastics in even the most remote corners of the Earth show that our actions are having a greater impact on the environment than ever before”, explains climatologist Ricarda Winkelmann (Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and University of Potsdam) on behalf of the expedition team. “As *Die Junge Akademie*, we have the opportunity to unite many different disciplines and jointly conduct research on a topic as critical as the impact of human activity on the environment. I hope we can share some of our experiences while at the same time gaining greater insights into how interdisciplinary research can work today.”

During the expedition, musicologist Miriam Akkermann (TU Dresden) carries out acoustic ecological research at different altitudes. Physician Martin-Immanuel Bittner (Arctoris) conducts interviews to shed light on the impact climate change may have on assumptions and experiences of the local population. Biologist Christian Hof (Technical University of Munich) focuses on questions related to biodiversity. Computer scientist Dirk Pflüger (University of Stuttgart), concerns himself with the generation and analysis of image profiles and data collection. Climatologist Ricarda Winkelmann (Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and University of Potsdam) studies the retreat of glaciers and the composition of the ice, working together with chemist Robert Kretschmer (Friedrich Schiller University Jena) to investigate whether microplastics can be found on glaciers without having been transported there by water.

All information on the expedition can be found at expedition.diejungeakademie.de/?lang=en.

Die Junge Akademie is the first academy of young academics worldwide; offering prominent young scientists and artists, from German speaking backgrounds, interdisciplinary and socially relevant space for academic collaboration. The academy was founded in 2000 as a collaborative project of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina. Since then, *Die Junge Akademie* has developed into a model organization and inspiration for similar initiatives worldwide.

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