

CECs, Centro de Estudios Científicos (Center for Scientific Studies) is a private, non-profit corporation, devoted to the development, promotion and diffusion of scientific research. CECs was founded in 1984 as the Center for Scientific Studies of Santiago and has since been directed by physicist Claudio Bunster.

Origins of CECs and its development until today



In its origin CECs involved theoretical physicists and biologists who had well established academic careers abroad but wanted to return to Chile to make a difference through science. It was quickly realized that the desired difference could only be made by starting what became the

first independent research institution in the history of the country. The center was started with a grant of 150,000 dollars a year for each year of three from the Tinker Foundation of New York. Besides that its capital was the first rate scientific quality of its researchers, their strong sprit de corps and their network of scientific relationships abroad. In a few years, functioning in a rented house the center became a focal point for science in Chile and in Latin America. Since 1990 the center also started playing an important role in public service not only through devising new scientific programs, such as the Millennium Science Initiative, but also for conceiving and putting into practice the idea of contributing to democracy by involving the military in science and, therefore, in contact with the civilian world in an uncontaminated context.

From a legal standpoint CECs is a non-profit private corporation. Its board is formed by its senior scientists who elect the Director of the institute. Concerning the operational procedures of the institute, experience has taught to keep them as simple as possible. There are three categories of scientific personnel: researchers, postdoctoral fellows and research students (both graduate and undergraduate). There are no formal departments, group directors, or the like. Leadership is exerted by scientific stature and command capability for a specific task or project. There is a strong esprit de corps and horizontal solidarity based on a common action-oriented style of work. Thus, the decision to move to Valdivia, 800 km to the south of Santiago, was taken in an unprecedented, exemplary measure of decentralization in a country that badly needs it. Similarly the center, which has now grown to a small steady-state size of about 80 researchers developed in less than four years a world class group in Glaciology and Climate Change, before the subject was in everybody's mind as it is now, and completed successfully major Antarctic expeditions including a, by now legendary, airborne survey of the Amundsen Sea glaciers in West Antarctica in 2002. Another bold move was the establishment of a world-class Functional Genomics Unit to generate and study genetically-modified mice, the first in Latin America, which is permitting the center to tackle fundamental biomedical questions and to conceive new biotechnological projects.



CECs prestige and reputation are reflected in the high impact of its scientific publications, in the international honors of its members, in the continuous stream of visitors that go through it every year, in the high number of first-rate applications for its postdoctoral positions from all over the world. So far the work of the center and its achievements has been in basic research and it is the center's firm intention to continue and further develop its excellence in basic research. Now

the center has decided to enter as well into applied science from the platform of its expertise in basic science. Qualitatively this decision marks the beginning of a new epoch in the center's history of comparable magnitude and requiring as profound a transformation as it was required when the decision to return to Chile and establish the center was taken, or when the decision to move to Valdivia and develop its own wet labs was taken, or when the decision to add a totally different area of Glaciology and Climate Change and accomplish major expeditions in the Antarctic was taken. Each time that a major new area of activity was started the previously existing ones were not only unimpaired but, on the contrary, they acquired renewed vigor. Similarly it is expected that the practice of applied science will have feed-back positively on the center's basic science.

CECs scientists have received funding for their research from the Annual Competition of the National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development (FONDECYT - Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Científico y Tecnológico) and other national and international agencies including: Fundación Andes, the European Southern Observatory, the Tinker Foundation, the Human Frontiers in Science Program, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the Packard Foundation, and the Presidential Chair in Sciences Program. CECs has also received support from the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for developing the research program for the Southern Patagonia Icefields. The acquisitions, remodeling and equipping of the new CECs facilities has received significant funding from the Subsecretariat of Regional Development and from private donations to CECs.

In the year 2007, CECs applied for and won a spot in the [Basal Financing Program](#) from CONICYT. This innovative initiative, that has already benefited more than 13 scientific institutions, allows securing research institutes and centers base financing for 5 years, allowing them to develop and implement mid-term research programs betting on a leap in their scientific productivity.



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