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**Global Sustainability Summer School
: Potsdam (Germany), July 8 - July 21,
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Sustainability is one of the most often used terms by those who are trying to find solutions to global problems. It has been used so often and in so many different contexts that the term “sustainability” seems to be fuzzy, too general and often misused. That is why a wider discussion on sustainability is needed. One of the aims of the Global Sustainability Summer School (GSSS) held in Potsdam in July was to start a discussion on sustainability, its aspects and ways of practical application. The subject of the two-week course was: *Risk, uncertainty and extreme events – the characteristics of human-environment interactions*. During this period, invited lecturers and participants attempted to answer the questions related to the issue raised in the theme of the school.

The summer school was held in the enchanting town of Potsdam, situated on the River Havel, 24 kilometres southwest of Berlin's city centre. It is recognized not only as one of the most beautiful German cities with many palaces and beautiful historical gardens, but also as having the highest density of academic and scientific facilities in Germany. Two of them, namely the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), together with the Santa Fe institute (SFI) organized the summer school. The participants numbered 35 with each coming from a different educational background and geographical region. These

backgrounds included universities, research institutions, governmental and non-governmental agencies. The rich variety of disciplines and cultures presented an unprecedented opportunity for the exchange of thoughts and also created a unique atmosphere.

The program of the GSSS included lectures that were aimed at widening knowledge on sustainability by addressing *inter alia* the following questions: "How did societies respond to extreme events in history? How should political decision-making processes be structured to best account for risk and uncertainty? How do concepts of risk and uncertainty differ between cultures? How have these concepts developed over time? Which degree of climate change could provoke abrupt, irreversible damages with global ramifications? How can the risk of this type of dangerous climate impacts best be included in cost-benefit analyses? How can we better estimate the probability of extreme events like heat waves, storms and floods? What do we know about climatic 'extreme events' in the Earth's past?" The lectures covered a variety of disciplines, thus the problem of sustainability was addressed from different angles including: economy, engineering, psychology, physics, social science, natural science and political science. Such an interdisciplinary approach to sustainability seems to be very needed and that is why one of the topics delved into was the possibility of an interdisciplinary approach for the emerging field of research on sustainable development, namely sustainability science.

Apart from the lectures, participants took part in a few interactive activities. One of those was the workshop of op-ed writing. The term "op-ed" is the abbreviation of "opposite the editorial page", and op-eds are newspaper articles expressing the personal opinion of the writer who is not an editorial board member. Each of the participants was asked to write such a short article on any chosen subject and afterwards discuss the articles to evaluate what was inspiring and what needed improvement. For people mostly connected with academia this was a very useful exercise concerning how to convey information in non-professional language and how to make it intelligible for newspaper readers.

Other interactive activities included the net-logo and theatre workshops. Participants of the Net-logo workshop learned how to use this program and prepare their own models, whilst the theatre group worked on theatre drama depicting some natural disasters associated with climate change. The idea behind including a theatre workshop was to show how to combine art and science, using art to express the concerns of scientists. The results of these interactive sessions on net-logo and the theatre workshops were presented on the very last day. There were drama depictions about hurricane Katrina and storm Kyrill as well as net-logo projects were presented to the audience.

The GSSS program was not only limited to the lecture hall in IASS or at Telegrafenberg hill at PIK, but also included a rich extra-curricular program. Of these, two events will be mentioned, the public lecture: *Geoengineering – blessing or curse?* Held at Robert Bosch Foundation in Berlin. In this discussion their participants, namely Mark Lawrence, Ken Caldeira, John Schellnhuber and Konrad Ott, were trying to address the controversies connected with geoengineering and tried to define the pros and cons of this approach. A few days later participants had an opportunity to see one of the geoengineering projects, namely Carbon Capture and Storage installation in Ketzin. In Germany there are two installations where CCS technology is tested, Ketzin has only storage installation, where CO₂ is injected to saline aquifer. The project started in April 2004 and is aimed at *in situ* observation of underground CO₂ storage. The summer school participants were briefed on the basic information about the technology and afterwards explored the CCS installation site.

All in all, the Global summer school on sustainability was an unprecedented blend of the scientific and cultural. The event was held in the charming surroundings of Potsdam known for its beauty and high density of scientific institutions. The program was very interesting and offered a wide range of different perspectives on sustainability due to the rich variety of lectures and different educational background of the participants. More information on the summer school can be found on the event website: <http://gsss-potsdam.org>.