

WHY

LATIN

AMERICA

MATTERS

– A collection of essays

Soledad Garcia Ferrari  
Hans Egil Offerdal  
Marta Alicja Kania  
Editors



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Latin American Studies

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- A collection of essays

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## Foreword

Why Latin America Matters is a necessary book — the collection of essays herein present reflections that are strategic at this moment in history.

The point of departure seems to be the question “Does Latin America matter?”. The answer is yes, but this is not enough. All countries matter, all regions matter, every individual matters, the planet matters. The meaning of the verb, or rather the significance applied to it, is what makes a difference. How did Latin America matter in the past, and how does it matter today?

This is what the authors strive to answer: a complex question about an equally complex, diverse, heterogeneous reality. They present comprehensive analysis on a broad range of aspects of Latin American history and present situations, challenges and solutions to such challenges. The essays focus on questions such as health, climate change, risk management, the role of humanities, art and social sciences, migrant movements, the importance of civil society, urban challenges, alternative concepts of development and production, community-building, regional and cultural identities.

However, the variety of subjects under scrutiny does not produce a fragmented body. On the contrary, there are unifying themes, as well as common methodological perspectives that provide an original and useful contribution to Latin American Studies, with a productive impact on transformative visions of Europe.

It is clear that all authors, regardless of their loci of enunciation, partake of similar views and converge in taking Latin America not as a problem but as a possibility. They consider that it offers concrete experiences of alternative processes to the hegemonic developmental theory and to the *modus operandi* of authoritarian, colonialist and disintegrated public policies that confirm the status quo of exclusion, inequalities, and cultural assimilation.

Reverting the hegemonic approach that considers Latin America as incapable of producing endogenous reflections about its contradictions and historical processes, the authors propose collaborative research and the analysis of case studies that reveal how the region has been confronting its repeated crisis and overcoming several of the constraints to its sustainable and inclusive development. These case studies are analysed not only in their intrinsic value for the communities represented, but also because they offer Europe some examples of new possibilities to face its own problems. Rather than bringing Eurocentric views and tools for Latin America to accept and copy, each essay takes the processes developed in the region as possibilities to learn from, indicating that the dialogue between knowledges, and the comparative and productive confrontation of perspectives, is enriching to the planet as a whole. Co-building knowledge implies the belief that knowledge is a public good and a universal right: the results of the intellectual and scientific endeavors should benefit all societies and human beings equally, and preserve the environment as our common home. The relational dimension on a planetary scale, which the pandemic of covid-19 has made acutely evident, demands multi-, trans- and interdisciplinary approaches, for no single view is sufficient for the understanding of our increasingly complex world.

This is why the different views presented in this book overcome orthodox binary comparisons and prioritise a relational perspective, that moves across cultural and geographic territories. ‘North’ and

'south', 'centre' and 'periphery', 'urban' and 'rural', among others, are categories that must be replaced by an integrated, intercultural perspective, as the book postulates and carries out.

This is defended in terms of research methodology but it also constitutes the main characteristic of the successful experiences discussed. Collective construction, co-participation, integration, democracy, identity, resilience, dialogue and respect of intercultural views, democracy, inclusion, bottom-up transformation, these are some of the key concepts pervasive in every essay.

Why does Latin America matter? The authors conclude that there are lessons to be learned from the unique experiences the region's history and present bring us. This is a dialogic collection of essays, much needed today.

Ana Lúcia Gazzola

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# WHY LATIN AMERICA MATTERS

## Introduction

This collection of essays exploring *Why Latin America Matters* aims to make the case for the importance of Latin America as a crucial region in global politics and development. With its rich history, culture, enormous resilience and creative innovation in the face of constant threats against nature and human dignity, Latin America can indeed show the way forward for the world. The essays that compose this book are presented as an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of significant social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural approaches that have taken place in Latin America during recent decades. These experiences, and perspectives, offer concrete lessons that can provide a decisive framework for profound reflection over growing challenging issues in other regions – particularly in Europe – and at a global scale.

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, the first Latin American Secretary General of the United Nations (1982–1991), once commented that “There is no development with poverty, there is no development with ignorance, there is no development with illness” (Berckemeyer Olaechea, 2007, p. 311, our translation). A huge challenge to global peace is the stark inequality between the world’s minority of rich and the world’s majority of poor people. Whereas data from the World Inequality Lab shows that Latin America is, together with the Middle East, the most unequal region of the world in terms of income distribution, Europe is considered the most equal (Wid.World, 2020). However, this measure does not provide the full picture when considering how nations tackle ongoing challenges, such as climate change impact in the global environment, human

wellbeing, and a dignified life for everyone. The socio-political and economic models applied by Europe therefore may not fit emerging global needs when enabling the creation of just communities. The essays presented in this book provide a point of departure where alternative models are explored, engaging with cultures and history, community experience and shared environmental challenges, through which new forms of collective organisation and innovation can support a more equal global society.

## An ally in preserving democracy

Home to more than 640 million people, Latin America will soon surpass the population of Europe. It is estimated that in 2050 Latin Americans will outnumber Europeans by around 44 million, and in 2100 the population of the continent will approximate 673 million against Europe’s 629 million (Our World In Data.org, 2021). Consequently, Europe will be among the three least populated regions of the world, together with Latin America and Oceania. Within this growing world population and its subsequent impact in relation to environmental and social consequences, the Swedish V-Dem Institute’s *Democracy Report 2021* points to an “intensifying wave of autocratisation across the world” (V-Dem Institute, 2021, p. 5). Certainly, neither Europe nor Latin America are exempt from this troublesome onslaught at democracy. However, given recent trends in global politics, due to Latin America’s own experience with anti-democratic governments in the 20th century, the continent can be Europe’s most valuable ally in countering authoritarianism and a global policy of ‘might is right’.

As a relatively small region in terms of population, Europe will in the future need like-minded partners in global cooperation, especially as regional collaboration and multilateralism are values that are currently under pressure. Moreover, when regimes with political preferences other than democracy strengthen their economic influence and take a stronger interest in the world outside their own borders, Europe should seek sound collaborations that secure the prospect for democratic values in the post-war European tradition. Thus, the experience of Latin American countries in their fight against totalitarian regimes might be Europe's best bet for shaking off influences from emerging autocratic states, especially within multilateral arenas and by developing various EU-Latin America and Caribbean cooperation initiatives.

It is essential to explore alternative forms of democracy and governance that are geared towards defending the rights and lives of citizens, as well as their habitat, across a range of topics, from health to economics. Europe should engage with societies in Latin America that have taken initiatives to shape a better future. Societies that are breaking the stereotype of dependency, passivity, and backwardness tend to be egalitarian and look for an alternative concept of development and protection of human rights. Through defending interculturalism and democratisation processes, there are communities in Latin America promoting dialogue instead of violence. Fighting for the rights of minorities, they refer to the instruments of international law and introduce innovative solutions in place of the repetitive but ineffective actions that have dominated public policies over the last decades.

Latin American societies are trying not only to redefine their approach to achieve sustainable development (proposing, for example, the concept of *suma q'awsay/Buen Vivir* - good living -, based on the search for harmony in the relationship between humans and nature), but also to mark their place in the modern world economy, looking for meaningful alternative production methods necessary to preserve vulnerable ecosystems and stem the dire consequences of climate change. Latin American communities are also playing an active role in environmental and climate change policies on a global scale. The undertaken actions therefore take into account long-term social goals, such as the necessary reforms of the labour market, the improvement of the quality

and access to education, and the strengthening of human capital or sustainable development based on the knowledge and experience of indigenous peoples.

It can be argued that the socio-economic situation in Latin America contributes to the increased mobilisation of groups hitherto remaining on the margins of social life. Conscious and responsible management of natural resources requires the participation and commitment of all sectors of society. The concept of multiculturalism, criticised as passive and static, gives way to interculturalism, based on action and change for a better future. Consultation and dialogue, which are inherent elements of the intercultural policy, seem to determine social relations in the 21st century. The democratic institutions and procedures introduced in Latin America create new vibrant opportunities for expressing disappointment with liberal economic development programs, and introducing standards of social participation and inclusion. These are clear insights that Europe can benefit from.

## A steadfast call for collaboration between states, nations and communities for human dignity

Entering the 2020s, the world is faced with a set of serious global challenges. Arguably the two most important are climate change and migration. It is a question of taking care of the indispensable ecosystems of our common planet — for so long used as a means for securing excessive profit with absolutely no regards for the natural, and human consequences — and of securing a life in dignity and freedom for human beings running from war, poverty, oppression, and other anthropogenic threats.

In the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, Sustainable Development Goal number 12 (SDG 12) aims to “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”. As noted by a recent SDG Report published by UN:

“It is time to fully embrace the decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation, a reduction in carbon emissions, improvements in resource efficiency, and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles” (United Nations, 2021, p. 50).

Most of the research and policy recommendations from the scientific community point to the fact that a radical change in production and consumption is needed in order to prevent a rapid breakdown of the habitat in which human beings and wildlife need to exist. Some key questions are: i) what can Europe learn from the peoples of Latin America when it comes to more responsible production of necessities and natural resources; and ii) what can Latin America and Europe learn with respect to effective and innovative modes of production?

For the last 40 years, most citizens of Europe have not been forced to escape war, poverty, and oppression to enjoy a safe and secure life for themselves and their families. On the contrary, today most of Europe generally provides a safe environment for citizens, including refugees seeking a life in freedom. However, growing challenges can be identified in relation to politics and society, as well as tackling climate change and its impact in the environment, which will need urgent action. The success of these actions will depend on the level of authentic international collaboration, across policy levels, knowledge fields and social groups.

If the world is to be successful in solving these far-reaching global challenges, understood as safeguarding both the planet and human beings, there is no other way forward than sincere cooperation between peoples. Seeking to (self) isolate nations and states may produce short-term electoral gains for political leaders but will not contribute to the necessary impact. Moreover, blind faith in eternal growth, not to mention exaggerated profits and opulent lifestyles only benefitting a few, need to be substituted by new economic and social models based on true international cooperation and sound global solutions. The contemporary freedom of inequality should be replaced with the real freedom to have a dignified life. Based on their different experiences and with their common dreams, together Europe and Latin America can make a powerful difference in the world to come.

As the Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel expressed:

“The point is to imagine a *new, transmodern civilization* based on an absolute respect for life in general, and that of the human in particular, in which all other dimensions of existence must be reprogrammed on

the basis of the postulate of “perpetual life.” This task falls to *all political institutions* and demands their radical transformation” (Dussel, 2008, p. 116, italics in original).

## Autonomy of knowledge institutions

The assault on scientific knowledge from various forces and movements in society that seek to control both research and education for their own benefits and reactionary agenda, has increased in recent years. One telling example is the circumstances surrounding the almost total exit of the Central European University from Hungary. That is the extreme result of what happens when a government wants to control the free quest for knowledge. Furthermore, among more moderate governments in Europe there is a tendency to instrumentalise education and research in order to achieve the targeted policies of governments. Instead of being autonomous entities where the academic search for new insights is the guiding principle, universities, and individual researchers, often find themselves having to make scientific priorities with an eye on the budget.

When allocations to basic research are reduced and resources are shifted to externally funded projects – often under the disguise that competition enhances the quality of the research – universities become tools for short-term governmental policies. In a meeting with several (public) Latin American universities looking at the possibilities for academic cooperation between Europe and Latin America, the authors of this chapter were starkly reminded of the importance of funding for both basic research as well as the autonomy of universities, when the colleagues from Latin America emphatically underlined that they wanted to decide themselves which themes to cooperate on, irrespective of funding opportunities in Europe.

Considering the challenges to the autonomy of universities in Europe, particularly when it comes to governance and financing, as highlighted by the 2017 report from the European University Association, (European University Association, 2017), we propose that European universities have much to learn about autonomy in a dialogue with public universities in Latin America. This is another reason why Latin America matters.

## Structure of the book

The book is structured around six wide-ranging themes which are explored from different disciplinary perspectives, drawing particularly on transdisciplinary work: *Culture and Identity; Environment and Sustainability; Governance and Democratisation; Health; Migration and Human Rights; and Urban Resilience.*

### Culture and Identity

Spanish is the second largest native spoken language in the world and an official language in the UN, in addition to being one of the languages in the European Union. There are now almost as many Spanish speakers in the United States as in Spain, and across the world more than 22 million people are studying Spanish as a foreign language (Instituto Cervantes, 2020). In the context of higher education, it is worth mentioning that, in terms of number of characters published, Spanish is the second largest language for scientific papers and journal articles (Instituto Cervantes, 2020, p. 62). Thus, a considerable part of the world's academic output is distributed in Spanish. Of the scientific production, the social sciences are particularly dominant in Spanish. One concrete example of this is the pioneering electronic editorial production of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (*Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales*, or CLACSO), which is published simultaneously in print and open access.<sup>1</sup>

In this section, the essays engage with cultural practices taking place in Latin America, exploring how these may help in shaping society, particularly when confronting violence, inequality and environmental risk. The essays reflecting on culture aim to identify how knowledge is produced and through this, explore the ways in which identities are reconfigured in crisis contexts.

In Chapter 1, Anapios and Hammerschmidt highlight the importance of complex, trans-local approaches, instead of national or regional units, when attempting to solve crises, as these may help in understanding and taking into account local particularities as well as global interconnections. Within this approach, the authors propose to differentiate how different identities experience these crises and how these identities are transformed by crises (especially disadvantaged groups such as women, indigenous communities,

migrants, etc.). This perspective introduces a reflection on the place of collectivity and community, for which Latin America can provide significant contributions due to its long-term expertise and knowledge production.

Engaging with education, in Chapter 2 Cracolici provides an overview of Latin American academic art exploring the transatlantic mobility of artists and artworks during the nineteenth century. The essay explores the influence of training and experience acquired by Latin American art students in Europe, valuing the importance of the transnational dimension and shared cultural heritage links between Latin America and Europe, which should contribute to enhancing education today.

In Chapter 3, Holmes and Corbett explore a specific crisis faced by higher education institutions in Latin America, where the importance of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences has been diminished by populist governments. This essay describes a project, grounded in critical intercultural pedagogy, which involves collaboration and co-production to promote intercultural dialogue. This experience demonstrates the value of international collaboration with Latin America, and is aimed at decolonising research, generating knowledge rooted in Latin America's own identity, and further, that of the Global South. The Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences are key for intercultural dialogue when confronting ongoing crises.

Finally, Schapira and Neuhaus in Chapter 4, devise sport, especially martial arts, as a space where activities of inclusion take place independently of current political and economic conjunctures. Within this approach, tournaments, for example, are a meeting point for people from heterogeneous backgrounds negotiating their dreams and aspirations, and are instrumental in creating social cohesion.

### Environment and sustainability

This section explores crises related with the current environmental stress. For example, some parts of Latin America are seen as a 'reservoir of opportunities' and a chance to save our planet from the catastrophic effects of climate change. The Amazon is undoubtedly such an area.

Sustainable development, as a means to maintain a balance between human activity and environmental protection, is explored through alternative methods of production and consumption by Keller and Abud Russell in Chapter 5. This essay discusses the interesting model of *Resilient Intercultural Economies*, based on the interaction between individuals, communities and the natural environment in a single, integrated food economy system. As a result, sustainable production and consumption are possible. The economic model based on this principle is implemented by the Mayan communities in the state of Campeche (México). These communities engage in economic activities that are consistent with respecting the environment and protecting the fragile ecosystem in which they function. This model is based on knowledge and experience passed from generation to generation and is presented as an alternative food production strategy, which considers both social needs (striving for prosperity, guaranteeing the stability of the economy) and the limitations of the natural environment.

The need to transform the production system and consume more consciously is also the subject of Chapter 6, by Krekeler. Whereas aggressive, invasive economic policies are leading to the destruction of many areas of Latin America (such as through the mass production of monoculture farms), the example of a cocoa plantation in the municipality of Mashpi, in the Ecuadorian Chocó region, offers a vision of other possible development paths, showcasing alternative methods of local food production, fair trade and sustainable management of natural resources, which could guarantee the functioning of more inclusive and sustainable societies.

Furthermore, in Chapter 7 Toivonen, et al. explore the challenges and threats associated with shaping a coherent policy for sustainable development without a comprehensive public debate supported by scientific facts. This leads to investigating the chances of solving the current socio-environmental problems when actions in the areas of science and environmental policy are combined. Referring to the activity of the Andean societies (in the past and in modern times), the authors indicate that joint initiatives between representatives of various fields of knowledge (including the use of the knowledge and experiences of indigenous communities) and representatives of the sphere of

public policies may lead to more informed decisions and effective actions in the field of environmental protection, preserving biodiversity, and defending the right to cultural diversity and the right to develop following one's worldview.

In chapter 8, Zuquim, et al. outline how much the future trajectory of this region will have an impact on the regulation of the global climate, maintaining biodiversity, preserving the balance of ecosystems, and food security on a global scale. Due to the irresponsible, destructive human activity and aggressive policy of exploitation of the rainforest area, there is an urgent need to protect the biological and cultural diversity of the Amazon, as well as to introduce more sustainable natural resource management practices, and engage both the local community and the entire "global village" to mitigate threats and avoid global tragedy.

### Governance and democratisation

This section explores interculturalism and participation through understanding broader forms of expressing a public opinion and engaging with new social movements, which defend the rights of the poorest and marginalised groups in the fight against social exclusion. To this aim, initiatives based on dialogue, cooperation and exchange seek alternative solutions, inclusive of vulnerable groups in defending place and space.

For example, in Chapter 9 Kania points out the critical role of the ratification of the International Labour Organisation's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention no. 169 in this process. One of its key provisions is introducing the prior consultation (*consulta previa*) procedure, which shapes a new model of relations between the state and the indigenous peoples, becoming a symbol of their political, cultural and economic empowerment. *Consulta previa* is both an expression of efforts to respect the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination and autonomy, and the source of the concept of an intercultural and democratic state. Examples of local and regional legal solutions implemented in some Latin American countries in climate policy, the management of natural assets, or protection of territories, can serve as a lesson in "good practice" and encourage similar initiatives at the institutional level on a larger, global scale.

Exploring the history of democratisation in Latin America, drawing particularly on the role of the state and civil society, in Chapter 10 Ragno presents the voices of citizens to provide an alternative political and social reality in Latin American countries. The author's research aims to strengthen the role of civil society, proposing a state that promotes spaces for "the politicisation of civil society" within their real needs and independently from political parties. This essay also reflects on the potential learning Europe can achieve from the experience of Latin America, to avoid the hybridisation of democratic regimes through populist political movements. Moreover, the essay proposes common experiences in Europe and Latin America in relation with the end of 'party politics', which in turn provides the framework for civil society to take a leading role in defining the political space.

Drawing on the specific experience through which the nation-state was built in Colombia, in Chapter 11 Soukup and Restrepo-Zapata explore the complexities through which the country established democracy, as a potential comparison with the current political situation in Europe, with the rise of extremist and populist movements there. The essay draws on recent political actions in Colombia, such as those related with the peace process, and examines the voice given to citizens to express their willingness for a pact between antagonistic actors, which created further populist and nationalist discourses. The author highlights within the complex history of Colombia the moments of success, for potential reflection with respect to the current situation in Europe, where there is significant distrust in politics as a mean to resolve ongoing challenges.

## Health

This section provides an overview of approaches to health and wellbeing in Latin America, offering perspectives on the conceptualisation of child development, and providing a strategic example when tackling childhood obesity in the region. These perspectives seed a much greater discussion around a focus on wellbeing, truly needed in the region and in Europe, when developing policy approaches that are inclusive of the vulnerabilities of specific groups in society, such as children, particularly when confronted with some of the challenges presented through this book in relation to environment and migration.

In Chapter 12, Lipina establishes a theoretical discussion about perspectives on childhood development existing in Latin America, which could provide the framework for a higher level of diversity in childhood experiences, through the deconstruction of *modern* categories with the emergence of new approaches based on multiple experiences and trajectories. The essay promotes the creation of new agendas, both within the research and policy environments, to achieve the construction of new concepts supported by true commitment and financial means. The essay also explores new methodological approaches to build knowledge, seeking the inclusion of innovation, such as using ethnography and artificial intelligence. The author highlights the importance of the deconstruction of the conceptual approaches when engaging with development in child poverty.

Exploring legal frameworks to tackle childhood obesity, in Chapter 13 Palmieri and Łukaszewicz engage with innovative measures taken by countries in Latin America when implementing policy and practice through nutritional labels on food packaging, calling for greater attention from Europe when making decisions oriented towards restricting the consumption of 'junk-food'. The essay provides concrete examples as a first stage for reflection, and builds a comparative overview of approaches in both regions. Palmieri and Łukaszewicz argue there is a need for more research that engages with these innovative strategies emerging in Latin America's legal systems, and for a deeper recognition of opportunities for Europe showcased by these examples.

## Migration and Human Rights

Castelli (2018) identified eight main reasons why people migrate. These include inadequate human and economic development, demographic increase and urbanisation, climate changes, wars and dictatorship, land-grabbing, religion, sexual identity and (lack of possibilities for) education. What is clear from this list is that countering these challenges both abroad and at home will be fundamental in the coming years, to address the root causes of migration, which the act of building walls between countries has no effect on. This will only lead to conflict and resentment. The walls may be counterproductive and, in the long-term, bring about an even stronger threat to countries behind them.

In a polemic essay in Chapter 14, Offerdal argues that the way that so-called civilised nations are treating migrants and refugees is indeed an assault on humanity. Offerdal sharply criticises politicians who are allegedly progressive and democratic, while in practice they are closing the door on the majority of humanity. The author proposes a reflection within the experience of Europe around practices, policies and populist rhetoric, calling for more human-oriented perspectives and approaches, where human dignity is most important, and not merely dismissed as a 'utopian wish'.

Within a similar argument, but expanding into an analysis of structural and systemic desired policies, in Chapter 15 Pérez-Bustillo underlines that the result of current hegemonic migration policies is a matter of life and death — for the migrants. The essay argues that some of these policies, especially in their implementation, can be considered crimes against humanity. Pérez-Bustillo explores the neo-colonial dimension of migration in Latin America and in Europe, and highlights patterns of systemic violence, emphasising the importance of a redefinition of the boundaries and contents of citizenship and its modes of organisation, particularly of the most marginalised groups in society, such as indigenous peoples and migrants, in order to re-articulate human rights.

In Chapter 16, Rioseco Vallejos et al. explore how 'soft-law' instruments can function to better integrate migrants in societies. Departing from the Inter-American Principles on the Human Rights of All Migrants, Refugees, Stateless persons and Victims of Human Trafficking (IACHR), the authors suggest that migration really is a two-way process where human rights obligations are crucial. Part of the argument is that practices of assimilation are in conflict with international human rights law. The authors promote transformative integration to achieve multicultural communities through international, global policy and laws supporting migrant integration that can achieve a stronger, long-term impact.

## Urban Resilience

This section explores challenges affecting growing Latin American urban areas, and identifies opportunities for innovative approaches to urban governance

and place-making. In Chapter 17, Garcia Ferrari investigates strategies aimed towards monitoring and mitigating the impact of risks related with climate change, through action-research that engages directly with affected communities. This approach promotes dialogue and collaboration between communities, government institutions, NGOs and academia towards the co-production of actions based on co-responsibility in tackling these challenges, and supporting long-term adaptive transformation.

In Chapter 18, Iliadi explores the notion of place-making as a potential approach to improve the living conditions of vulnerable and informal areas based on the notion of participation and local knowledge. The essay argues that place-making practices have been expressed in very spontaneous ways in Latin American cities, prior to the emergence of the term in professional and academic fields. Exploring the case of Palo Alto, a self-built settlement in Mexico City that arose informally and was later organised as a cooperative, the essay demonstrates the wider effect of place-making in the socio-spatial cohesion of the city. Moreover, the research highlights the significance of practices of self-production of habitat through community initiatives as a contribution to community inclusion and resilience.

A range of initiatives based on this action-research are then presented in Chapter 19 by Kaesehage, Bain and Crane De Narváez, exemplifying innovative research methodologies that promote community agency and empowerment. The essay presents an in-depth analysis of examples of co-production approaches to risk management in the Galapagos Islands (Ecuador), the city of Puebla (Mexico), and the city of Medellín (Colombia). The contribution of this reflection is towards more grounded research methodologies that create a sense of community ownership, building trust and enhancing community autonomy. This is demonstrated by drawing on the experience of locally-oriented actions that emerge through a 'dialogue of knowledges' that may offer greater impact in Latin American cities.

Exploring challenges in Latin American cities, in Chapter 20 Méndez Abad, Leinfelder and Schoonjans engage with the specific processes of urban informality, presenting research in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The research engages

both with neighbourhood upgrading initiatives and citizen's practices in public spaces through a methodological approach based on understanding local narratives. The focus on public space allows the understanding of the juxtaposition of formal and informal practices in the configuration of collective life. In this essay the notion of a 'dialogue of knowledges' helps to explore local people's practices, which can be articulated with design and planning discourses and theories, to build alternative narratives and urban visions.

## Collaboration as a platform for dialogue

The concept for this book emerged as a collective effort through various conversations and dialogues within the Latin America Working Group (LAWG) in the Coimbra Group of Universities, which promotes exchange and collaboration among European Universities and with partners in Latin America. Some of the thoughts and concepts were therefore discussed during conversations at seminars and workshops organised by the working group, in dialogue with networks in Latin America, such as our friends and colleagues in AUGM, the Universities' Association Montevideo Group (*Asociacion de Universidades Grupo Montevideo*). We wish to thank all the former and present members of the LAWG for their feedback, ideas, criticism and support.

This book's main contributions draw on the work of the many authors who dedicated their time, insight, and perspectives through the various essays. They and their thoughts are this book. We hope that the conversation between countries and continents continues and that the experiences and thoughts suggested through the essays contribute a collective recognition that current and future economic, social, political and environmental challenges can only be solved through integrating different forms of knowledge through dialogue. The authors therefore offer contributions to an expanded reflection in the continuous pursuit for internationally shared knowledge that can bring about a closer understanding of global needs in the development a better, fairer, sustainable and inclusive tomorrow.

We also wish to acknowledge the vision of the Executive Board of the Coimbra Group in trusting that having a working group focusing especially on Latin

America is of value and importance. We count on the fact that the manifestation of this book not only demonstrates why Latin America matters, but also that it can be an example of a collaborative academic output across Coimbra Group universities, and an illustration of cooperation between Europe and Latin America, thus assisting in making the Coimbra Group of Universities more relevant, more visible, and more open to the one world we all are part of. This book is a joint call for a more humane world where, in the words of the Argentinean singer-songwriter León Gieco, the crucial issue is not "to be indifferent to the suffering" – [*que el dolor no me sea indiferente*"]. If the words and thoughts in these pages can encourage politicians and citizens to undertake concrete actions to reduce human suffering, the book has indeed achieved its purpose.

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## Endnotes

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# CULTURE AND IDENTITY

# 1

## Coping with Regional Identities in Crises: Perspectives from Latin America

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### Abstract

The following article reflects on the place of Latin America, its past and present challenges, in a global context. Faced with the question around “Why Latin America Matters?”, we elaborate multiple answers from the Maria Sibylla Merian Center for Advanced Latin American Studies (CALAS). This centre for transdisciplinary and transregional studies proposes the collaboration of Latin American and German institutions to reflect and produce knowledge about the ways in which different social groups in Latin America faced and face the transitions between violence and peace, confront inequalities, environmental crises, and the ways of reconfiguring identities in crisis contexts.

### Resumen

*El siguiente artículo reflexiona sobre el lugar de América Latina, sus desafíos pasados y presentes, en un contexto global. Proponemos responder a la pregunta sobre “¿Por qué América Latina importa?” desde el Centro Maria Sibylla Merian de Estudios Latinoamericanos Avanzados en Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales (CALAS). Este centro de estudios transdisciplinarios y transregionales propone la colaboración entre instituciones latinoamericanas y alemanas para reflexionar y producir conocimiento sobre las formas en las que diferentes grupos sociales, en América Latina, enfrentaron y enfrentan las transiciones entre violencia y paz, las formas de confrontar las desigualdades, las crisis ambientales y el lugar de las identidades regionales en contextos de crisis.*

Latin America matters. It matters because it exists, as Africa matters, as Asia matters. As matters the world and the social, economic, political and environmental problems that arise from our presence in it. But Latin America has a particular identity, history, territory, time and space that differentiate it from the rest of the world. As a region that suffered the reasons and consequences of colonialism, it offers a long tradition built, sustained and re-interpreted in multiple and changing historical contexts that obliged continuous self-reflexivity on subjection, dependency or inequality, and new forms of conviviality, or interculturality. This reflexivity, which is the product of a particular combination of political commitment and academic production from and for Latin America, has contributed to the visibility of the problems and particularities of the region in the global world.

It is one of the continents with the highest levels of inequality, comprising countries with a problematic institutional continuity, crossed by deep poverty and informality, reaching 80% of the population in some regions. In particular, it is a region inhabited by a multiplicity of identities that have entered history without asking permission and have disputed a place in history and its right to exist. In the case of indigenous communities, for instance, they were not only defeated by Western colonial empires, but also persecuted, exterminated and/or incorporated into the 19th century's nation-states under construction, in a permanent tension that enabled new identity constructions (Quijada, 1999; Briones and Del Cairo, 2015; Gleizer and López Caballero, 2015).

For this reason, it is obvious that historically in Latin America – and the fact that colonisation and decolonisation occurred so early in the region helps to explain this phenomenon – a series of ethnic and social conflicts, actions and collective movements converged with a cultural, academic and technological production that discusses and problematises the challenges of the region. In this

long tradition of theorising and fighting ethnic and social inequality, injustice, and violation of human rights, Latin America offers extensive and intensive expertise to provide in current debates on how to deal with social, intercultural and economic crises. This is a particularity and a specific contribution from Latin America towards thinking about social problems in global terms.

## Latin America and the tradition of crisis

Latin America, like the rest of the world, is going through and has gone through various moments of crisis: both rapid and convulsive changes, and slow but lasting transformations. This perpetual state of evolution, which is the experience of modernity itself (Berman, 1982) and which contains the idea of crisis, is particularly intense in Latin America.

As the covid-19 pandemic painfully illustrates, global crises taking place in the 21st century are calling into question hegemonic lifestyles, economic structures, ecosystems and models of social organisation all over the world, and therefore are challenging globalisation itself linked to global capitalism and the ways of life it implies. For its long history of colonisation and decolonisation and the socio-political implications, social practices and theoretical reflections these consequences of global capitalism provided and provides, Latin America is placed in a very privileged epistemic position to face these crises. The region has been especially remarkable for its output of creative cultural and political strategies to address the multiple emergencies that have called into question the established social and political order in modern, postmodern and current times.

Linked to globalisation from its beginnings, that is from the outset of European colonialist expansion towards the West, and the 'invention' of America as its other (Todorov, 1982), Latin America is very familiar with the pernicious effects of increasing homogenisation of economic, political and cultural models, and the hegemonic imposition of a capitalist world-system that, in its desire for profit, tried to universalise itself and obliterate all differences (Wallerstein, 2004). Early Latin American decolonisation processes made possible different models of political and economic emancipation, promoted new cultural paradigms

and innovative socio-political concepts for managing present conflicts and efforts of reconciliation with the past, confronting tensions involved with social inequality, multi-ethnicity, interculturality, racism, mass migration, and the ecological limits of economic growth. In facing these challenges, theoretical and empirical approaches have been generated in Latin America that are of great importance not only for the region, but also for the general understanding and solving of the current problems of humanity.

For instance, on one hand Latin America has offered models for interethnic, transareal, translocal, transnational and transcontinental relationships. These were based on the concept of continuous movement and fluidity and seemed to make politically, socially, and culturally viable new dialogical forms, theorised as the logics of (trans) archipelago contact by the Caribbean philosopher and author Édouard Glissant (1990; 1997), or as (trans) border thinking by the chicana activist, feminist and author Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). On the other hand, the contradictions of capitalism have also been theorised, that is to say its production of ‘universalisation’ and its multiple forms of dependency, subjugation and attempts at whitening or “whiteness” (Echeverría, 2010) that seek to annihilate all differences by consumption, assimilation, opposition or abjection.

It is against this all-encompassing, falsely ‘universalising’ and alienating trend that both the so-called ‘subaltern groups’ and the ‘peripheries’ located in the global South began to resist from the 1960s. Similarly, it is as resistance against this nefarious trend that the emergence of new voices, actors and cultural facets in Latin America must be understood, which have since then begun to fight (and continue to fight) for its visibility. Thus, the struggle against the different forms of generic, ethnic or (geo)political oppression, and the (re)emergence of local aesthetic manifestations, regional literatures or ethnic modes of expression must be seen as counter-responses or counter-discourses that are opposed to Western ‘universalising’ globalisation exposing their ‘peripheral’ position strategically (in the sense that Spivak had given to ‘strategic essentialism’ as “strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak, 1996, p. 214) to guarantee the agency of the ‘subaltern’, or in the sense of ‘identification’ defined by Caribbean postcolonial cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1996)).

## “Coping with Crises” - Maria Sibylla Merian Center for Advanced Latin American Studies (CALAS)

Because of this long Latin American experience in dealing with crises, one of Coimbra Group Universities with a special focus on the region, Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, Germany, forms part of the transdisciplinary research project on “Coping with Crises: Transdisciplinary Perspectives from Latin America” at the Maria Sibylla Merian Center for Advanced Latin American Studies (CALAS). CALAS is the second Merian Center established by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany (BMBF). Highly reputed for its expertise and transdisciplinary approach, CALAS is an international research school where four German universities (Bielefeld, Kassel, Hannover and Jena) and four Latin American universities (Guadalajara, Costa Rica, FLACSO in Quito, and Universidad Nacional de San Martín/UNSAM at Buenos Aires) collaborate, sharing and concentrating their expertise (<http://calas.lat/en/about-calas>). Based upon the fact that Latin America is a region that has provided central impulses to discussions on social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological crisis and offered possible solutions (as “Buen Vivir”), the participating researchers focus on critical questions of how crises and processes of change are triggered, accelerated, decelerated, perceived, and reflected on by different actors in Latin America. Leading questions on which the Merian Center focusses are concerned with past and present strategies for dealing with crises offered by Latin America and its important output of critical theory (as dependence theory or the “Coloniality/Modernity” group). In addition, the Merian Center examines how new approaches to problem solving offered by Latin America – including transregional approaches – could be made more effective, institutionalised, or transferred to other World regions.

The research matrix of CALAS consists of four separate but thematically strongly entangled research groups: 1) Visions of peace: Transitions between violence and peace in Latin America; 2) Confronting Social Inequality: Perspectives on wealth and power; 3) Coping with Environmental Crises; and 4) Regional Identities in Multiple Crises. Two transversal axes complement these research groups: 1) the theoretical-methodological meta-reflection in Theorising Crisis, and 2) the reflection of the role of centres for advanced

studies and academic knowledge-production in Latin America in the Global Knowledge Society. As CALAS aims to enhance dialogical research and avoid the theoretic-methodological subordination traditionally existing in North-South collaborative partnerships, all CALAS research is based on knowledge production generated within Latin American contexts of practice in relation to horizontal, participatory, collaborative, and postcolonial methodologies (Sousa Santos and Meneses, 2009; Caretta and Riaño, 2016). This approach implies reversing traditional worldviews and flows of knowledge in order to place them differently, this time horizontally, making research visible that has shaped specific Latin American approaches and created its own theories, methodologies, and ways to perceive and analyse crisis (García-Canclini, 2014).

The CALAS headquarters are based in Guadalajara, Mexico, and act as a central hub with a high international visibility. Three affiliated regional centres, based in Central America (at University of San José de Costa Rica), the Andean region (at FLACSO, Quito), and the Cono Sur with Brazil (at UNSAM, Buenos Aires), secure its pluritopic structure and transnational dialogue. In CALAS and within its focus on “Coping with crises: Perspectives from Latin America”, FSU Jena is interacting especially with UNSAM in Buenos Aires, where the “CALAS Regional Center Cono Sur and Brazil” is located (and co-directed by both universities). The thematic focus of the Maria Sibylla Merian Regional Center concerns “Regional Identities in Multiple Crises”.

In the following lines of this overview on “Coping with Regional Identities in Crises: Perspectives from Latin America”, we will focus on the research program of this regional centre and its basic theoretical convictions (for more detail, see <https://www.gw.uni-jena.de/fakult%C3%A4t/arcosur/forschung/forschungsprojekte/calas> and <http://www.unsam.edu.ar/calas/>).

### “Coping with Regional Identities in Multiple Crises: Perspectives from Latin America” (FSU Jena / UNSAM)

Latin America unfortunately constitutes one of the world regions with particular expertise in dealing with crises, conflictive identity formation and pluri- or inter-culturality. The ongoing intense public debates on collective

identity in (post-) colonial societies of Latin America are deeply related to multiple crises and demonstrate quite clearly the ways in which crises are linked with identity formation. The foundations of nation-states in Latin America have always implied narratives of national identity based on Eurocentric narratives about ‘whiteness’ and ‘mestizaje’ (‘mixture of races’) (Briones, 1998; Pratt, 2010; Quijano, 2015; Segato, 2015). These hegemonic matrices have included projects of homogenisation, techniques of ‘invisibilisation’, and stigmatisation of indigenous peoples (Ramos et al., 2016; Delrio et al., 2018) and inhabitants with African ancestors (Restrepo, 2013). At the end of the 20th century, an important change with constitutional effects took place in several countries, which led to the recognition of the multicultural origin of all kinds of identities and the necessary pluralism, multilingualism and interculturality of Latin American societies (Zapata, 2018). While creole and white identities have been put into question since the 1990s, indigenous and Afro-American identities have managed to establish deep cultural-political changes, which find their institutional expression in the reformulation of several constitutions. Ever since – and beyond the official formal multi- and pluri-cultural or even national redefinitions of the majority of the Latin American nation-states –, regional, ethnic, ethnic racial, gender, and class identities, as well as processes of reterritorialisation and movements of the subaltern, have struggled against classism, racism, and machismo, while other forms of social-economic and symbolic exclusion have been revived. In this process, the use of the regional level as a framework for identity politics has often followed the pattern of strategically proclaimed geo-cultural differences (de la Cadena, 2007; Hall, 1996; Spivak, 1996).

This focus on “Regional Identities in Multiple Crises” thus explores the multiple configurations in which identity is negotiated, (re)invented, performed and politically, as well as aesthetically, represented (Grimson, 2011; Hammerschmidt, 2019). In doing so, the thematic axis analyses the identity processes related to politics of recognition and ethnic autonomy, as well as recent trends of resurgence of ‘whiteness’, sexism, and racism. Moreover, special attention is given to new forms of identity formations that arise in the context of regional and cross-border self-definitions, south-south migration

flows, forms of intersectionality, and alternative forms of literary and cinematic expressions.

The aim of this research group is the paradigmatic analysis of how interpretive patterns (of the regional level) are used in crises. To that end, the research group concentrates on the following aspects:

1. Identity processes between indigenous peoples, migrants, social organisations, and women's movements, with special reference to the ideological and theoretical implications of concepts such as multi-, trans- or interculturality. This perspective concentrates on different kinds of identity building by social practices, discourses, and narratives based on inclusion and exclusion procedures, especially taking into account processes of intersection and their (intercultural) aesthetic articulations, and reconsiders commonly accepted theoretical assumptions such as multiculturalism in the context of new hegemonic discourses grounded in racism, new xenophobia, violation of human rights, and misogyny.
2. Equivalence and divergence processes between emergent demands and their potential of fragmentation and articulation in Latin American nation-states, with a special focus on new regional identities, local discourse and text production in global contexts. To this effect, we focus on constructions and deconstructions of the region by symbolic inventions and their aesthetic-political potentials, rendering possible new forms of strategic identities that react to crises, including ethnicity, territory, ecology, class, and gender.
3. The crisis of metropolitan narrations on identity, such as the crisis of 'the lettered city', the interrelations between representations of crisis and crisis of representation, identity and intersectionality, or designs of 'subjects in crisis' in current Latin American literature and cinematography.

### Merian-CALAS Regional Center Cono Sur y Brazil

As the Regional Head Office of the Southern Cone and Brazil, in 2018 UNSAM hosted the Platform for Dialogue "New hate speech and its counter-speeches

in Latin America", organised under the direction of Alejandro Grimson and Claudia Hammerschmidt. This platform offered a space for reflection on hate speeches involving indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, women, dissident sexualities, migrants and political adversaries. The proposal considered the emotions at stake in stigmatisation and anti-stigmatisation processes – such as contempt, invisibilisation, cruelty, resentment, fear, as well as sorority, brotherhood, solidarity, new forms of community care – and paid special attention to counter-discourse formulations, especially aesthetic proposals, to deal with these speeches. One of the main topics was to think on those worldwide phenomena in their local shape and emergence – and the local techniques developed in Latin America to face and counteract them. In doing so, we tried to make out strategies valid for application in other regions of the world.

In a line of continuity with this event, in April 2021 the UNSAM and FSU Jena organised the Platform for Dialogue "Politics, Affects and Identities in Latin America" (in an online format due to the covid-19 pandemic) under the direction of Luciana Anapio and Claudia Hammerschmidt. The starting point of this platform was the recognition that both affects and inequality, including of course violence, play an important role in the construction of identities and social imaginaries and have their specificity in Latin America (Illouz, 2007; Frevert, 2014; Sabido Ramos, 2020). Emotions and affects can be formative and build senses of belonging and community; or, on the contrary, contribute to their disintegration. This illustrates the importance of studying affects and their role in the discursive construction of identities in relation to broader sociocultural dynamics. The objective was to think about the articulation between policies, affections and identities in the various and constant crises experienced by Latin America (Faur, 2007; Gravante and Poma, 2018). Furthermore, we focused on the different ways in which identity is negotiated or reinvented, and how people involved in crisis processes are able to reconfigure an imaginary transnational and/or local arena through which different manifestations of symbolic and material affection circulate. In this sense, the links between affects (in its various dimensions) and the different forms of identification were taken into account, as well as the particularities presented by the regulation of affections

as a key to the exercise and power relations in contemporary societies, and the role they play in the production and management of crises. By paying attention to the feelings and affections in cultural productions around identities, the Platform investigated their potential for dismantling existing power relations and analysed how, in different narrative modes and means, different affective cumulus emerge. In addition, various approaches considered how these affective dynamics articulate or do not articulate with the macro-political processes that many Latin American countries are experiencing in contexts of polarisation, i.e., how links or disarticulations are produced between indigenous movements, movements of African descent, migrant collectives, dissident feminisms and sexualities, or other similar identities, with political identifications. In doing so, this second Platform for Dialogue organised by the CALAS's Cono Sur and Brazil Regional Center, as previously addressed in the first event, was intended to contribute to a situated (affect) theory fitting to identity building processes in other world regions as well, thus providing a global approach from local analysis.

In the global network of society, crisis cannot be solved only at the scale of national or regional units; instead complex, translocal approaches are necessary that take into account local particularities as well as global interconnections. Furthermore, as CALAS suggests, Latin America offers a wide range of expertise for dealing with crises, which should be globally considered.

## Thinking regional identities and crises glocally: from Latin America to a global world

This starting point for thinking about crises from Latin America involves reflecting on historical and contemporary processes in which different actors must develop strategies to deal with crises that were (and keep being) expressed in multiple ways: political crises, economic crises, social movements, environmental crises, representation crises, institutional violence, migration crises, diasporas. It implies analysing the differentiated impact by which different identities experience these crises and how these identities are transformed by crises – especially women, indigenous communities, dissident identities, migrants, the dispossessed and declassified. It means investigating

the way emotions and affections are pierced and transformed; and focusing on the articulation between the various expressions of identities, politics, economics, work, the right to a healthy environment, and their aesthetic, discursive and counter-discursive representations.

To think of these kinds of crises from Latin America is to recognise that reflection on these processes can transform not only the Latin American region. Latin America matters because the answers that emerge from Latin America have something to say about the processes of social transformation anywhere in the world. We look and are looked at regionally, we dialogue from a located point of view and seek answers to local problems – which at the same time are also global. Today, when humanity is facing uncertainty, fascist rights are resurfacing and hate speeches unfolding in new forms and combinations, Latin American experience is fundamental to discuss major issues that concern us all. This perspective helps us to understand different forms of articulation between freedom and equality, to think of the social cost of equality, to disarticulate the organisation of social movements of “the aggrieved of equality” (García Linera and Errejón, 2020), and to reflect on the place of collectivity and community, or on the place of the state in these crises and its limits. Latin America’s long (and suffered) expertise and knowledge production in these fields can help develop and offer answers to these past, present and future urgent questions through a delicate combination of political commitment, integration, hope – and remaining uncertainty.

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# 2

## Uncovering a Common Heritage: Latin American Academies of Fine Arts in the Century of the Independence

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### Abstract

During the nineteenth century, the process of nation-building in Latin America was accompanied by the creation of publicly funded art academies charged with the delicate task of forging new images for the newly independent countries. This essay intends to offer an overview of Latin American academic art by focusing primarily on the transatlantic mobility of artists and artworks during the nineteenth century. The training and experience that Latin American students of art could acquire during their prolonged sojourns in Europe allowed them to become familiar with new artistic languages and techniques and to intervene directly in the cosmopolitan debate about the role of art in modern societies. The new global turn in art-historical studies provides us today with the unique opportunity to look at the transnational dimension of nineteenth-century Latin American art through new conceptual lenses and to unravel new aspects of the shared cultural heritage that links Europe to Latin America.

### Resumen

*Durante el siglo XIX, el proceso de construcción de naciones en América Latina fue acompañado por la creación de academias de arte financiadas con fondos públicos y encargadas de la delicada tarea de forjar nuevas imágenes para los países recién independizados. Este ensayo pretende ofrecer una visión general del arte académico latinoamericano, centrándose principalmente en la movilidad transatlántica de artistas y obras de arte durante el siglo XIX. La formación y experiencia que los estudiantes de arte latinoamericanos pudieron adquirir durante sus prolongadas estancias en Europa, les permitió familiarizarse con nuevos lenguajes y técnicas artísticas e intervenir directamente en el debate cosmopolita sobre el papel del arte en las sociedades modernas. El reciente giro global en los estudios de historia del arte nos brinda hoy la oportunidad única de mirar la dimensión transnacional del arte latinoamericano del siglo XIX, a través de nuevos conceptos y de desentrañar aspectos emergentes en el patrimonio cultural compartido que une a Europa con América Latina.*

## 48 Introduction

In recent times, nineteenth-century Latin American art has hit the art world quite remarkably. Names of artists, once known only locally, are now starred in international exhibitions, and their works, once relegated in the dusty corners of museum deposits, are now displayed in permanent galleries. Even the art market is showing a renewed interest in this neglected repertoire, overshadowed until recently by the feats of modernism. Today, nineteenth-century artists are increasingly featured alongside colonial, modernist and contemporary masters in stand-alone Latin American sales, offered yearly by leading international auction houses. Scholars, curators, art dealers and private collectors have learned to appreciate their art and role in the process of nation-building. These artists forged a new cosmopolitan image of their countries, then recently disenfranchised from colonial bonds, and contributed significantly to shaping the artistic landscape of the Americas.

I wish to be able to write such a celebratory statement in the near future. At the moment, despite some commendable pioneering efforts, this is regrettably not the case. Scholars, curators and art dealers show indeed an increased interest in nineteenth-century Latin American art, but this occurs only sporadically and almost invariably on a national level. Its transnational dimension is still largely overlooked by the general public. Of course, every Latin American country has its local hero. Brazil, to take one example, is rightly proud of Victor Meirelles (1832-1903), whose *The First Mass in Brazil* (1861) counts as an early manifesto of continental historical painting. However, one can legitimately wonder who, outside Brazil, is ready to acknowledge the artistic relevance of Pedro Américo or Rodolpho Bernardelli. The same could be said, to mention but a few, of Pedro Lira, in Chile; Ernesto de la Cárcova, in Argentina; Juan Manuel Blanes, in Uruguay; Ignacio Merino and Francisco Laso, in Peru; Juan Cordero, Santiago Rebull, and José Salomé Pina, in Mexico (Coli, 2005;

Romera, 1951; Malosetti Costa, 2001; Peluffo Linari, 1986; Ramírez, 1985; Ugarte Eléspuru, 1966).

The common thread linking these artists together was their cosmopolitan academic education, achieved at home and overseas. The need to forge and control new symbols of nationhood and become acquainted with a standard artistic language common to other modern nations spurred several Latin American countries to establish publicly funded schools of art. Expensive programmes of scholarships for students (*pensionados* in Spanish-speaking countries; *pensionistas* in Brazil) were embedded from the very beginning in the academic curriculum. Rome and Paris became the privileged metropolises of reference for many young Latin American artists and the centres in which they perfected their skills and produced their works. These prolonged moments spent abroad offered these *primeros modernos* with the unique opportunity to engage actively in the artistic debates of Europe. The felicitous formula *primeros modernos* or 'first modern artists', coined for the Argentinian case, could be easily applied to other Latin American contexts (Malosetti Costa, 2001).

We are now working in times in which an increased interest towards transnationalism and globalisation has changed the ways in which academic research is conducted. The global turn has dramatically affected also the fields of art history and museum studies (van Damme and Zijlmans, 2012; Belting et al., 2009; Elkins, 2010). One of the consequences of this new orientation has been the increased interest towards the phenomena of mobility, migration and transformation, as witnessed in the topics of special interest, formulated most recently by the CIHA, the International Committee for Art History: 'Motion: Transformations' (Florence 2019) and 'Motion: Migrations' (São Paulo 2020-21). This new approach also has been endorsed by the Getty Foundation with the 'Connecting Art Histories' initiative (2009-19), an ambitious programme of grants awarded to universities working on Asian, Latin American, Greater Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European projects. The general framework under which the Getty asked scholars to submit their proposals revealed a distinct focus on non-Western art. The dynamic exchange between Europe and Latin America during the nineteenth century remained somewhat untouched (Guzmán and Martínez, 2012).

This is a topic that matters: especially for Europe. The case of the Academia Nacional de San Carlos in Mexico City offers a paramount example. Funded by Fernando José Mangino and Gerónimo Antonio Gil in 1781, during the colonial period, the Mexican academy of fine arts was the first of its kind created in the Americas (Charlot, 1962; Báez Macías, 2009). After the independence from Spain in 1821 and the creation of the Mexican Republic in 1823, the new government sent as soon as 1825 five students to Rome to study painting, sculpture, engraving, architecture and botanical drawing. The names of these pioneers – Ignacio Vásquez, José María Labastida, José Manzo y Jaramillo, Alejandro Vicente Casarín and Francisco Xavier Arias – are largely unknown today, but their few preserved works offer an excellent illustration of the kind of art needed by the new nation. It suffices to mention, on this regard, the sculptures of the *Mexican Eagle* (1833-34) and the *Allegory of the 1824 Constitution* (1832), which Labastida carved during his sojourn in Rome, to have an idea of the national character linked to that mission (Cuadriello, 1989; Cracolici, 2021).

In 1843, the Mexican government decided to revive the Academy of San Carlos with funding derived from the national lottery. The new curriculum entailed, this time, a well-designed programme of scholarships to support six students in Rome for a period of four years, with an additional one to be spent in Paris. The first cohort included two painters, Primitivo Miranda and Juan Cordero; two sculptors, Tomás Pérez and Felipe Valero; and two architects, the brothers Juan and Ramón Agea. The pensionados in Rome were open also to indigenous Mexicans, as witnessed in the amiable token of affection that Juan Cordero painted in Rome, with the *Portrait of the sculptors Pérez and Valero*, intent to mould in clay the head of Homer (Fig. 1). The second cohort of students included pupils of the Catalan artists Pelegrín Clavé and Manuel Vilar, appointed in 1845 in Rome as directors respectively of painting and sculpture. This second generation of *pensionados* comprised the better-known painters José Salomé Pina and Santiago Rebull; sculptor Epitacio Calvo; and architect Ramón Rodríguez Arangoiti (Capitelli and Cracolici, 2018).

The achievements of these artists left an enduring mark in Mexico. Cordero's wall painting in the churches of Santa Teresa Antigua and Jesús y María in Mexico City, now severely damaged, have been rightly identified as the



Fig. 1: Juan Cordero, *Portrait of the sculptors Pérez and Valero*, oil of canvas, Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.

immediate precursors of the mural paintings by modernist artists such as José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera or David Alfaro Siqueiros. The fact that a pioneering study on Cordero and San Carlos came from the pen of Jean Charlot, a distinguished member of the muralist movement, proves once more the historical significance of that artistic tradition (Charlot, 1946). The route to Rome was not only beaten by *pensionados* sponsored directly by the Academia Nacional de San Carlos, but also by artists able to attract funding from other sources, such as Salvador Ferrando, sponsored by the government of Veracruz;

Miguel Martín Azparren, sponsored by the businessman Anselmo Zurutuza; or Jacobo Gálvez and Felipe Santiago Gutiérrez, who managed to partially self-fund their education in Europe (Capitelli and Cracolici, 2018).

Gutiérrez left us a vivid account of his Roman sojourn in his travelogues, dwelling in particular on its cosmopolitan atmosphere: ‘El periodo que dura el estudio [...] se pasa sin sentir, por lo agradable de la ocupación al lado de setenta u ochenta artistas ingleses, franceses, rusos, americanos, españoles, y en fin, de todas las naciones’ (‘The time spent studying passes without noticing, for the pleasure of working in the company of seventy or eighty artists of French, Russian, American, Spanish origin, in short, of all nations’; Gutiérrez, 1883, pp. 159-60). The cosmopolitan milieu portrayed in this sketch of artistic life in Rome is not all too dissimilar from the accounts that our Erasmus students could formulate to describe their international experience in our modern universities. This convivial atmosphere is also revealed in a group photograph sent by Mariano Fortuny to Claudio Lorenzale, where Mexican painters Salvador Ferrando and Santiago Rebull are featured in Rome alongside other pensionados from Spain, among which appears also the Argentinian Martín Boneo (Folch i Torres, 1962, p. 161, Fig. 2).

The presence and activity of Latin American artists in nineteenth-century Europe is an aspect that art history has studied only tangentially, paying little attention to the transnational dimension of the phenomenon. The centrality of Rome and Paris for the formation of artists is instead tersely expressed in a comment on the Great Exhibition of 1878:

“Presumimos que Roma es el cerebro artístico del mundo; pero París es su corazón [...] Roma sigue siendo el templo del arte; París es su mercado. En Roma se pinta por pintar; en París por vender. El arte sublime que se siente en Roma, en París se manufactura. Roma y París han sido las escuelas de nuestros modernos artistas” (Escobar, 1878, p. 367).

(“We believe that Rome is the artistic brain of the world; but Paris is its heart [...] Rome is still the temple of art; Paris is its market. In Rome one paints for the sake of painting; in Paris, to sell. The sublime art one can feel in Rome, in Paris is manufactured. Rome and Paris have been the schools of our modern artists”).

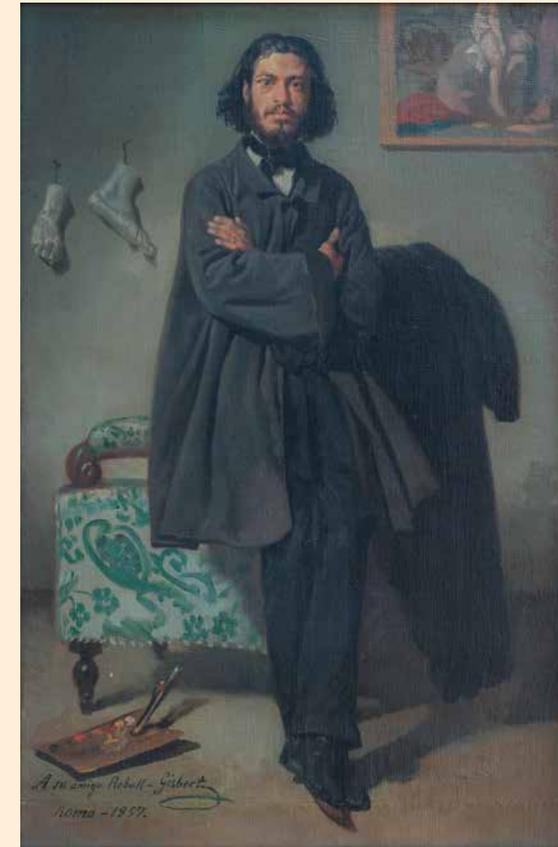


Fig. 2 Antonio Gisbert, *Portrait of Santiago Rebull in his Roman Studio*, 1857, oil on canvas, Private Collection, Berlin.

What Alfredo Escobar maintained here for the case of Spanish art equally applied to the emerging Latin American schools. It was almost invariably from the portfolios of those artists who had spent part of their lives in Europe that their governments selected the artworks to be exhibited in such defining events as the Great Exhibitions. The specificity of each country was conveyed in many cases by carefully chosen subjects, but the artistic language in which they were inflected used an international style acquired through a common academic curriculum.

The French and Italian models were seminal to launch in Latin America the first series of academic exhibitions. These were introduced as early as in 1829 in Brazil by Jean Baptiste Debret, who had travelled to Rio de Janeiro in 1816 as a member of the French Artistic Mission to establish, under the auspices of the royal court of Portugal, the *Escola Real de Artes e Ofícios* ('Royal School of Sciences, Arts and Crafts'), which became the *Academia Imperial de Belas Artes* ('Imperial Academy of Fine Arts') under Pedro I (1822-31; Cardoso Denis, 2000). In Rio, Debret worked closely with the French architect Grandjean de Montigny and painter Nicolas-Antoine Taunay, both winners of the Grand Prix de Rome. The Brazilian academy introduced a travel grant, the *Prémio de Viagem*, in 1845, after an early experiment in 1831, when Manuel de Araújo Porto-Alegre was sent to Paris. From 1845 to 1887 the *Academia Imperial de Belas Artes* conferred the *Prémio de Viagem* to Rome and Paris to artists such as the aforementioned Meirelles, Bernardelli and Américo, destined for brilliant careers in Brazil, but also Zeferino da Costa, Agostinho da Motta, Rodolpho Amoêdo and Oscar Pereira da Silva (Cavalcanti, 2001; Dias, 2020).

Regular exhibitions were introduced also in Mexico by Clavé and Vilar starting from 1848. These events were not only an occasion to display artworks sent from Europe by the *pensionados* but allowed also local artists, be they students of the academy or not, to show and sell their works. The academy equally promoted the envoy to Mexico of exemplary pieces by European masters, which enhanced the opportunity for artists based in Mexico to compare their works with the ones displayed in international exhibitions, opening new vistas on the genres, styles, techniques and tastes of the global art market. Such public displays of art had great impact on the bourgeoning of an artistic and collecting culture among the Mexican bourgeoisie, who started to commission artworks from members of the academy (Romero de Terreros, 1963; Rodríguez Prampolini, 1997; Acevedo and Widdifield, 2002). Eugenio Landesio, the Italian professor of landscape appointed at San Carlos in 1854, and his best pupil José María Velasco obtained significant commissions from the owners of the wealthy haciendas and silver mines, marking a new starting point in the construction of an autonomous image of the Mexican landscape (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 José María Velasco, *The Metlac Ravine*, 1893, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.

A further aspect worth mentioning is the increased mobility of artists within the continent. The success of the San Carlos exhibitions encouraged artists of the *Escuela de Dibujo y Pintura* de San Alejandro in Cuba, founded in 1818 by the French painter Jean Baptiste Vermay, to send their works to Mexico. As early as 1795, the Italian painter Giuseppe Pirovani found his way from Rome to Philadelphia, where he decorated the interiors of the Spanish embassy, then to Cuba in 1804, where he painted three frescoes in the cathedral of Havana, and eventually to Mexico where he worked at San Carlos until 1829 (Rose-De Viejo, 2011; Niell, 2012). Alessandro Ciccarelli, a painter from Naples but formed in Rome, was invited in 1843 by Pedro II to Rio de Janeiro to act as court painter. In 1848 Ciccarelli moved to Santiago de Chile, where he established the first Chilean *Academia de Pintura* ('Academy of Painting'; Cruz de Amenábar, 2004; Berríos et al., 2009; Zamorano Pérez, 2013). Before him, the French painter Raymond Monvoisin had reached Santiago in 1843, after spending one year in Buenos Aires; in 1845, we find him in Peru, where he met Ignacio Merino, pupil in Paris of Delaroche and professor of painting in Lima at the *Academia de Dibujo y Pintura* ('Academy of Design and Painting'); in 1846, he was active at the imperial court in Brazil, where

he became Ciccarelli's friend, to finally spend eight years in Chile, before returning to France in 1856 (Dias, 2020, pp. 266-90).

The case of Monvoisin, however, is distinct from the one offered by other European traveller-artists, who flocked to Latin America in the wake of the ethnographic curiosity spurred in Europe by Alexander von Humboldt's explorations of the continent in 1799-1804. The artistic production of Johann Moritz Rugendas, for instance, the German traveller-artist who between 1831 and 1847 journeyed through Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, with his detailed views of landscapes and customs, is hardly comparable with the art of Monvoisin (Diener, 1996). Like Ciccarelli, Monvoisin travelled through Latin America as a cosmopolitan academic painter ready to engage with other cosmopolitan academic artists. Mexican, Brazilian, and Peruvian artists did not



Fig. 4 José Salomé Pina, *Pietà with Saint Charles Borromeo and Saint Bernard*, 1859, oil on canvas, Private Collection, Santiago de Cali.

limit their European travel to their study years, but also crossed the Atlantic later when their careers were well established. Ferrando, for instance, remained in Rome for about twenty-five years, where he opened a photography studio; Américo spent his most productive years in Florence; Merino left Lima in 1850 to settle in Paris permanently; and to paint his now regrettably lost *Circular Panorama of Rio de Janeiro* (1888), Meirelles went to Belgium (Coelho, 2007).

The mobility of artists chimed with the mobility of artworks. The case of religious paintings and monumental statues made in Europe adds a further element to the academic exchange between the two continents. The envoys of sacred art from Rome, but also from Germany and France, served to disenfranchise several recently independent countries from religious colonial bonds. The numerous altarpieces by prominent artists of the Roman Academy of Saint Luke sent to various churches in Santiago de Chile offer a paramount example (Capitelli, 2010, 2016; Capitelli et al., 2017). The renewal of religious iconography occurred also as the result of the implementation in Mexico, for instance, of the Roman academic curriculum, as shown in Pina's or Rebull's envoys from Rome (Fig. 4). On the secular side, monumental bronze statues depicting Simon Bolivar by Adamo Tadolini were placed in the main squares of Lima, Caracas and San Francisco; the ones of the same hero by Pietro Tenerani are in Bogota and in the Panteón Nacional in Caracas; the statue in marble of José María Morelos by Antonio Piatti in Mexico City is still in place today, although severely damaged (Hufschmidt, 1996; Gutiérrez Viñuales, 1997; Grandesso, 2003, 2018).

## Conclusions

This short excursus on nineteenth-century academic art and its transnational relevance for Europe ought to be complemented with a survey of those Latin American initiatives and institutions that in recent times have devoted special attention to this once overlooked repertoire: the Centro de Estudios del Patrimonio at the Universidad Adolfo Ibañez in Santiago de Chile and Valparaíso; the Instituto de Artes at the Universidad Nacional de San Martín in Buenos Aires; the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in Mexico City; the Departamento de Historia

del Arte at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogota; the Departamento de História de Arte at the Universidade Federal de São Paulo. The collaborative network that these centres have developed with local museums and galleries, including private collections, is invaluable also for European researchers and curators. The Jornadas de Historia del Arte, organised by Chilean and Brazilian colleagues, have become over the past fifteen years an attractive forum also for European investigators.

This well-established network of international scholars is now in the process of consolidating their collaboration at the institutional level, through the creation of confederated programmes for postgraduate students. Like the artists enrolled in the fine arts academies of the nineteenth century, art and art history students of the twenty-first century need travel. The necessity to visit museums and galleries personally, to test different forms of supervision and postgraduate training, to become proficient in the languages considered particularly relevant in the art world – besides English, also Italian, French and German – elevates travel to an irreplaceable component of their education. The new global turn in the study of art history makes travel indispensable also for European students, for whom the routes to Latin America open new vistas on the global geography of art and its shared common heritage.

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# 3

## Latin American Universities in a Time of Crisis: Responses from the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

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### Abstract

Drawing on the Brazilian context, we discuss the crisis facing Latin American Universities, where the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences have been deemed 'useless' by populist politicians, who instead favour technicist, neoliberal approaches to education that will produce graduates capable of bolstering a struggling economy. And yet, these disciplines are central to addressing global issues and challenges, and crucial in universities in promoting internationalisation and intercultural collaboration among faculty and students. Paradoxically, covid-19 also offers opportunities for universities in Latin America to internationalise and share resources through the delivery of online programmes, and other virtual exchanges, networks, and collaborations. In this essay, we aim to show how education, embedded in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, and drawing on virtual exchange, can address difference, diversity, marginalisation and exclusion to open up intercultural understanding and communication, especially where young people face conditions of conflict, forced migration, and occupation. Second, we highlight how these forms of education can facilitate intercultural understanding, thereby enhancing critical, participatory, and responsible citizenship in young people. We describe a project, grounded in critical intercultural pedagogy (Freire, 1970), which eschews discourses of competence and employability, and instead involves faculty-student collaboration and coproduction in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences to promote intercultural dialogue. The project included a multinational, multidisciplinary, multilingual researcher and student network in seven universities: three in Latin America as well as one in Palestine, one in the United Kingdom, and two in Turkey. We illustrate our approach through two case studies from the project: an intercultural language learning programme in Colombia, inspired by Boal's (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*; and a critical intercultural online exchange using flash fiction, poetry, and identity narratives. Our essay offers inspiration to researchers, teachers of

languages and intercultural education, policymakers, and others interested in internationalisation in universities on the value of the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences in promoting international cooperation and understanding within and beyond Latin America.

## Resumen

*Baseado no contexto brasileiro, discutimos a crise que as universidades latino-americanas enfrentam, onde as artes, as humanidades e as ciências sociais têm sido consideradas “inúteis” por políticos populistas que, em vez disso, favorecem abordagens tecnicistas e neoliberais da educação, que produzirão graduados capazes de apoiar uma economia em dificuldades. No entanto, essas disciplinas são centrais para abordar questões e desafios globais, e de vital importância nas universidades na para a promoção da internacionalização e colaboração intercultural entre professores e alunos. Paradoxalmente, a pandemia do covid-19 oferece oportunidades para que as universidades da América Latina se internacionalizem e compartilhem recursos por meio da oferta de programas online e outros intercâmbios, redes e colaborações virtuais. Neste ensaio, pretendemos mostrar como a educação, incorporada nas Artes, Humanidades e Ciências Sociais, e fazendo uso de intercâmbio virtual, pode abordar a diferença, a diversidade, a marginalização e a exclusão para ampliar a compreensão intercultural e a comunicação intercultural, especialmente onde os jovens enfrentam condições de conflito, migração forçada e ocupação militar. Em segundo lugar, destacamos como essas formas de educação podem facilitar a compreensão intercultural, aumentando assim a cidadania crítica, participativa e responsável dos jovens. Descrevemos um projeto fundamentado na pedagogia intercultural crítica (Freire, 1970), que evita os discursos de competência e empregabilidade e, ao invés disso, envolve a colaboração e coprodução docente-aluno nas Artes, Humanidades e Ciências Sociais para promover o diálogo intercultural. O projeto incluiu uma rede multinacional, multidisciplinar e multilíngue de pesquisadores e estudantes em sete universidades: três na América Latina além de uma na Palestina, uma no Reino Unido e duas na Turquia. Ilustramos nossa abordagem por meio de dois estudos de caso do projeto: um programa intercultural de aprendizagem de línguas na Colômbia inspirado no Teatro do Oprimido de Boal (1979); e uma troca intercultural online crítica usando ‘ficção flash,’ poemas, e narrativas de identidade. Nosso ensaio oferece inspiração para*

*pesquisadores, professores de línguas e de educação intercultural, para responsáveis por decisões políticas, e outros interessados na internacionalização em universidades sobre o valor das Artes, Humanidades e Ciências Sociais, na promoção da cooperação internacional e da compreensão, dentro e além da América Latina.*

## Introduction

The current crisis in Latin American Higher Education, particularly but not exclusively in the area of the humanities and social sciences, predates the devastating recent impact of covid-19 on the world’s economies and on global mobility. The longer-term downturn in the global economies has impacted disproportionately on the countries of Latin America, with even the bullish economy of Brazil suffering severely, a situation exacerbated by corruption scandals that have implicated the key players in the oil industry and the previous governing party, among others. As with other beleaguered Latin American countries, the voting public turned to populist leaders who combined a rhetoric of anti-corruption with neo-conservative economic and social policies. In Brazil in 2018, the current President, Jair Bolsonaro, was elected on a pro-militarist, anti-Marxist platform. A substantial part of his support derives from the evangelical Christian churches, whose number of adherents has rapidly grown amongst the Brazilian working classes, giving them considerable political power (Hunter and Power, 2019).

Once in power, Bolsonaro’s government quickly moved to reduce the funding to public education, seen as a hotbed of left-wing indoctrination of the young. The Bolsonaro government also supported the *Escola Sem Partido* (School without Party) bill, which was specifically opposed to ‘indoctrination’ in public schools by teachers influenced by the ideas and teaching strategies of the educator, Paulo Freire (Knijnik, 2020). At higher education level, public universities, state and federal, found their funding cut. While they were not alone in suffering shrinking budgets, humanities and social science faculties were particularly singled out for criticism. In the words of Marine Corde, a Brazilian anthropologist (Chalhoub et al., 2020, p. 4): “[...] humanities and social sciences are still pointed out as useless disciplines. It is a deeply rooted social representation, and this is more or less strongly reflected in the political views of governments”.

It is significant, that Corde acknowledges that the antagonism to the humanities and social sciences is a 'deeply rooted social representation' extending beyond the present Bolsonaro government, though exploited by it. The general representation of humanities and social sciences as 'useless' allows governments in numerous regions to justify cuts in funding, particularly at times of crisis. One challenge facing Brazil, Latin America, and humanities and social sciences centres elsewhere, is finding ways of demonstrating that the arts and humanities can and do address global issues and global challenges in ways that the wider population will understand and appreciate.

## Challenges to the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Latin America

One of the most immediate impacts of the covid-19 pandemic for Latin American higher education has been the threat to the 'internationalisation' of universities, whatever their place in the world rankings. Internationalisation, while it has multiple definitions, generally refers to the flow of intellectual, human and economic capital, facilitated by the increased global mobility of academic staff and students. The proportion of 'international' staff and students that a higher education institution can boast is one of the key indicators that boost or depress the institution's position in the world rankings. A further indicator is attracting international funding (Proctor and Rumbley, 2018). However, the funding of research in Brazilian public universities outside direct grant awards via state or central government agencies has always been bureaucratically difficult to achieve (Caliari et al., 2020).

In relative terms, Latin American universities have a poor record in internationalisation. For example, according to the 2021 THES World Rankings, the highest ranked university in South America, the University of São Paulo (USP), which lies in the 201-250 band, has only 4% international students, and, while it is rising, its 'international outlook' lags behind its ratings for teaching, research, citations or industry income (THES, 2021). For comparison, the current No.1, the University of Oxford, has 41% international students, and its 'international outlook' exceeds its income from industry; and the University of Coimbra, ranked in the 601-800 band, still has 18% international students and

its international outlook exceeds its scores for research, teaching and industry income. Now, staff and students in Latin America find the opportunities for global mobility restricted, not only by lack of funds, but also the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. In this context, internationalisation needs to be redefined: paradoxically, by anticipating the need to reframe what is meant by 'internationalisation' in a world where physical travel has become difficult, Latin America may now have the opportunity to lead the way for other countries in the world.

In her survey of successful Brazilian graduate programmes, Ramos (2018) identified numerous strategies then being undertaken, the most popular of which was outward student mobility under the government-funded 'Science without Borders' (*Ciências sem Fronteiras*) initiative, which applied only to students in the 'useful' exact sciences, and which was discontinued by the Bolsonaro government in 2017. Since outward mobility programmes, even when they were being subsidised, only reached a minority of Brazilian students, some institutions had already begun to advocate 'internationalisation at home' before the pandemic struck. A central pillar of 'internationalisation at home' is the delivery of courses using English-medium instruction (Martinez, 2016; Carvalho Fonseca et al., forthcoming). The broader range of elements of internationalisation include (Ramos, 2018, p. 9): "*mechanisms or strategies* (international mobility, international scientific cooperation, international networks and collaboration, curriculum internationalisation, international engagement in science policy/governance), *academic output* (international publications, international co-authorships, attendance to international scientific meetings and conferences), *enabling factors* (institutional, organisational and administrative support) and *access to resources* (sharing of cutting-edge research facilities and technology, international funding) to *desirable outcomes* (global competence development and scientific capital accumulation)".

Given that higher education in Brazil has been largely a provider of exchange students to other countries, and that, alongside other actors in the education sector and at all levels worldwide, Brazilian university education has swiftly moved to an online mode of activity, there are, at least in principle, greater opportunities in Brazil for 'virtual internationalisation' as universities elsewhere

address the accelerated move towards online delivery of programmes, networking, collaboration in publishing, conference participation and sharing of research resources.

These possibilities have been recognised by some senior staff in major Brazilian universities. In one of a series of webinars on the 'New Normal' in higher education in the post-coronavirus era, the USP Dean of Research, Professor Carlos Graeff, identified key points learned so far from the Brazilian experience of the pandemic (USP, 2020). Among them, he highlighted the way in which global scientific collaboration around the response to the pandemic has demonstrated the need for 'Open Science', which can be defined as the free dissemination of knowledge, subject to aspects of ethics and intellectual property, by means of Open Access to publications, Open Data (access to raw data from the initial stages of research, models and documentation), and Open Computational Process (software and algorithms).

While Open Science is clearly in the public good and it facilitates research collaboration between scientists in Brazil and elsewhere, the prospects for the humanities and social sciences, already bleak before covid-19, seem bleaker. Squeezed by an unsympathetic federal government, typically more individually oriented in their research agendas than their collaborative colleagues, less positivist in their theoretical frameworks and methods, and often valuing modes of dissemination that are not subsidised by project funding (e.g. traditional formats such as printed books), those who work in the humanities and social sciences will again need to be creative in order to thrive and win public respect in the difficult months and years ahead.

## The Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences as Responses to the Crisis

Against this backdrop, we initiated a multinational, multidisciplinary, multilingual network project, that brought together researchers in three universities in Latin America (University of São Paulo, Brazil; University of Los Andes, Colombia; and the Instituto Federal Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil) and four other universities (Anadolu University, Istanbul University, Turkey; Islamic

University of Gaza, Palestine; and Durham University, United Kingdom). The project, led from Durham University, benefited from funding from United Kingdom Research Innovation, specifically, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Global Challenges Research Fund.<sup>1</sup> The project responds to several issues raised above concerning the crisis in Latin American universities.

First, the project addresses the challenges faced in many Latin American universities concerning the relevance of the arts, humanities, and the social sciences. We maintain that these disciplines remain crucial in preparing graduates for a complex and uncertain future, not least in their willingness to tackle global challenges imaginatively, and to critique the reductive neoliberal discourses of competence and employability. Second, the project repositions internationalisation in Latin America, and beyond, by engaging private and state/federal universities and their faculty and students, through researcher collaboration with universities in other parts of the world. Finally, it promotes intercultural dialogue among students in higher education and young people excluded from it who are in challenging contexts due to conflict, forced migration, and occupation.

The project had the following two broad aims: How can forms of education embedded in the arts and humanities address difference, diversity, marginalisation and exclusion to open up intercultural understanding and communication, especially where young people face conditions of conflict, forced migration, and occupation? How can these forms of education facilitate intercultural understanding, thereby enhancing critical, participatory, and responsible citizenship in young people?

The researchers and educators, in five case study sites (in Bogota; Natal/Gaza; Istanbul; Anadolu; and Durham) worked with students and refugees (supported by non-governmental organisations, charities, and other community groups) to co-construct critical intercultural pedagogies (Freire, 1970). The case studies drew on creative arts and new materialist methods (Badwan, 2020; Frimberger, 2016; Harvey et al., 2019) that involved sharing narratives of the self; languages instruction and exchange; ethno-religious music that drew on new and traditional forms of representation and identity; participatory photography;

deconstruction of media discourses and representations of refugees and asylum seekers; and creative writing (flash fiction and autobiography). Through face-to-face workshops and online meetings, the students and young people (guided by the researchers) engaged in dialogic intercultural encounters to develop understandings of one another's languages, culture and cultural heritage, multiple identities, and representations. These co-constructed, locally-generated, and context-specific intercultural pedagogies enabled young people to share educational experience which fostered language learning, intercultural dialogue, equitable quality education and lifelong learning. Together, the intercultural pedagogies developed through the five case studies (see the project website <https://biphec.wordpress.com/>) aimed to promote participation and responsibility in the community and public sphere, in response to the UNESCO 2030 education strategy and Sustainable Development Goal 4, in formal and non-formal education.

The project also brought together researchers from multiple disciplines (anthropology, applied linguistics, education, ethno-religious and music studies, languages education, and sociology) to enrich understandings of internationalisation and intercultural education, and in particular, to decentre research theories and methodologies developed in the Global North. The researchers drew on decolonising approaches to researcher practices through Freirean intercultural pedagogy (Freire, 1970), whereby researchers work *with* and *for* the research participants (not *on* or *about* them) with an aim to decentre and question their own power in the research process and resist hegemonic narratives (Ladegaard and Phipps 2020; Smith, 1999/2012; Walsh and Mignolo, 2018).

Two of the case studies from the project involved researchers from Latin America. The first, led by Dr Beatriz Peña Dix at the University of Los Andes and supported by Professor John Corbett from the University of São Paulo, investigated the role of pre-service language teachers as multilingual mediators. Drawing on critical pedagogy, and in particular, Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), the researchers explored how drama and theatre games empowered student recipients of the Colombian government's scholarship programme "It pays to be clever" (*Ser Pilo Paga*) to create their own

intercultural English language education resources for mediation in conflict situations resulting from civil war. The lead researcher supported students to develop learning resources using dramatic improvisations based on their own and their students' experiences, approached literally or metaphorically through critical incidents. The case study was guided by the main question: "How do pre-service language teachers understand critical intercultural pedagogies as transformative intercultural language education in contexts of conflict?" The 20 students, who were enrolled in an undergraduate teacher education degree at a private university in Bogota, participated in three workshops:

1. intercultural approaches and drama strategies in English language teaching;
2. intercultural pedagogies, dialogue and mediation; and
3. designing a toolbox to prompt critical intercultural pedagogies in the English language classroom.

As an outcome of the final phase, they created and refined activities to foster intercultural dialogue and reflection around their own or imaginary intercultural encounters that involved conflict. Students invited their former English language teachers (from their secondary schools) to participate in a co-teaching experience called "The Mirror Project" in which they collaborated in teaching some of the activities previously designed. The case study reviews Boal's (1979) pedagogical principles and their local adaptation. The case study then draws on the tasks designed by the students, their journal entries, and interviews with the researcher, to explore how the students developed an understanding of critical intercultural pedagogies, the creation of third spaces, and mediation and dialogue in intercultural encounters. The emergent intercultural pedagogies developed by the students may inform language education stakeholders (e.g., pre-service and in-service language teachers, language teacher trainers, language teacher education programs, and the Ministry of Education's language teaching policy developers) on the use of critical intercultural pedagogies in English language education as resources for the mediation of conflict in contexts of war and other civil conflicts.

The second case study involved researchers at the Instituto Federal Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil (Dr Bruno Ferreira di Lima, Professor Janaina Weissheimer), and researchers at the Islamic University of Gaza, Palestine (Professor Nazmi Al Masri and Dr Refaat Alreer). The case study, by connecting students at their respective universities in Brazil and Palestine, sought to develop a critical and creative intercultural pedagogy of resistance and resilience. The case study focused on two creative projects that explored identity, resilience, and resistance. At the Instituto Federal Rio Grande do Norte, trainee language teachers were taught to write ‘flash non-fiction’ in English to explore their own identity and experience of life in the economically marginalised north-east of Brazil. Meanwhile, in an intensive creative writing training course held at the Islamic University of Gaza, male and female graduates from the English department were trained and encouraged to write both short stories and poetry in English in response to the ongoing state of crisis in Palestine. The two groups were brought together in an online intercultural exchange in which they shared their work, then participated in a ‘live’, synchronous online meeting. The case study addresses the techniques used to train the students to write fiction and non-fiction in their different educational contexts, the themes and issues that arose out of the students’ writing, and the impact of engaging online with a particular audience from a different culture, with a different experience of marginalisation and crisis.

The engagement among researchers in Latin America and elsewhere in the Global South facilitated two further strands of investigation. The first concerns the role of languages in the research process. The network enabled researchers to investigate processes of translation, language and communication among researchers, educators, experts, non-professional translators and community groups with the aim of enriching understandings of multilingual researcher methods and processes (“researching multilingually”) (Holmes et al., 2013). This investigation opens up debates about the role of indigenous languages, Spanish, other Latin American languages, and the dominance of English in education, internationalisation, and research, including languages of publication. The project raised issues for the researchers concerning the advantages and challenges of having English as a common language of inquiry

and action; while certain aspects of collaboration were certainly enabled, the project also introduced the Latin American researchers and students to some unexpected linguistic demands and opportunities, such as the necessity for Syrian refugees in Istanbul to learn Turkish for academic purposes, and the creative uses of English by Palestinians in Gaza to ‘write back’ against oppression. The researchers, from diverse geographical backgrounds, also shared concerns and strategies for their own scholarly development in globalised academia, whereby, for career advancement and recognition, they are increasingly expected to publish high quality outputs through the medium of English.

Second, we explored the benefits of a multilingual, multidisciplinary, multinational network in enhancing researcher development, collaboration, and shared/unshared researcher approaches that recognise and value knowledge forms and research methods emergent in the Global South, and in particular, in Latin America. The outcomes of these investigations will be published in an edited research monograph which discusses the five case studies and the affordances and challenges of the transnational, multilingual, multidisciplinary network; and includes contributions from three other scholars working within and on Latin American issues in intercultural education<sup>2</sup> (Holmes and Corbett, forthcoming).

## Conclusions

The project has demonstrated the importance and value of international collaborations with scholars from Latin America. Together, we have sought to decentre and decolonise research processes in order to generate research based on Latin American and other Global South forms of knowledge. This knowledge, grounded in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, and evidenced in the critical intercultural pedagogies, is crucial in enabling educators to work with students and people in the community on global issues and challenges in ways that resonate with their own identity and belonging, and especially in contexts of conflict and forced migration where higher education may be inaccessible. Our work underscores the arts, humanities, and social sciences as key areas for intercultural learning and understanding, and in promoting intercultural

dialogue concerning current societal crises ushered in by populism and far-right ideologies, racism, climate change, and the covid-19 pandemic. The project also demonstrates that internationalisation does not have to be about chasing university rankings; in-stead, it marks the value and importance of international researcher collaborations in shaping methods of learning that reach out to the many in Latin America for whom higher education can be an imagined future only.

## Endnotes

- 1 We thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council Global Challenges Research Fund (AH/S003967/1) and United Kingdom Research Innovation for funding this research project.
- 2 The contributing scholars are Clarissa Menezes Jordão (Federal University of Paraná, Brazil), Manuela Guilherme (University of Coimbra, Portugal), and Robert Aman (Linköping University, Sweden).

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# 4

## Of medals and recognition: Producing urban sociality through martial arts in Brazil and Argentina

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### Abstract

The essay discusses access to and movement in the city through the lens of martial arts practitioners in Brazil and Argentina. The ethnographic glimpses describe how the urban space is produced and revealed to the athletes attending competitions and sporting events. The example of a Brazilian jiu-jitsu project in Rio de Janeiro shows how the practical inclusion of socially disadvantaged youths through martial arts practice is contradicted by their symbolic exclusion as inhabitants of the city's periphery. The example of a taekwondo competitor in Buenos Aires then highlights the facilitation and limits of social inclusion by following the trajectory of a publicly-known female taekwondo competitor seeking official financial recognition for her achievements. Both case studies provide insights into why Latin America matters by showing how urban sociality is produced via competing for medals and recognition in martial arts.

### Resumen

*El ensayo reflexiona sobre el acceso a y movimiento en la ciudad desde la perspectiva de practicantes de artes marciales en Brasil y Argentina. Las observaciones etnográficas describen como los espacios urbanos están producidos y se revelan a les atletas que participan en torneos y eventos deportivos. El ejemplo de un proyecto de jiu-jitsu brasileño en Río de Janeiro muestra cómo la inclusión concreta de jóvenes socialmente desfavorecidas a través de la práctica de las artes marciales se contradice con su exclusión simbólica como habitantes de la periferia de la ciudad. Luego, el ejemplo de una competidora de taekwondo subraya la facilitación y los límites de integración social siguiendo la trayectoria de una competidora de taekwondo conocida públicamente que busca el reconocimiento financiero oficial por sus logros. Los dos ejemplos plantean cómo América Latina es importante y muestran cómo la sociedad urbana es producida a través de competir por medallas y de esta forma ganar reconocimiento en el ámbito de las artes marciales.*

This essay aims to inspire policymakers and stakeholders to understand grassroots sports projects as resources for resilience, capable of responding to multiple crises. After several years of decline, social inequality is on the rise across Latin America, especially in Argentina and Brazil (United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020, p. 29). The outbreak of covid-19 aggravated the social crisis (Ruiz, 2020), bringing political cleavages even more to the fore. Given the current insecurities related to health and income, we argue that access to sports projects should be facilitated through reasonable fees and socially inclusive spaces that work on- and offline, respecting the necessary measures in place to ensure a flattening of the curve of covid-19 infections.

Research on sports and Latin America has focused on aspects of modernity and how sports facilitate social and geographical mobility (Archetti, 1998; Podalsky, 2015; Besnier et al., 2018). Looking beyond themes such as nationalism, national imageries and sports in Latin America (Archetti, 1998, p. 94), we explore social tensions that translate into actions and rituals on the mats and within the audience from a more practice-oriented perspective. Hence, we follow Podalsky's lead in claiming that "Latin American(ist) sports studies might also allow for a fuller grasp of how everyday practices or low-level civic engagements related to sports shape political conduct." (2015, p. 16).

We focus on martial arts practitioners and coaches and how they negotiate dreams and aspirations regarding urban access and mobility, temporarily realising Lefebvre's "right to the city" (1996)<sup>1</sup>. Based on ethnographic fieldwork<sup>2</sup>, we explore the urban webs created through Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) in Rio de Janeiro and taekwondo in Buenos Aires, demonstrating the responses of martial arts practitioners to social and health challenges. The Brazilian case study describes the success story of a BJJ project in Rio de Janeiro's

periphery, offering children and teenagers martial arts classes as a way of acquiring a positive feeling of self-worth. However, this success is scrutinised by contextualising it in a symbolic system that systematically mutes the city's periphery and its actors. The Argentinian case study describes the trajectory of a successful female taekwondo competitor seeking official financial recognition for her achievements, and analyses the on- and offline event of competitions as spaces for sociable interactions, arguing that the new online modalities can manifest social inequalities.

## Brazilian jiu-jitsu in Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian jiu-jitsu is said to be one of the fastest-growing martial arts worldwide. Its global success is closely related to the success of Brazilian jiu-jitsu athletes at international tournaments such as the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), which pits fighters from different disciplines against each other. The success of the Brazilian BJJ athletes at these tournaments, which began in the early 1990s, created a global demand for Brazilian BJJ coaches, making the sport one of Brazil's most successful intangible heritage export products in recent decades. Brazilian jiu-jitsu was developed during the 20th century in Brazil. Based on Japanese martial arts, especially jiu-jitsu and early forms of judo, it was transformed into a martial art in its own right by integrating aspects of other martial arts and developing innovative approaches to fighting (Cairus, 2020; Silva and Corrêa, 2020).

Brazilian jiu-jitsu is one of Brazil's most popular martial arts and an important tool of social and community work in Rio de Janeiro's northern periphery, which was historically characterised as an industrial zone inhabited by a low-income population (Abreu, 2013). Since the 1990s, the socio-economic characteristics of this area have become more heterogeneous because of the upward social mobility of its inhabitants, as a result of better qualifications and schooling. These residents work in low- to middle-income occupations and live in neighbourhoods qualified as "peripheric," "suburban," or "favela" (Sampaio Guimarães and Davies, 2016, pp. 9-10).

This socio-economic description also fits the members of a group of coaches active in the district of Guadalupe, who work as part of a social project founded in 2017 by the police officer and kickbox champion Sérgio Blindado. The project is held in a shopping mall, teaching children and teenagers different martial arts, such as kickboxing, Muay Thai, judo, and Brazilian jiu-jitsu. The gym is called “Protecting Lives,” referring to the project’s aim of providing children and teenagers with “protection” against the odds of life, especially violence and drugs. One of the project’s main goals is to offer children and teenagers an alternative to seeking employment in the drug business by allowing them to develop an alternative sense of self through practising sports.

Sérgio Blindado and his coaches were honoured for their civic engagement with the Pedro Ernesto Medal at the Municipal Chamber of Rio de Janeiro. They received the medal from the hands of the police officer and Delegate Jones Moura of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) on 6 June 2018, during a ceremony in which three chief inspectors assisted Moura. Thiago Ribeiro, a Brazilian jiu-jitsu practitioner and coach in his late twenties, was part of the group. The day he received the distinction, he posted on Facebook: “Who would have thought that jiu-jitsu would take me that far. The kid from the favela honoured by the Municipal Chamber. Glory to God,” together with a picture showing him in the plenary hall. For Thiago, the ceremony was the culmination of years teaching Brazilian jiu-jitsu to socially disadvantaged children and teenagers. A response to his Facebook post called him “Thiago-protecting-lives,” taking up the name of the sports project and giving him credit for having a positive influence on his students. As he was sitting in the plenary hall, the great satisfaction he and his fellow coaches felt was evident, as they were cracking jokes to each other, marvelling at being in that place. Coming to the Municipal Hall in the heart of Rio de Janeiro’s city centre was not a matter of course for many of them, as most live in the district of Guadalupe.

Brazilian jiu-jitsu projects often organise competitions themselves to allow athletes living in the periphery to participate in contests. The BJJ coaches from the “Protecting Lives” gym, for example, organised a competition ten days after being honoured at the Municipal Chamber. The competition took place in the shopping mall where their project is located and brought together

children and teen-agers from social projects around Rio de Janeiro. The young competitors fought on two mats in the upper level of the mall in the hallway. Despite the improvised use of the mall’s space, the competition was organised professionally. Mobile grids separated the different areas, such as the warming-up area, the fighting area, and the spectator area, and the scoring judge indicated the score and time to the main referee via laptop and flat-screen. The professionalism of the event was matched by the spectators’ and participants’ emotional involvement, which equalled the intensity of feelings at large sports events that produce “collective effervescence”, by transporting them into a world different from ordinary life (Durkheim, 1995; Dunning, 1986, p. 3). On the faces of the young participants, tears shed for having won alternated with tears shed for having lost. The faces of the spectators, friends, and coaches also expressed a range of emotions, from excitement to joy and frustration.

The event was greatly inclusive on a practical and symbolic level. On the practical level, it allowed disadvantaged children and teens to participate free of charge in a competition and win a medal. It also served to raise money for a highly ranked senior coach having financial difficulties via a *tombola*. On the symbolic level, it provided participants with the opportunity to feel part of society through their belonging to the Brazilian jiu-jitsu community, and to counteract the general symbolic exclusion of favela residents (Perlman, 2010). During the competition, kids, teens, and parents were eager to take pictures with a Brazilian jiu-jitsu grandmaster, a ninth-degree red belt.<sup>3</sup> The desire to have their photo taken with him expressed the children’s and teenagers’ identification with their idol and the values he stands for. More so than pointing to the hierarchical differences between them, the typical Brazilian jiu-jitsu uniforms that everyone was wearing transmitted the idea of children and the grandmaster being fundamentally equal, only differing in age and experience as expressed by the different belt colours. Since Brazilian jiu-jitsu practitioners understand differences in rank to be based on meritocratic principles, this means that every practitioner has the potential to reach the highest belt ranks through dedication and perseverance, as is regularly stated by senior practitioners.

However, despite the integration into the urban society of otherwise excluded children and teenagers achieved by Sérgio Blindado Santos and his Brazilian

jiu-jitsu coaches, these changes remain confined within the dominant Brazilian spatial, social, and symbolical order. Spatially, this dominant order delegates citizens with a low income to the periphery and the favelas, by which means these citizens are also symbolically muted. The video that was shown during the ceremony at the Municipal Chamber to introduce the martial arts project only used the postcard images of Rio de Janeiro, such as the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema, but no images of the North Zone, where the martial arts project is located, were shown. Although the video included images of the project itself, it excluded the surrounding neighbourhoods, which is contradictory since it is the surroundings that are the primary motivation for the project.

The same phenomenon of muting the periphery symbolically can be observed in the shopping mall where the project is located and where the competition took place. The fights happened in front of large wall paintings depicting several of Rio de Janeiro's landmarks, such as Ipanema Beach, the Lapa Arches, and the Maracanã Stadium. These formed the visual background for the competition in front of which children and teenagers living in favelas competed. While every tourist coming to Rio de Janeiro will visit at least one of these landmarks, this is hardly the case for the young people who can seldomly afford to visit the city centre. So, while on the one hand, the activities and competitions organised by the network of socially engaged Brazilian jiu-jitsu coaches integrate young and disadvantaged practitioners, Brazil's symbolic order continues to exclude them.

The coaches of the martial arts project work towards social integration by teaching, via sport, civic values to children and teenagers that they understand as essential. Core values such as respect, hierarchy, and discipline are seen as empowering, enabling socially disadvantaged practitioners to escape a social environment in which a criminal career might be perceived as a way out of poverty. Among members of this network, social exclusion is less understood as a structural problem caused by state politics that keeps the poor "in their place" (Souza, 2018), but rather as a lack of the right mindset on the part of the socially excluded. BJJ coaches in Rio de Janeiro's periphery teach a specific Brazilian jiu-jitsu ethic to their disciples with the aim of "protecting" them against seeking employment in the drug business. The growing markets of violence and drugs

(Elwert, 1999) are generally not seen as the result of economic and social injustices but as the result of a weak state that does not fight against criminals with sufficient force (Feltran, 2020). The conservative subjectivity (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco, 2020) expressed by BJJ coaches in Rio's periphery puts them close to Brazil's current far-right president Jair Bolsonaro. However, it would be too easy to confuse the two since BJJ coaches respond to complex sets of problems for which they seek solutions independent of changing political conjunctures. Instead, these coaches seek to instil in their disciples values that will, as they emphasise, allow them to be successful on the mats and in life.

## Taekwondo in Buenos Aires

Taekwondo was developed from Karate, renamed in South Korea in the 1950s as a statement against the prior Japanese rule, and was used to foster nation-building processes. The political landscape in South Korea facilitated a targeted expansion of athletes into the world. In Argentina, this martial art has risen in popularity as it combines performance, fighting, self-defence practices and elements of fitness. Following a boom after the last dictatorship, the 2012 Olympic gold medal winner, Cristian Crismanich, boosted the popularity of the sport in the 1990s (Adrogué, 2011). A sparring match stands out for being fast, full contact and featuring flamboyant kicks, without grappling. An important part of taekwondo, yet outside of the media focus, is the performance of ritualised movement patterns called *poomsae*<sup>4</sup>, which combine elements of sports and dance as aesthetic movements that are demonstrated individually, in synchronically moving with partners (Moenig, 2015).

In order to win a *poomsae* competition, one has to learn and present the correct movements, which are judged on accuracy, presentation (following the protocol of rituals, tidiness of appearance), power (strength), and energy (rhythm and expression of energy). Whilst the moment on the mats resembles a demonstration of control over one's body in alignment with the rules, *poomsae* can be understood as showing biopower or a perfectly docile body (Foucault, 2012). Consequently, scrutinising the care of the body and the embodiment of the movement can be understood as an examination of bodily capital (Wacquant, 2004). From the moment the competitor steps on the mats, noises

and other visual distractions must be blanked out by both the referees and the competitor. The event of a tournament can be understood as a crossroad for bodies of different urban neighbourhoods negotiating symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1983) in relation to the bodily capital.

The international taekwondo competition observed by one of the authors attracted taekwondo practitioners predominantly from Argentina and adjacent countries to watch the selected athletes from across the Americas. Competitors and performers must win a series of local, regional and national tournaments in order to be recommended for this competition. Here, the medal winners gain points to climb up the world ranking list and accrue points to enter global competitions such as the Olympics.<sup>5</sup> The venue is located near the city centre and its main cultural attractions, such as the Colón Opera House and the Obelisk, as well as areas where street Tango is performed, which were highlighted on large video screens above the rings. However, the venue is surrounded by places of anonymity (Augé, 2008), such as the northern waterfront, the city airport, the harbour, the motorway and the railway that connects the centre and Northern Gran Buenos Aires. In order to reach the venue by public transport,<sup>6</sup> one has to walk along the stolon of the innercity slum, Villa 31, and dusty pedestrian ways of the industrial zones of the harbour.

One of the authors attended the event on the first day with a camera assistant to film the opening ceremony and to become acquainted with the venue. It was loud. Besides the cadette competitions, the ring in front of the VIP-lounge remained free so that the TV channel TyC Sports could set up the cameras to transmit the fights of the Argentine team live, and the press could find a position to get the best shots of the ceremony. While waiting for the ceremony to start, snacks were served to the referees, press, VIPs and organisers. As we missed the passage of the waiters, we approached the kitchen where a man attended to us, and a woman in the official national taekwondo tracksuit checked the oven. Later, the camera assistant who filmed the ceremony from the audience noted that the same woman was also depicted on the banners hanging above the *poomsae* rings and at the entrance displays. We decided to engage with the woman, Lara, who seemed to take on so many different roles in the competition while she was practising in the quiet and almost empty warming-up area.

The next day was completely different. The warming up area was packed. Two days before the event, the competitors are informed of the patterns they will have to perform. Competitors arrive early to practice and rehearse the patterns before they are called to the mats hours later. The practice may be interrupted to avoid crashing into each other. Watching and being watched is important. Out of curiosity and interest in calculating one's chances, one starts observing the other members of the category. The people in the warming up area provide feedback for each other or film each other with a mobile phone. These interactions create moments of sociability<sup>7</sup> (Simmel, 1949) and support. Attending competitions regularly, people start to recognise each other and get acquainted with their sporting abilities but are also introduced into a world of stories and gossip about individuals and club morals. Hence, a competition is a place where people meet each other and practice sociability and networking. Additionally, when the organisers approached Lara to provide the catering for the event, she could 'convert' her bodily capital as a champion for some income and thus financial security, as well as adding an important item to her entrepreneurial CV (Curriculum Vitae).

Our relationship developed through visiting Lara at the multisports club of the municipality, where she coaches local children, adolescents and adults. Taekwondo is what shapes her movements around the urban space – training and instructing the national team, interacting with her teacher and visiting the municipality club, besides studying at university and running the catering service that includes food delivery. She is a leading entrepreneur and chef. When a competition overlaps with catering events, she coordinates a team remotely to run the service at the venue.

At the competition, it was pointed out that some sparring competitors may become eligible for a scholarship upon winning a medal. Lara brought two more gold medals home, but when enquiring about bursaries for being a member of the national team, competing around the globe, she and her coach usually rolled their eyes and sighed: "They have never supported me with a peso for the journey," as she confirmed also in a text message. If she wins the competition, her fees are reimbursed. The two golds she accrued strengthened her bid to enter the Poomsae World Championship in China. However, between the two

competitions, the monthly inflation rate escalated to 6.5 percent on consumer goods (Clemente and Rim, 2018; Diamante, 2019). This not only affected the prices for basic needs, which skyrocketed, but the changes to the Peso–Dollar exchange rate made the purchase of tickets for the flights extremely difficult. She started a fundraising campaign, adding into her schedule appearances on TV shows during which she laid out all her medals and asked for donations. The campaign included, besides media presence, solidarity parties during which local club or bar owners donated part of their money to support her journey.

Despite the economic crisis and imposed institutional boundaries, the possibility of gaining access to the world competition and to geographical mobility generated hopes in her environment. Hence, the rally for donations in times of crisis reflects a collective effort and resourcefulness, sustaining each other in solidarity and creating networks of support and resilience that lie beyond the politicoeconomic, generating concrete utopias (Dinerstein, 2015) and networks of care (Narotzky and Besnier, 2014). For Lara, the utopia may be that *poomsae* becomes an Olympic discipline facilitating access to funding, with a recognition beyond being displayed on official posters. Her supporters may share a more immediate goal, making it possible as a collective for a local peer to represent them on a global stage. However, Lara’s immediate drive is to master the art of a docile body.

During the covid-19 pandemic, Argentina was one of the first countries that entered a strict lockdown. Half a year later, the rules of confined mobility continue to limit access to the urban environment and are rigorously invigilated. Lara possesses a permit to deliver *viandas* (lunches). Her university studies continue online, as does her taekwondo life. Instead of regular classes, the association organises training days scheduled so as not to overwhelm the online experience of apprentices and school-age participants. Online events and competitions require that participants send in their videos for evaluation. At the social and practical part of the event, they aim to invite well-known athletes such as the Olympic medallist. At the beginning of lockdown, the online competitions were messy due to technical limitations and a need to experiment with the camera setup, but the federation has now created rules and standards for video submissions.

However, for some students, it is difficult to adhere to these standards due to a lack of appropriate space and equipment. Lara, too, attended a competition via Zoom in order to qualify for the Pan-American championships. Here, a referee uttered the commands he or she would hear in offline competitions. Lara lamented that many disciplines were disqualified because of technical complications, such as unreliable internet connections and blurry videos. However, the referees were allowed to take spatial features into account, so, for example, she had to perform inside her house and deliver the pattern in diagonal – to fit the performance into her home space. In contrast, she observed other competitors performing in large gyms with tatami mats, while others performed on rough pavements. The whole experience of performing is then different, as one is alone and the mood of a competition cannot be instilled because the participants are missing the physical presence of the coach, the referees and the audience, as well as all the other people involved in setting up the event. Being fed up with the lock-down rules, she would love to have access to the urban space together with her new-born baby, to let him experience sociability and let the baby bond with people other than his parents.

Through moving online, the domestication of the global is playing out unevenly, creating new forms of media-scapes (Appadurai, 1996). The interactions at the competitions were seldom concerned with making enquiries about the private life and social background of participants, thus social inequalities were further veiled by adhering to unwritten protocols of conduct. Nowadays, access to the internet and the visible backgrounds of the submitted videos depict differences in the conditions in which people are living and practising sports. Furthermore, the athlete’s performance is no longer scrutinised only under the aspects of pure bodily merit or bodily capital (Wacquant, 2004), but social and technical issues intervene, such as when surroundings that are blocked out may affect the judgement of the performance, as well as the stability of the internet connection and access to technology.

## Conclusions

We devise sport, especially martial arts, as a space where activities of inclusion happen. Tournaments, for example, are a meeting point for people

from heterogeneous backgrounds negotiating their dreams and aspirations. In the Brazilian case, we argue that although coaches of grassroots martial arts clubs display the “conservative subjectivity” (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco, 2020) characteristic of supporters of Brazil’s right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro, they are, nevertheless, instrumental in creating social cohesion by integrating disadvantaged groups into urban society. Similarly, in Argentina, we have highlighted how martial arts practice broaches issues of inequality and deprivation and illustrates the resourcefulness and strategies deployed to confront the political-economic limitations, by balancing different tasks and responsibilities individually that are backed by local solidarity networks.

Although we recognise the great integrative function of grassroots martial arts clubs, we argue that this “democratic utopia” (Dinerstein, 2015) has to be situated in the current political, social and health context of right-wing populism in Brazil and volatile political directions in Argentina in the recent years. By this means, we seek to scrutinise general assumptions about civil society as “left” or “liberal”, which often serve as a projection surface for Western left actors romanticising struggles for social justice. Instead, based on our ethnographic research, we describe the ideals and contradictions of our interlocutors struggling to gain access to the urban space and maintain a “good sporting life.” Engaging with sports in times of the covid-19 pandemic, we also see how the Latin American context makes social inequalities more visible, making access to local and global communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) more difficult due to unequal access to the internet infrastructures. Nevertheless, the inventiveness and resilience with which martial arts groups respond to the current social and health crises can serve as examples for others and demonstrate “why Latin America matters.”

## Endnotes

- 1 “[T]he right to the city is like a cry and a demand” (1996, p. 158) writes Lefebvre in his classical book on the city, which he understands as “a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualisation in socialisation, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the [city as] oeuvre, to participation and appropriation” (1996, p. 173). This “cry and demand” has never been fully realised for most urban dwellers of Latin American countries.
- 2 During fieldwork conducted between 2017 and 2018, we adapted a “sensuous” (Pink, 2009), “mobile” (Büscher et al., 2011), and “embodied” (Wellard, 2015) approach to ethnography by practicing our respective martial arts. The “carnal” (Wacquant, 2015) understanding we gained through this approach was contextualised and deepened through visual (MacDougall and Castaing-Taylor, 1998; MacDougall, 2006) and classic ethnographic methods including interviewing and participant observation. The presented data has been accrued during our fieldwork and ongoing conversations with our interlocutors.
- 3 The belt colours in Brazilian jiu-jitsu are white, blue, purple, brown, and black. The black belt is divided into six degrees, after which the belt changes into black and red for the seventh degree, into black and white for the eighth degree, and into red for the ninth and tenth degree. The minimum age for the ninth degree is 67 and is only awarded in exceptional cases. The tenth degree red belt is reserved for the founders of Brazilian jiu-jitsu (International Jiu-Jitsu Federation, 2015).
- 4 Apprentices are bestowed with belts of different colours to show their level of skills. In order to pass the grading, the student has to demonstrate and master *poomsae*, self-defence, one step sparring, sparring and knowledge in accordance with the belt syllabus.
- 5 The fees for this kind of international competition are charged in \$US, adding insecurity to the volatile peso-dollar exchange rates.
- 6 International competitors arrive by coaches provided by the organisers. Local competitors must arrive by their own means, usually by sharing a car or public transport.
- 7 Georg Simmel defines sociability (*Geselligkeit*) as voluntary social encounters on an equal level, however, as a game that works according to a friendly protocol: “It is a game in which one ‘acts’ as though all were equal, as though he especially esteemed everyone” (Simmel, 1949, p. 257).

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# ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

# 5

## “Many producers, many protectors!”<sup>1</sup> — Geographical Reflections on Resilient Intercultural Economies in North-West Campeche, Mexico

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### Abstract

This paper is based on the study of economic practices of Mayan communities in North-West Campeche, Mexico, which are identified as resilient due to their high degree of integration and diversification. We call this model Resilient Intercultural Economies, which is identified as a form of political ecology, since it allows for a transition into a mode of production and consumption in which individuals, communities, economy, and environment all work together as one. However, just as important are the intercultural learning processes which could be adapted to the West's situation if these practices from the Global South and the innovations they could enable are taken seriously. It is suggested here that the Mayan communities could be a role-model in helping the global capitalistic system adapt to the challenges of the 21st century. This paper thus proposes some strategies based on the case study of the Mayan communities that could be implemented in the European Union.

### Resumen

*Este trabajo se centra en el estudio de las prácticas económicas de la comunidad Maya del noroeste de Campeche. Dichas prácticas se caracterizan por su alto grado de resiliencia dada su integración y diversificación. Le hemos dado el nombre de Economía Intercultural Resiliente, misma que tiene lazos con la ecología política, pues permite una transición hacia un modo de producción y consumo en el cual el individuo, la comunidad, la economía y el ambiente trabajan de manera conjunta. De igual manera, es de suma importancia el conocimiento que el Occidente podría adquirir de tomar con seriedad las innovaciones que ofrece el Sur Global. Sugerimos, entonces, que las comunidades Mayas podrían fungir como modelo a seguir, con la finalidad de ayudar al modelo actual a adaptarse a los retos del siglo 21. Este texto propone un número de estrategias, basadas en el estudio de las comunidades Mayas, que podrían implementarse en la Unión Europea.*

Humanity's relation to its surroundings has plunged us as a species into a crisis that forces us to re-evaluate our current model of production. The collapse of the value chain has exposed the fragility of an economic system that favours specialisation, speed, and cost over an inclusive and resilient network. Climate change and its diverse manifestations — such as the covid-19 pandemic (Lustgarten, 2020) — highlight the vulnerability of a system that is unable to respond to global shocks. The search for an approach that favours resilient economies led us to practices that are thousands of years old — those of the Mayan people of Campeche in Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. As the quote in the title by a Mayan beekeeper alludes to, it is possible to reconfigure our models of production and consumption in a manner that incorporates the needs of the community and the environment, and understands the economy as an integral sphere housed within this system. The honey producer quoted here believes that, in this case, beekeeping could become one of the skills practiced in the community whereby people would not only work together and pass on local knowledge but also invest in their lived environment. Respect for the environment, an understanding of the complex ecological system, and a sense for communal well-being are unified. This paper looks at Mayan communities in the state of Campeche, Mexico, and asks what can be learned from the Resilient Intercultural Economies they practice and how certain strategies could be extrapolated and applied to the European Union. While this is not a policy paper, we hope to open up new ways of thinking about the economy and bring forward some concrete suggestions following from our geographical approach to Resilient Intercultural Economies. We believe that only if we think across cultures and geographic divisions such as North and South as well as centre and periphery, can we address the vulnerabilities of the current system and work towards a globally integrated and socially just society.

## Resilience through Diversification — A Case Study of Mayan Communities in North-West Campeche

The Mexican state of Campeche is located on the Yucatan peninsula. It is one of the country's least populated states with only around 900,000 inhabitants in an area of 57,507 square kilometres. Prior to the Spanish invasion, the Yucatan peninsula was inhabited by the Mayan civilisation, which had lived in the area for over 3000 years. To this day, over 76,000 people speak Maya in Campeche<sup>2</sup>, most of whom are settled in the north and north-west, where up to 32% of the region's population still speaks the pre-Hispanic language (Russell Archer et al., 2016). The diversity of the Yucatan peninsula's climates and ecosystems, which range from tropical rain forests to drylands, meant that Mayan communities had to adapt to a heterogeneous landscape; over the course of millennia, this translated into a wealth of knowledge and skills that allowed them to thrive (Barrera-Bassols and Toledo, 2005). The Maya's close ties to the land allowed them to gather a comprehensive understanding of its ecosystem, which is an irreplaceable cultural asset and a resource for new strategies in resilient economy building.

The Maya's wealth of agricultural and ecological knowledge is evidenced by the strategies they apply to work with the land. These practices are tailored to the specific conditions of the Yucatan peninsula, which has an ecosystem that is unique within Mexico. While farming is still based on the agricultural calendar with specific growing seasons and crop rotation, other strategies involve the use of multiple species and landscape units, resource rotation, and landscape-patch management (Barrera-Bassols and Toledo, 2005). Furthermore, other jobs and communal duties are practiced outside the growing seasons, such as fishing or the use of ancestral techniques to manufacture certain arts and crafts they can later sell in the market. Since this model does not rely on specialisation in the production chain in the Ricardian sense, we call this approach Resilient Intercultural Economies. Rather than focus on a narrow range of commodities and specialise in their production, the economy is geared towards diversity, which allows for this system to absorb external shocks and better deal with the problems caused by a changing climate. This system is, by its very nature, resilient, for it understands that the economy is but a subsystem of a larger

system: nature. We use the term resilience following the definition by Barrera-Bassols and Toledo (2005) as “the capacity of adaptive systems to absorb disturbances, which translated to the field of cultural history means the ability to collectively memorise success and failure, including ways to overcome unexpected changes and perturbations.” (p. 32)

The Resilient Intercultural Economies practiced in North-West Campeche could thus be key to better understand resilience as a theoretical concept. According to Barrera-Bassols and Toledo (2005), resilience shows in a two-fold manner here: the secular and the sacred. While the former applies to the adaptive management strategies, the latter relates to the Mayan faith in an animated nature. To live in nature, to work the land and take from it, implies that one has to give back to nature by caring for it — it is a reciprocal relationship. Human well-being is thus related to the well-being of the ecological system, a connectedness which “means that all actors should work together as a team, otherwise men may not receive the benefits from the borrowed land, and may be punished by nature and the supra-natural beings” (Barrera-Bassols and Toledo, 2005, p. 30)

Further, as Manuel-Navarrete et al. (2004) point out, the economic model of the Mayan communities allows for a more flexible approach to resilience since, instead of solely focusing on technological fixes, the social and cultural components are taken into account. This means that their understanding of the economy transcends the western atomised vision, for they seek to redress the harm done to the latter by addressing the social, political and (above all) environmental problems that caused what academics in the Global North would simply perceive as an economic crisis. Their concept of ecological integrity aims to incorporate a respect for the ecosystem as a dynamic entity which is influenced by human activity. In the same way, the economy is not an autonomous sphere, but it affects society and nature, and the subsequent relation between the two. Resilient Intercultural Economies allow people to learn various skills and participate in all aspects of life. This means that they, as ever-present participants, are constantly involved in the chain of production; they are involved in economic activities and community building, which, in fact, are one and the same. Subjects do not suffer from a sense of alienation, for

their value is infused into the objects, products, and people that surround them and form a part of their daily lives. Their approach to resilience is epitomised by their apiarian practice, which emphasises that the health of society can only ever be achieved if nature itself is healthy. This furthers the notion that social, political, and economic systems are mere subsections contained within the larger system of nature, and that all are interrelated; to understand them as separate is to engage in the absurd.

## Political Ecology as a Response to the Consequences of Economic Specialisation — Some Theoretical Remarks

Specialisation is defined here as the predetermined tool through which the West has sought to accumulate its body of knowledge pursuing the idea that things can be studied as static and unitary. This was in large part a product of an industrial society that separated the individual from the community, which reconstituted the subjects’ relation to their surroundings. Labour was no longer understood in its interplay with society and the environment but viewed in its productive capacity with regards to the economy. This initial alienation generated the notion of the individual with ties, not to its community, but to the “market society”, as identified by Polanyi (2001 [1944, 1957]). The “Great Transformation”, as he called it, a product of the industrial revolution and the state which fed it, succeeded in unweaving the complex social fabric that previously existed (Polanyi, 2001 [1944, 1957]). Its outcome was not collateral damage, but a necessary step in an effort to transform people into labour and commodify the productive output of each individual.

The West’s deconstruction of the subject into human, member of society, labourer, allowed for these spheres to be perceived as independent. One could choose to participate in society or not, engage with nature or not, work or not; choice became the new ideology, and the onus was put on the individual. This new enforcement of choice meant that the inevitable alienation of the subject from the production and consumption of goods was a problem of his own making. Durkheim (1985 [1897, 1951]) brilliantly identified a sense of anomy which was structurally attributed to the individual and not to the system of production. The only escape awarded to the subject was to increase the rate

of capital accumulation in an effort to have the desired level of liquidity that would allow them to fully benefit from the “market society” (Polanyi, 2001 [1944, 1957]).

This process that separates the subject from the object occurs at scale (Harvey, 2006). Regions focus on particular goods or services, which leads to the creation of spaces of high value and spaces of low-end commodity production. Those uneven geographical developments facilitate the process of capital over-accumulation, which contributes to the systemic imbalance of the current economic system (Harvey, 2006). Due to what Harvey (2014) calls spatio-temporal fixes, places in which capital is already present become wealthier by its circulation and further accumulation. As labour follows capital, mass migration deteriorates the conditions of spaces of low-end commodity production, further eroding the identity of the region and its inhabitants.

The Global North’s development of the economy as a separate sphere from society, the subject, and nature reformulated humanity’s relation to the latter as a space of extraction (Marx, 2003 [1852]). As the “market society” took over, the exploitation of the environment was thought of as a process encapsulated within its own self-replicating sphere. Thus, the notion arose that one could simply extract without the need to reinvest; nature as the zero-cost production machine. Under neoliberalism, this shift in our relation to nature is evidenced by the shift from use value to exchange value thus transforming nature into one commodity among many others (Harvey, 2014). This becomes especially prevalent in ecosystem services, as showcased by Dempsey and Robertson (2012), in which “[n]ature is now found frequently represented as credits, information, or services, purportedly unbound from material essences and free to move through global circuits of credit and finance commodities” (p. 759).

One effect, so Dempsey and Robertson (2012) contend, is uneven development as well as destructive effects on local and indigenous communities. As Harvey (1996) argues, there is always a connection between the domination of nature and domination over others. Transforming our natural environment always has “distributional consequences and the patent inequity of many of these has been the source of powerful conflicts” (Harvey, 1996, p. 137). Again, these occur

along the different geographical scales of capital’s ecosystem (Harvey, 2014), dispersing problems by moving them to a different scale and thus alienating individuals from the consequences of their behaviour.

As pointed at above, the process of westernisation undergone in Europe and North America destroyed all remnants of its past, which resulted in a violent decoupling of all interrelated spheres of life. That vision of the world, which has spread through globalisation, is repeatedly contested by indigenous groups in the Global South, not just through rhetoric, but by direct action; their mere existence a challenge to western ontology. Having co-evolved with nature and possessing an understanding of the interconnectedness of all that surrounds them (Porto-Gonçalves and Leff, 2015), people such as the Maya in the Yucatan peninsula view the West’s separation of nature and culture as an absurd distinction. Capitalism’s domination of nature stems from its own idea that the latter is two-fold: it is a resource and an obstacle to development (Albán and Rosero, 2016). The space occupied by nature is not imagined as one that must be protected due to the impacts it could have on the social, psychological, economical, and political spheres; it is an ‘obstacle’ in the way of ‘development’ that can be transformed into capital.

The Western distinction between nature and culture, and capitalism’s narrow understanding of nature as a duality, have been perpetuated by the triad of economics, science, and technology (Albán and Rosero, 2016). This triad is, itself, proof positive that the West interacts with its surroundings in an objective fashion, not realising that the characterisation of nature as inert is itself evidence of its ontological relation to the environment. This phenomenon is then compounded by the misrepresentation of all other interactions with nature as ‘primitive’ or ‘mystical’, thus rejecting all other forms of knowledge by disregarding them as ‘unscientific’. By creating and perpetuating this myth, capitalism seeks to erase all other forms of meaning, especially those of native people in the Global South (Albán and Rosero, 2016).

Görg et al. (2017) thus advocate for a political ecology that looks at the relationship between society, culture, and nature and the dynamics between them, which co-constitute inequalities as well as power relations. The goal of

political ecology is thus not only to support sustainability, but to work towards a more holistic transformation of society and its relation to nature. In order to transcend the simplistic view of nature as the 'other', we must move away from the scheme of domination; away from that constant fixation with the unit as an explanatory category (Porto-Gonçalves and Leff, 2015). Political ecology thus argues for a deconstruction of the current system not through theory but through the emancipation of those who combat capitalisms totalising trend. The economy, then, is no longer understood as development and growth, but is properly conceived as one based on the productive capacities of nature; one that can offer a truly sustainable future (Porto-Gonçalves and Leff, 2015). Only by expanding the horizons of meaning, can we achieve a truly intercultural relation to nature, that is to say, one that recognises the diversity of possible relations, in order to move away from the totalising trends of modern thought.

The fight against the relentless forces that wish to exploit nature is ever-present in the relation the Mayan people have to their environment. Campeche's beekeepers understand that humans are not 'free' to extract and act as they wish, for humans are animals in constant need (Hinkelammert and Jiménez, 2009), ones that require food, water, shelter, and communal attention. They reject the ontological position of individual choice as the guiding principle of society, for they comprehend that actions are not without repercussions, and individual greed can lead to choices that destroy nature: the space the community calls home. Choice, then, is not a matter solely for the individual, but a topic of communal concern, and one that will inevitably impact the ecosystem. They take these lessons into their practice, for they understand all too well that in order to work with bees they must take into account the health of the forest, for it is in its diversity that hives can thrive. The ontology that guides their relation to nature means that their approach to the environment takes into account all the diverse factors that might play into the conservation of their lived space, not because it should be conserved as the ultimate goal, but because the reproduction of bees and humans goes hand in hand with the reproduction of nature itself (Hinkelammert and Jiménez, 2009).

What is evidenced by the Mayan people of northern Campeche is that communities can be organised in a relational configuration which understands

the interdependent network connecting society, nature, and the individual. This, in turn, means that production and consumption are interrelated aspects of life that cannot be separated into two distinct actions. We argue that this knowledge can be used in other regions of the world to better humanity's connection to the environment, but it cannot be appropriated as a simple collection of individualised practices. In order for this body of wisdom to function, we must reconfigure our understanding of relational dynamics, and put an end to isolated individualised action. The Resilient Intercultural Economies approach we suggest is a form of political ecology which does not only deal with the transition into a mode of production that allows for individuals, communities, economy, and environment to all work together as one, but also addresses the learning processes and innovations that can be triggered when these practices from the Global South are taken seriously.

### Lessons from Resilient Intercultural Economies?

The practices of the Mayan people praised here do not get the appreciation they deserve and receive hardly any social or political recognition. Russell Archer et al. (2016) state, "this lack of recognition is not only discriminatory but is also ecologically short-sighted" (p. 108). Indigenous people utilise 22% of the world's land surface, yet they maintain 85% of its biodiversity. We thus believe it is time to value the local knowledge of indigenous people, look at their economic practices, and think about what we can learn from them. This approach has only seldom found its way into academic literature since the learning process is often in a matter-of-fact manner assumed to run from North to South or papers address specific challenges which hinder economic development in the Global South (e.g., Ayala-Orozco et al., 2018). Following the conceptualisation of Parnell and Robinson (2013), we suggest a response to European challenges based on experiences from the Global South. The ideas stemming from the school of political ecology are helpful here since they have long focused on the Global South; yet those observations are no less relevant in the urban and industrial places of the Global North (Walker, 2003).

In this third part, we suggest that the Resilient Intercultural Economies approach as developed by Mayan communities should be both theoretically and

practically incorporated by the European Union and Europe in general. We do not propose going back to an agricultural society mirrored after Mayan origins, but instead argue that we must incorporate their ideas of diversification and communal participation. This would not only strengthen the economic system and revitalise declining regions, but it could also be understood as a means of building a society in which people are given the space to participate in all aspects of life, reconnecting them with their communities and environments.

A necessary first step is the erasure of the stark division between the rural and the urban. If the urban space began to exploit certain areas for the production of basic consumer goods, such as fruits and vegetables, individuals within communities would begin to address the issue of alienation from the most basic of human needs: nutrition. For those products to grow, pollinators would be needed through the city (rooftops being the ideal candidate), which would in turn strengthen the bond between urban dwellers and nature. Just like the Mayan beekeeper, the metaphysics of an integral society built on community would begin with the practice of producing what one consumes. By blurring the line between spaces of production and spaces of consumption, society can democratise and de-commodify food, while engaging in an effort to create an economy that grows with nature, not at its expense.

From a model as straightforward as this, one can derive further bottom-up political solutions. Alienation from the environment, the economy, and the community can only be reversed if people have a sense of agency. Especially on the municipal and regional level, direct democracy could be a tool to get people actively involved in a local politics that debates how and where, e.g., urban gardens, can best serve the needs of the community<sup>3</sup>. While this always bears the danger of populist groups influencing decision making, we believe it would provide people with a chance to think about how they want their communities to look and which goals they want to work towards. These creative place-making practices are found to be not only empowering for the community, but they allow individuals to actively engage with their environment. McKeown (2021) argues that creative place-making could be an alternative systemic approach which helps to implement locally-scaled solutions to global challenges and serve “as a springboard to reimagine

growth, within the context of a de-growth society through developing resilient resistant practices” (334).

Another area that would benefit from Resilient Intercultural Economies would be the current model of free movement of labour within the European Union. We have observed that immigration has fed into the problem of economic displacement, whereby low-income regions surrender their workforce to spaces of capital over-accumulation. These migratory pressures are not just a drain of local labour, they also erode community ties and family relations, which tend to be the primary source for the transmission of local knowledge. A program which sought to bolster resilience would not simply tackle the issue of autonomy and self-reliance, but also enhance the creation of spaces for local development. Here, local community ties and indigenous knowledge could be restored, all while preserving the ecosystem. This diversified approach, which understands the complex relational nature of society, would promote local knowledge, slow labour flight, create resilient communities, and tackle climate change.

We maintain that this strategy would further allow for the wealth of local knowledge to filter into political and economic decision-making. This would particularly amplify the voices of those who toil the land, for they possess a vast amount of knowledge and understand first-hand the hardships of a changing environment. They deserve closer attention, for they might have devised strategies to mitigate the damage caused by changes to the environment; all of which should be documented and studied. It is crucial that people throughout Europe get the recognition they deserve for preserving their cultural memory and local knowledge. If we continue with the current model that allows for certain spaces to accumulate capital and draw in labour, we will witness a “brain drain” in the already declining regions of the continent. The Resilient Intercultural Economies approach is thus a means to preserve cultural memory and to make it accessible to a wide range of people.

Lastly, we believe that diversification could be used to reduce uneven geographical developments. The fact that so many migrants move within the EU to get, for example, to Germany, stems from capital accumulation in that

particular country. The EU has to favour policies that create spaces of capital development in those countries which experience negative net-migration. However, we suggest, this aid should follow a Resilient Intercultural Economies approach, which does not reduce its programs to a simple direct transfer of money but incorporates other issues and understands how interrelated problems within a community require programs with a broader scope that go beyond economic indicators, while respecting and learning from the regional culture and knowledge. Only then can people participate in the local economy and in community building. If we are looking for a path to more resilient economies, then it can only be achieved if regional characteristics are acknowledged and uplifted. As Pinto et al., (2019) argue, there can only be regional paths to resilience and not a one-fits-all approach. In order to strengthen diversity in the EU, a first solution could be to stop using the GDP as the be-all and end-all way of measuring the output of a nation. Economic growth should be understood as one metric among others such as access to healthcare, mental health, nutrition, education, community integration, and, of course, the protection of the environment. We hold that this would better describe the European landscape, which would help identify true problem areas, instead of those issues the market deems worthwhile.

The basis of the transformation we are suggesting should be an ontological reconceptualisation of education that takes into account the importance of lived experience and practice as inerrant tools in the pursuit of knowledge. Murphy (2006) makes a strong case for teaching geography students to be “more spatially and contextually sensitive” (p. 439) of economic geographies in the Global South as well as their complexities and diversities. By re-thinking the representation of the economic geographies of ‘others’ which are often downplayed and devalued in our educational system, we can enable students to recognise their potential. With this final aspect we further propose that we rethink given geographic notions of Global North and South as well as core and periphery. The recognition of practices of indigenous people from the Global South and the incorporation of these into social and economic processes in the Global North can only be a first step on the way to an integrated and socially just society. Without forgetting about geographic differences of specific localities,

the goal should be a global political ecology, in which given geographic frames of Global South and North have been dismantled and our ecosystem is understood as one system with infinite interdependencies (Walker, 2003).

## Conclusion

The covid-19 crisis cannot be ignored in an essay dealing with economic and social resilience, as the pandemic we are facing in the years 2020 and 2021 has shaped our society. We know now from experience that our global capitalistic system is vulnerable and — due to a high degree of specialisation — falls short when asked to work autonomously. When borders are closed and the free flow of people and goods is no longer possible, the system is immediately thrown off balance. Nevertheless, the challenges posed by this pandemic could be made to spark many social and economic innovations that better prepare us for future crises. The writing is on the wall, and only through an approach that is resilient and intercultural can the European Union clear this hurdle.

In this respect the Mayan communities could be a role-model in adapting to the challenges of the 21st century. What Beck (1992) identified as Risk Society in the 1990s — a society in which the production of wealth systematically generates risk — has now been showcased in a most drastic manner by the global pandemic. While the risks at first sight are not distributed equally, they will — in the long run — affect everyone. As Beck (1992) affirms, we already live in a society dominated by catastrophes; yet these could provide enormous political potential for change. Global challenges such as the one we are confronted with in the years 2020 and 2021 can thus also be understood as an opportunity to rethink our relationship with the environment, the economy, and our community in order to establish ways of living in a world dominated by erratic and unpredictable risk.

We have suggested here that the Resilient Intercultural Economies practiced by the Mayan people in North-West Campeche, Mexico, could be key in promoting economic resilience in the European Union. The Maya understand economy, community, and environment not as separate spheres but as parts of a complex interdependent system. It is this understanding of economy and

ecology which the farmer quoted in the title alludes to. If there are many people who learn the skill of beekeeping, there will also be many people who protect the forest. Production and consumption are not regarded as separate from the environment, but as embedded within it. More than a change in the economy, what this system (which took thousands of years to develop) requires is that we eliminate the notion of “our approach to nature” and begin to understand ourselves as a small part of nature, and nature as an extension of us.

## Endnotes

- 1 Mayan farmer quoted in Russell Archer et al., (2016)
- 2 It is important to note that although 76,826 people speak Maya, some of them have been forced to abandon their traditional way of life due to the market forces that have displaced them (Gobierno de México, 2021).
- 3 The very notion of an urban garden would need to change, for the name itself “urban garden”, suggests that gardens are alien to the urban landscape.

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# 6

## Latin America - Heading to the Future<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

At first sight, Latin America fulfils its role within the current development model, providing raw materials for the world economy, submissive in the faith of perpetual growth. However, below this superficial image are social, economic, and environmental experiences that are successfully building in the present a future with a future (i.e. building a future beyond the existential crisis currently facing humans). As an example, this essay presents a motivating experience from the Almanac of the Future<sup>2</sup> (“Chocolate and something else”) that shows the feasibility of practicing a circular and reciprocal economy, producing in harmony with nature and with an approach of territoriality and short paths. The Almanac of the Future offers more than thirty motivating experiences, testimonies of people in transition. These are Latin American messages to the world, summarized in the form of this essay, demonstrating transitions in progress towards post-development concepts.

### Resumen

*A primera vista, América Latina cumple su rol dentro del actual modelo de desarrollo, proporcionando materias primas para la economía mundial, sumisa en la fe del crecimiento perpetuo. Sin embargo, debajo de esta imagen superficial se encuentran las experiencias sociales, económicas y ambientales que están construyendo exitosamente en el presente un futuro con futuro (es decir, construyendo un futuro más allá de la crisis existencial que enfrentan los humanos actualmente). Como ejemplo, este ensayo presenta una experiencia motivadora del Almanaque del Futuro (“Chocolate y algo más”) que muestra la viabilidad de practicar una economía circular y recíproca, produciendo en armonía con la naturaleza y con un enfoque de territorialidad y caminos cortos. El Almanaque del Futuro ofrece más de treinta experiencias motivadoras, testimonios de personas en transición. Estos son mensajes latinoamericanos al mundo, resumidos en la forma de este ensayo, que demuestran transiciones en progreso hacia conceptos de post-desarrollo.*

Permanent crises on the planet seem like everyday bread and butter: the climate emergency with its frequent extreme events, the increase in economic and social inequalities, the degradation of the environment, extractivism and the accumulative logic in the name of development. The covid-19 pandemic, a health emergency with fatal outcomes for the global neoliberal economy, has to be understood as another disastrous consequence of the current development model: a development for the few at the cost of the pauperisation of ever more people and of Mother Earth. The Anthropocene, reflecting the preponderance of humanity in the development of the coming history of planet Earth, is and will be a time of great changes<sup>3</sup>: the human community will either begin to do things differently or will no longer be part of the future. The present does not indicate otherwise. It is a bleak outlook with threatening forecasts as there is no change of course in sight (Boff, 2011; Adloff and Leggewie, 2014). Many, perhaps most, move between scepticism and anxiety in the face of transitions towards alternatives; transitions appear more in the narratives and very little in the change of people's routines (Bregman, 2017). Changing schemes and paradigms (Scharmer and Kaeufer, 2013) is something that still has no place on the mental maps of many people. Economic growth has entered its final phase (Heinberg, 2011); but in the face of all the alerts that underline the need to migrate to different paradigms, the slogan is to continue or in other words: more of the same. Thinking that a paradigm shift around development is going to take place from the highest political and economic spheres of world governance seems nothing more than a mental mirage (Paech, 2012); the history of mankind evidences it sufficiently. Paradigm shifts began at the base of societies, and from the day-to-day routines of individuals and groups. It has been these transitions that have allowed decisions to permeate globally over time. Overcoming conventional logics and moving from authentic identities to alternatives is not easy (Bellota and Krekeler, 2012).

We are in a crisis of the civilisational model (Houtart, 2011), many feel powerless, looking for points of reference and orientation<sup>4</sup>. Ignorance of the finiteness of nature, the commercialisation of the Common Goods without any scruples, increasingly predatory profits and unbridled consumerism are just some of the coordinates to place ourselves on the map of recent history. We are currently experiencing the collapse of an economic system that has long produced more losers than winners. We belong to planet Earth, but the planet does not belong to us, even if our current behaviour patterns are guided by this fallacy. The Global North clings to the system because of a lack of imagination of what an ecologically and socially just world can look like. Too great is the fear of the apparent winners of the current system, who are predominantly in the northern hemisphere, of becoming losers of a new way of life. Therefore, they prefer to continue, even though the crises and scenarios are deepening and threatening our very existence.

What is required is a "Great Transformation" (Schneidewind, 2018), currently taking place in small modular steps; for some, with too much hesitation, but at least in the right direction. Harald Welzer (2019) proposes small modular transition steps rather than a big transformation, because otherwise, according to Welzer, one quickly gets stuck in a game of thoughts and the subjunctive: it would be more pleasant if it were more pleasant.

## Latin America - Heading to the Future

*From the south of the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego, Latin America has an approximate area of 22 million square kilometres... and a population of 600 million... We are one of the largest reserves of fresh water available in the world, almost all of our territory is habitable and cultivable. We have a great biological diversity and the Amazon Biomass... We are the green continent of the planet, where all the other continents are looking at as a reserve to overcome the future challenges of climate change... We will be and can be a fundamental part of the well-being of the planetary human species if we learn and implement the values of this new worldview of care. This is the new meaning that as Latin Americans we can offer for the new humanization of the planet*  
(Toro, 2014)

For many, the Latin American hemisphere is a key piece for the future of global development. However, different from the reading of Bernardo Toro, the interest is centred on the role that Latin America currently plays, undergoing constant reprimarisation and assuming the role of one of the world's raw materials pantries. Relationship policies with Latin America, both in the European Union and in China, are narrowly reduced to guaranteeing the supply of minerals, soybeans and meat, among others. The extractivist approach has been overly rigged in this region of the Global South, with the permission of its elites and at the cost of the largest number of socio-environmental conflicts worldwide (Svampa, 2013). Development cooperation, suffering from the same disease as everyone else, takes the GDP per capita as an orientation to establish its interventions; the result is that in the most unequal subcontinent worldwide<sup>5</sup>, appear, except for Haiti and some Mesoamerican spots, merely countries of the middle-income group.

Diversity and difference mean, first and foremost, wealth and opportunity. When discussing the need for our future to have a future beyond the existential crisis we face, and of the necessary transitions and transformations to open the way to this future, there is the risk of a difficult mutual understanding due to sometimes very different contexts; this is the case of Latin America and Europe. As an example, we will take the debate around the economics of de-growth or post-growth: while more and more people in post-industrial societies in the North are approaching this transformative proposal with interest or at least with curiosity, to couple this approach to the different realities of the Global South and particularly Latin America is a difficult task; in the Latin American context we will find, even within the transformation community, the discussion revolves more around the overcoming of extractivism, installed by force during the colonial era. Overcoming the erroneous belief of unlimited growth in the North helps pave the way in the South - largely already tainted by the belief in growth - to gradually free itself from the clutches of extractivism. It is a challenging necessity to understand this conceptual asymmetry.

## Resistance and alternatives

Speaking of resistance and alternatives, it is essential to understand that the development model is predetermined at the global level, increasingly questioned, but still standing and dominant. For Latin America, the extractivist economy is a key piece of this model, reflecting interests, foreign to the territories with their inhabitants, their ecosystems, their identities and their cultures. To break the extraterritorial domain, it is necessary to work on alternatives from the territorial level, this being the scale with the greatest probability of reaching alternatives.<sup>6</sup>

Alternatives are born out of resistance. Territories affected by the extractivist model show that the interests of those who inhabit these territories (from a holistic understanding taking into account everything: Mother Earth, living species, biodiversity, local inhabitants and metropolitan populations) are not addressed from the logic of this development model; however, damages are assumed territorially (Elbers, 2013). We are faced with a dilemma: minorities are those who, due to the effects of their own situation, enter into resistance, while the majorities are not directly affected and are submerged in the belief that development is not feasible without economic growth, whatever the cost. Even governments called 'progressive' have constitutionally elevated Mother Earth to the rank of subject of law and, at the same time, opt for extractivist logics, achieving the support of the majority for their neo-extractivist policies (Gudynas, 2011). To break this circle, migrating from resistance to building alternatives, it is important to aim for a feasible scale. At the global or national level, it is extremely difficult for people not directly affected to show the need to migrate to alternatives. There is an apparently convincing obligation at the macroeconomic level where we find the tricky exclusion of externalities. The search for and possible construction of alternatives is the product of motivation or disagreement (resistance) at the personal level of each individual and of groups. Alternatives to development are feasible to the extent that they point to a territorial scale where the critical mass among inhabitants is large enough, comprising those wanting to migrate towards friendlier, more sustainable, and more inclusive ways of life, economy, and coexistence. Giving birth to something different implies transforming the current situation. In this sense,

something different does not necessarily mean doing something new, but rather migrating towards something different, which may be closer to a previous situation (e.g. the pre-extractivist era), or building the different from a fusion between the ancestral and the new. The essential thing in everything is the entry into a situation of paradigmatic transition, that is, not to continue attending to paradigms of the current development model (e.g. supremacy of the human being over nature, economic growth as the key and code to development). Taking into account the correlation of forces between endogenous development from the territory and the globalised logic of the conventional development model, it is often necessary to accept coexistence, creating new, more harmonious and reciprocal forms and routines, i.e. alternatives, while what surrounds us continues to obey the logic of conventional development. The most emblematic difference between the logic of resistance and the construction of alternatives is perhaps that resistance is oriented more to the established order, arguing within the logic of the development model to achieve a migration towards a different logic, while the construction of alternatives (at least at the territorial and local level) are unmarked by this logic from the beginning, transforming paradigms.<sup>7</sup>

## Motivating experiences in Latin America

The “Almanac of the Future”<sup>8</sup> is a communication medium offering motivating experiences from Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, highlighting new paths around production and food, economy and market, environment and development, culture and identity, city and housing, energy, resistance and alternatives. The motivating experiences are complemented by analytical contributions and thematic deepening. The following section reviews one of the experiences from the “Almanac of the Future” that illustrates the transforming potential of Latin America, through doing things differently.

## Chocolate and something else<sup>9</sup>

A farm in the tropical forest of the Ecuadorian Chocó grows organic cacao and produces delicious chocolate bars, dedicating 90% of the land to the conservation and recovery of the ecosystem. Social justice and ecological sustainability, as

well as circular and collaborative economy, illustrate paradigm breaks that open new paths.

## Social justice and ecological sustainability

The property, located in the community of Mashpi, Ecuadorian Chocó, is managed by Agustina and Alejo, covering 56 hectares. During a walk around the farm, we visited the cacao plantations in similar agroforestry systems, the nursery and the processing area, all in the middle of the forest. Agustina explained: “When we started the project on the farm with Alejo, our purposes were two: restore the forest and preserve it while producing chocolate with a conscience”. Agustina spent her childhood with her parents on the family farm, then lived in the city and studied ecology. Alejo migrated from Costa Rica to the south looking for birds, and stayed in these mountains.

This area of the Ecuadorian Chocó is characterised by its abundant tropical vegetation and generous rains, which occur almost daily. Cocoa is produced on only a tenth of the surface of the farm; 50 hectares are not exploited at present and have entered a phase of regeneration of the ecosystem. Several of the families on neighbouring farms, in part relatives of Agustina, are in the same wave of restoring the forest. This has allowed a broader corridor of ecological restoration to form, at the same time as opposing a serious threat, since the area is concessioned for metal mining.

“Our product, chocolate, contributes to social justice and ecological sustainability in the forest,” said Agustina. Cocoa plants are found only in the flat parts of the farm. “We started from permaculture principles and tools of analogue forestry for the design and management of food forests. At the beginning, the cocoa plantations looked more like cassava or palm heart plantations, because we planted the cocoa plants not in monoculture but in association with other fruit trees.” As guardians of the seeds, the couple protects more than 35 traditional varieties of Ecuadorian cocoa, the national Fine Flavour cocoa. The vast majority of cocoa producers opt for hybrid varieties. The production of cocoa on the farm is one hundred percent organic, with fertilisers and bio-regulators made on the farm. Cacao diseases that occur frequently in monocultures, such as

the 'witch's broom' caused by a fungus, do not appear or are easily controlled by bio-fertilisers through the activation of mountain microorganisms that are applied. In addition to cacao, approximately three hundred varieties of fruits, nuts, and other tropical fruits are grown, all on a small scale.

## Cocoa to chocolate bar

Mashpi Artisan Chocolate is the name of the chocolate brand that is produced here on the farm. Agustina and Alejo are accompanied by three other people in their work on the farm. "When we started harvesting our cocoa," Agustina recalled, "we twice sold the cocoa without processing it. The price we were paid was so low that we made the decision to process the cocoa and produce chocolate right here." Given that the volume of cocoa production on the farm is not very large, there was a need to organise small-scale processing. "Processing machines are usually designed for industrial volumes; but we found ways to adapt the technical equipment to our needs; we also aim more at manual processes than mechanical ones", explained Agustina, showing the facilities where the cocoa is fermented and dried, then showing the chocolate production section. The production is still handmade, but it has nevertheless been necessary to expand the chocolate factory.

It is not common to find in a cocoa farm a complete productive chain. Mashpi Artisanal Chocolate demonstrates that such an approach is possible: production from the cacao plant to the chocolate bar, with greater emphasis on the restoration of the ecosystem than on production. They offer a variety of organic chocolate products, with more than 20 products including chocolate bars with different flavours, such as guayabilla (a variety of guava), dodderer, and cardamom, as well as nibs, cocoa powder and so on. The degree of concentration of cocoa in the products varies from 60 to 100%. The option of producing from the raw material to the final product on the farm has generated employment for people of the village who live 15 minutes away and do not own their own land.

"We offer tours of the farm and facilities [...]. Alejo, along with a young man from the area, also offers walks for bird watching", said Agustina. The income obtained from the sale of chocolate and fruit products, as well as from visitor

tours, supports the farm and those who dedicate their work and life to this project.

## Market and certification

"Our products are part of a national sanitary registry, in addition to having an organic certification for markets in Europe, Asia and the United States," said Agustina. "Summing up marketing, we realised that it is more favourable to insert ourselves mainly in the local-regional and national markets. Instead of large volumes, we produce a wide range of products." In fact, annual certifications, a requirement to sell the products in Europe and other parts of the world, are expensive. Agustina and Alejo rightly question the lack of seriousness of the procedures to obtain these certifications. "The certifying companies, usually foreign, do not thoroughly inspect the crops, but mostly study documentation". For each shipment of merchandise to markets overseas, in addition to the certification, high transaction costs arise.

## Collaborative logic

Alejo, Agustina and her sister Manuela, who is in charge of sales, are paid the same salary as the people who work at Mashpi Artisanal Chocolate: a base salary of approximately \$US 500 per month. "With this income we live very well, but more important than monetary income is being able to live in harmony with nature." Agustina enjoys living on the farm and avoids spending much time in the city. Profits from the farm and chocolate are reinvested in the farm. "The neighbouring farm is on sale," said Agustina. The owner lives in Quito and the production of palm hearts as a monoculture does not meet his expectations, despite monthly profits of several thousand dollars. "We have decided to buy a part of the farm to expand our project of regenerative agriculture and forest conservation." The purchase will put an end to the use of agrochemicals and thereby considerably reduce the pollution of the Mashpi River. Collaborators of the Mashpi Artisanal Chocolate project, two of which are single mothers and heads of family, will become the joint owners of the new restoration area. The economic logic of the farm and its owners is circular and collaborative: the profits generated on the farm are the product of collective work. Three nearby

small farms have also decided to accept Mashpi Artisanal Chocolate training, and currently produce cocoa that is processed on Agustina and Alejo's farm. The revenues obtained remain in the area and are shared.

## Seed Guardians and pioneers

Alejo and Agustina are seed keepers involved in cocoa issues and are part of the Red de Guardianes (Guardian Network) community. The couple first met this group when they were invited to a meeting many years ago. A characteristic of the Guardians is their constant research and experimentation. In the case of Agustina and Alejo, they have decided to abandon the organic certification to venture into more accurate methods to verify the advances around the restoration and recovery of the ecosystem. They are studying and preparing chromatography tests, which represent a biodynamic agriculture technique involving the analysis of soil quality. The chromatography method allows an assessment of the interaction between minerals, organic matter and microorganisms. In addition to the use of chromatography, Alejo and Agustina are interested in certifying their analogue forestry approach in forest recovery and lost biodiversity, and monitoring progress towards ecosystem recovery. They are in dialogue with the Slow Food organisation to obtain the Bastion seal for the Chocolate of Chocó. Javier Carrera, who accompanied us during the visit, is one of the coordinators of the Guardian Network, which has recently been supported by the international development organisation Misereor. Regarding chromatography, Javier explains: "We Guardians do not limit ourselves to one way, we are convinced that another coexistence between ourselves and nature is possible without falling into a dogmatism." Mashpi Artisanal Chocolate embodies this statement: it is chocolate and, above all, something else.

## Messages to the future

Produce to restore; reinvest in the recovery of the ecosystem instead of profit. Cultivate healthily and with ecological justice; process and transform in an artisanal way, generating local circuits based on the collaborative concept. Economic logic should be based on the concepts of collaboration, reciprocity and holistic and distributive equity. Each bar of chocolate produced is one step closer to a present with a future.

## Conclusions

The experience presented herein illustrates a possible Latin American future. These are options, taken by local actors, allowing the construction of alternatives, in full coexistence with the market and the accumulative economic logic, with a territorial reference and with different degrees of scale. Variables such as cultural identity, territory and history, reciprocity and solidarity are the guiding elements that allow a more balanced interaction between the common good and the economy, giving relevance to the social, environmental, cultural and economic dimensions. For the author, they are reliable evidence that post-development concepts (Kothari et al., 2019), as well as routine change (Kopatz, 2016) can lead to alternatives to development (Ricaldi, 2019) and, with this, make another world possible - a world with a future.

## 130 Endnotes

- 1 This document is partly fed by different texts by the author, hosted on the "Almanaque del Futuro" platform, which is the author's website (<https://almanaquedelfuturo.com/>).
- 2 <https://almanaquedelfuturo.com/>
- 3 <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-37220892>
- 4 <https://www.almanaquedelfuturo.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/texto-introductorio-espac3b1ol-baja.pdf>
- 5 BBC News Mundo, 6 febrero 2020, Por qué América Latina es "la región más desigual del planeta" <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-51390621>.
- 6 <https://www.almanaquedelfuturo.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/alternativas.pdf>
- 7 Idem.
- 8 <https://www.almanaquedelfuturo.com/en/>
- 9 [https://www.almanaquedelfuturo.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/32\\_english\\_baja.pdf](https://www.almanaquedelfuturo.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/32_english_baja.pdf)

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# 7

## Rethinking the science-policy interface for the sustainable future of the Andean environment and society - learning from diversity

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### Abstract

The Andean region is environmentally, culturally and socially highly diverse. This is a challenge for consistent policy-making for sustainability, but also an opportunity offering different solutions for current socio-environmental problems. In this essay, we discuss the science-policy interface, focusing on environmental policy-making. We suggest that instead of a gap between science and policy that needs to be bridged, there is a dynamic landscape of different knowledge realms and interests influencing the policy-making. A genuine dialogue between these realms can lead to societal learning and transformation towards sustainability. Learning from diversity, including indigenous knowledge and creativity, makes the Andes, and the whole of Latin America, a unique environment.

### Resumen

*La región andina es ambiental, social y culturalmente muy diversa. Este es un desafío para la formulación de políticas consistentes para la sostenibilidad, pero también una oportunidad de diferentes soluciones para los problemas socio-ambientales actuales. En este ensayo, discutimos la interfaz ciencia-política, enfocándonos en la formulación de políticas ambientales. Sugerimos que en vez de una brecha entre la ciencia y la política que debe cerrarse, más bien existe un entorno dinámico de diferentes sectores de conocimiento e intereses que influyen en la formulación de políticas. Un diálogo auténtico entre estos sectores puede coadyuvar al aprendizaje social y transformación hacia la sostenibilidad. Aprender de la diversidad, incluido el conocimiento y la creatividad indígena, hace de los Andes, y de toda América Latina, un ámbito singular.*

One remarkable fact that makes Latin America unique is the presence of the Andean mountain system, a large mountain chain functioning as the backbone of this environmentally, culturally and socially diverse continent. The Andean region also faces several environmental, socioeconomic and health challenges, which are often intertwined. These include climate change, overexploitation and unsustainable management of natural resources, environmental contamination, and social inequality, including issues related to gender, ethnicity and economic opportunities. One of the biggest contemporary challenges is the capability to respond to different epidemic and pandemic diseases, such as the current coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic. This is foremost a serious health challenge, but the crisis also includes socioeconomic and environmental aspects. The multidimensional diversity of the Andean region can be a challenge for policy-making aiming towards sustainability in environmental and social wellbeing, but also represents an opportunity offering a variety of solutions.

Science has a unique role in contributing to environmentally and socially relevant decision-making (see Ruspini, 1987, p. 924). However, problems are often complex and require multifaceted responses from policy and decision-makers. Therefore, the role of science may sometimes be diluted in these processes, and its relative weight in decision-making is reduced. Commonly, this is seen as a gap that needs to be bridged (e.g. see Werner et al., 2020) to enable the transfer and translation of scientific insights towards policy formulation and implementation. We argue that the metaphor of a gap may be misleading, where instead there is actually a landscape of different pressures, desires, norms and epistemic work that we often call the science-policy interface. What happens in this landscape, in fact, is the work of a variety of networking epistemic (expert) communities (Haas, 1992) that each share similar rationalities about science and policy, progressing specific ideas and goals. In the Andean region,

these communities are particularly formed by non-governmental organisations (NGO), but also by other networks of scientists, activists, consultants, and political advisers. In policy processes, these epistemic communities reassemble insights from science and elsewhere to persuade policy-making to support their views and to act accordingly. However, the reassembled scientific insights may be only pieces of information to support specific goals and policy alignment, having at the same time diverse impacts on other fields. Therefore, a more generic scaling up of scientific understanding, combined with local and indigenous knowledge, is needed.

In the Andean context, science has an important role in producing reliable information and evidence backing different policy options, but also more broadly, as part of the public discourse to support the formation of environmental values in society. Adapting Majone (1989, p. 183), what is needed are better conditions for public deliberation and dialogue, which can result in societal transformation and learning. Although the Andes are widely recognized as a biodiversity hotspot, with their unique and fragile ecosystems, economic criteria have been the driving force behind policy formulation for natural resource use since the colonial period until today. Environmental issues have forcefully emerged in the region since the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, when many of the Andean countries had relatively recently undergone transitions to democracy. This new era simultaneously invigorated civil societies and drove states to reform their environmental sectors (Orihuela, 2014; Onestini, 2012). Andean countries have not been mere passive receptors of international blueprints, but rather they have contributed to new institutional adaptations through the work of domestic “institutional entrepreneurs” with real agency in policy processes (Orihuela, 2014).

In this essay, we discuss the science-policy interface in environmental decision-making in the Andean region, focusing on the environmental challenges related to mining, agriculture, hydropower, wastewater management and climate change. We are particularly interested in exploring what can be learned from the diversity of conditions, stakeholders and systems in the Andes to achieve a sustainable future globally.

## The Andean context and past processes

Our current actions and decisions are not independent from our past (see Salo et al., 2014, Ch. 19). Thus, understanding history plays an important role when planning and formulating policies aiming towards a sustainable future. In the context of the environmental decision-making in the Andes, it is crucial to understand the natural processes that have shaped the Andean environment in the past, as well as the human history of the region. Scientific research plays a key role here in shedding light on these past processes.

### Natural history

The Andes is the longest continental mountain chain in the world, ranging along the western edge of the South American continent, forming a continuous and orographically complex highland from Venezuela, through Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, to Chile and Argentina. It is the source of all the major rivers of the continent, including the Amazon river, offering vital ecosystem services, such as water supply for more than 100 million people (Encalada et al., 2019). Complex topography and sharp elevation changes create strong temperature gradients and varying rainfall patterns, which in turn cause abrupt changes in ecosystems over short distances, making the region particularly diverse but also sensitive to the current climate change and human land use. The uplift of the Andes has isolated species populations, forming barriers for species dispersal. The gene-flow of several species groups has been disrupted with few possibilities for populations to reconnect, and isolation has led to speciation. The diverse climatic conditions along altitudinal gradients have allowed species to become established and migrate along elevational ranges that meet their ecophysiological tolerances. Additionally, the varying topography in mountains creates micro-climatic conditions that can offer refugia during periods of rapid climatic changes, thus increasing the possibilities for local species populations to survive in these sites in the long-term without going extinct (Rull, 2009).

With a variety conditions for life, the Andes is considered a global biodiversity hotspot, harbouring an astonishing diversity of plant and animal species. For

example, nearly half of the over 82,000 described vascular plant species of South America are restricted to the Andes (Ulloa et al., 2017; Särkinen et al., 2012). The Andean region is also a globally important centre of agrobiodiversity, having a major influence not only on local livelihoods, but also on global food security, functioning as an important gene bank of cultivated crop species. The Andean ecosystems and biodiversity have been studied since the times of Alexander von Humboldt, from the early 19th century, but we still lack understanding of the details of the processes that create high biodiversity (Perrigo et al., 2020; Särkinen et al., 2012).

### Human history

The Andean region is also culturally unique and highly diverse. It has shaped the culture of a large part of the continent for millennia, as a centre of the large ancient civilizations that form the basis of the current indigenous cultures and knowledge. Human history in the Andes dates back to the end of the last glacial period. Since then, humans have rapidly started to impact the Andean ecosystems' integrity. The first signs of human occupation in the Andes appeared before the end of the last glacial, over 12,000 years ago. Early agricultural activities appeared between 7,500-3,000 years ago, followed by the period of high-Andean cultures, which lasted until the colonial period (Kessler and Driesch, 1993). The large ancient civilizations probably benefited from the high biodiversity of the Andes, forming a basis for the domestication of different crop species and the development of agriculture (Chepstow-Lusty et al., 1998). Natural resource use has intensified considerably since the colonial period. The main historic land use impacts since then have been timber extraction, mining, grazing by introduced domestic animals and associated burning for pastures, and agricultural expansion (e.g., Ellenberg, 1979; Kessler, 1995). Human-induced fires and consequent land use changes have been suggested to have contributed strongly to the loss of the Andean natural forests (e.g., Kessler, 2000). However, the Andean forest cover has also naturally fluctuated as a consequence of complex processes of landscape evolution and past climate changes (Gosling et al., 2009).

Currently, the Andean region generates a large part of Latin American Gross National Income in the form of different economic activities, such as mining, agriculture and hydropower (World Bank, 2011). These activities also form the major environmental challenges for the region.

## The current environmental challenges in the Andes

The Andes are one of the most densely populated mountain regions in the world, with an approximate population of 85 million inhabitants (Devenish and Gianella, 2012). With the increasing human population and a need for economic growth, the pressure towards the exploitation of natural resources has dramatically increased in the region during the last decades.

The economies of the Andean countries are largely based on natural resources extraction. The region is rich in mineral resources, especially in Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador (Wallace and Hall-Wallace, 2003). Mining of various metals and minerals forms an important part of the income, but also creates environmental and livelihood conflicts (Brain, 2017). Mining concessions have often been granted to transnational consortia led by foreign companies, overlapping with indigenous territories, protected areas, rural farmer communities and areas that provide important ecosystem services, inevitably leading to conflicts in land tenure rights between local communities, conservation actions, governments and foreign investors. A great debate around mining is about the degree of safety of this activity. Mining wastes pollute agricultural fields and fresh water (Brain, 2017), increasing the concentration of chemical and organic contaminants and solid waste in the environment (Capparelli et al., 2020). Mercury is one of the major sources of pollution that puts the safety of people and the environment at risk (Salo et al., 2016).

Agriculture is another important economic activity in the Andean countries. The Andes have been cultivated since pre-Columbian times, and since then locally adapted agroecosystems have been developed (Cruz et al., 2017). However, nowadays the indigenous farming systems have been substantially reduced and replaced by extensive and intensive farming systems. The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has also increased in the last decades. Particularly, the

use of highly hazardous pesticides is a long-standing problem to be addressed, as it has strong negative impacts on the environment, biodiversity and human health (Cole et al., 2011). An additional challenge is that most of the Andean croplands are located on steep slopes. This leads to high rates of soil erosion, land degradation and soil carbon loss (Barrowclough et al., 2016). More research is needed on these issues, and on integrated pest management in particular, to achieve sustainable agriculture in the Andes.

Many rivers in the Andes are also threatened by hydropower. This is considered as an important resource to generate electricity in Latin America, because of the combination of topography and a dense hydrological network. Currently, at least 142 dams are preventing rivers to flow freely, threatening migratory aquatic species and affecting fishing and other related economic activities (Anderson et al., 2018). Because of high erosion rates from steep slopes, dams trap river sediments that otherwise would be deposited downstream in river floodplains. This phenomenon reduces the dam life cycle and increases the risks for dam failures, which have caused untold human and economic losses in the Andes in the last decades.

Additionally, rapid urbanisation in the Andes and in Latin America in general during the last decades, coupled with deficient sanitation systems, has caused environmental and health-related problems. Untreated wastewater input to rivers causes serious environmental contamination. Less than 30% of the cities in Latin America have sewage treatment (Rojas Ortuste, 2012; Hernández-Padilla et al., 2017). This is a major public health problem, as several diseases are related to contaminated water.

To deal with these environmental challenges, justified regulations and efficient monitoring would be needed. Environmental impact assessments (EIA) have often been inadequate and incomplete due to various reasons, including lack of training and quality data (Ritter et al., 2017; Cashmore, 2004). Risk and impact assessment should be carried out based on scientific evidence, independently from political interests. Carefully carried out EIAs and scientific insights from other sources play a crucial role when solving environmental challenges. Scientists and experts should engage in policy processes and also work with

the relevant stakeholders after the impact assessments have been carried out to discuss how to better formulate and implement environmental legislation.

In addition to environmental contamination, climate change is threatening the sustainability of the Andean environment and society. Furthermore, the above-mentioned environmental challenges may become worse in future scenarios of climate instability (Wen et al., 2017). Unpredictable climate events (extreme and prolonged droughts and changes in precipitation patterns) are already observed, and are forecast to increase in frequency and intensity in the near future (Nobre et al., 2014). Rural populations, whose economy relies on small-scale agriculture, might be particularly sensitive to these extreme events, but the economic and social impacts of climate change may also extend to large urban populations. The most visible effect of climate change in the Andes is a rapid melting of mountain glaciers, causing water shortages for agriculture as well as in urban areas (Ramirez et al., 2001; Kaser et al., 2005; Bradley et al., 2006). In addition, ecosystems that depend on glaciers, such as Andean wetlands, are rapidly degrading, because of a decrease in the groundwater levels which sustain them. These ecosystems are becoming carbon sources instead of carbon sinks and losing important ecosystem services, such as regulation of water quality and quantity (Encalada et al., 2019).

Climate change is also causing biodiversity loss in the Andes. Species are already observed to be migrating upwards and shifting their occurrence ranges, seeking cooler temperatures (Morueta-Holme et al., 2015). Upward migration rates may, however, be slower than temperature increases, which may lead to increased extinction risks for several species that occur along the Andean slopes (Feeley et al., 2011). Given the uniqueness and diversity of the Andean fauna and flora, it is of great importance to understand how species will cope with climate change and how science-based conservation decisions, for example establishing more protected areas and conservation corridors can increase the possibility for species migration.

When dealing with climate change and other environmental challenges, evidence-based scientific communication is imperative (Jensen and Gerber, 2020). Initiatives such as Scientists' Warning (<https://www.scientistswarning.org>)

help to promote awareness of climate change and its impacts. Scientific outcomes, however, need to be disseminated to various sectors of society. The first step is to make relevant scientific evidence accessible so that the consciousness about global threats becomes a fact. The next step is to construct a dialogue between different stakeholders, aiming at environmentally sustainable and socially acceptable decisions and action implementation.

## Science in public deliberation and societal learning towards sustainability in the Andes

There is wide agreement that political decisions should not be taken against clear scientific evidence. However, today's environmental problems are challenging this principle. When decision-making needs to take into account complex interrelations among a diversity of social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors, the simple easily becomes complex and the necessary becomes unfeasible. Even though science has a ubiquitous role backing important decisions in environmental policy making, science alone cannot solve the dilemmas that have a strong political nature. Weinberg (1972) recognized this when he coined the term "trans-science", meaning questions that transcend science, i.e., those that are asked by scientists but cannot be answered by them. Often, such questions involve moral or ethical considerations, but they can also just be extremely complex. These kinds of questions are nevertheless addressed by scientists and experts, which means that the desired political ends (e.g., to halt biodiversity decline) are entangled with the means, as well as how to act and how to justify the proposed means (see Eyal, 2019). This debate is also exemplified in political discussions related to protected areas (i.e., whether to establish strictly protected areas or areas of integrated conservation and development goals).

In environmental policy-making, decisions are not normally taken among alternative options for which the costs and benefits can be unequivocally calculated, but rather as compromises involving multiple pressures, trade-offs and objectives advocated by a variety of stakeholders in different power positions. When aiming towards sustainability, compromises are needed between available environmental information, socioeconomic needs and

cultural aspects. The role of science departs clearly: to produce relevant information based on reliable data that can then be interpreted as evidence to strengthen certain arguments. But that is only the easy part of the policy-making process.

What kind of future we want, is a question that policymakers, scientists and different stakeholders constantly pose. If those futures are many (infinite), how to get there is an equally perplexing question. Policy-making is a complex process that, from the viewpoint of scientific advice, typically involves ignoring what is called the “uncomfortable knowledge” (Rayner, 2012). As Rayner argued, such organized ignorance is a necessary strategy that helps societies handle the complexity of the world, but is also problematic when decisions are actually made against better knowledge. Rayner’s answers included the “clumsy solutions”, i.e. arrangements that are not elegant but robust, because they rest on a pluralistic epistemic and ethical foundation. This seems also often to be the case in environmental decision-making in the Andes, but the region also offers some interesting examples of the development of alternative thinking.

One of these is the concept and practice of Sumaq Kawsay in Quechua, meaning “living in harmony with nature and people”. It is a critical discourse challenging the western mainstream development model. It is based on alternative epistemic and ontological foundations for understanding environment and sustainability (Merino, 2016; Villalba, 2013; Radcliffe, 2012), but it accommodates western science and technologies as far as they are applied for the good of the community as seen from the justice and political perspectives (Rose and Cachelin, 2018). This capacity for transformative dialogue is a long-standing phenomenon in the Andean intellectual culture (Apffel-Marglin, 1995; 1998). Similarly, indigenous norms can be interknit with local environmental policies and upscaled towards the national scale and beyond, as exemplified by the case of Tungurahua watershed management reform in Ecuador (Kauffmann and Martin, 2014; see also Dupuits et al., 2020). The concept of Sumaq Kawsay formed the glue to institutionalise local indigenous norms, further diffused toward the national level through a network of domestic and international actors, challenging the western sustainable development discourse (Kauffman,

2016: 55-79). Sumaq Kawsay has had a profound influence in the political constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia, specifically in their treatment of nature and its rights. Also in Colombia, the Atrato River and its tributaries were attributed with legal personhood and representatives through a ruling by the Colombian constitutional court (Cano Pecharroman, 2018). The impacts of mining are relatively well known (Vallejo Toro et al., 2016), but the study of law was also needed for the final impact.

## Recommendations for rethinking and improving the science-policy interface in the Andean region

### Comprehensive communication

In the Andean region, the role of scientific knowledge in decision-making has been in the centre of debate, particularly in relation to the establishment and management of protected areas (Toomey et al., 2019). Studies conducted in intensively investigated areas, such as the Madidi National Park (Toomey et al., 2019), indicate that scientific research committed to transferring results beyond scientific journals and offering solutions that are locally possible has a higher impact. Promoting a comprehensive synthesis of scientific knowledge accounting for natural and human history, as well as for ancestral and local knowledge, for example in regards to Andean agroforestry, terrace cultivation and ethnobotany, is needed to genuinely feed deliberative policy-making processes.

### Public engagement and citizen participation

Public engagement and citizen participation play a key role in the science-policy interface to ensure the inclusion of all essential knowledge into the decision-making process. With public participation, ownership over the issues can be created, which is the key for the sustainability of the solutions and actions. One way to engage the general public could be the establishment of citizen panels (see Brown, 2006) or joint citizen-expert panels, structured discussion groups with defined goals, to prepare policy-in-briefs and recommendations for decision-makers. This would largely expand the science-policy dialogue to the general

public and help to mainstream the current scientific knowledge about the Andean environment (e.g., biodiversity and ecosystem functioning). Similarly, it would help to recognise the current environmental challenges, but also the potential for a sustainable future taking into account the Andean ecosystem integrity and human wellbeing. This would naturally include investment in education and capacity development. Different citizen science activities, such as reporting species locations or participating in climate monitoring, would also increase public engagement in science-policy discussions, especially from the point of view of understanding the role of science.

### Promotion of partnerships

The promotion of partnerships between the public, private and civil society sectors forms a part of the science-policy landscape where scientists, policymakers and different stakeholders carry out their dialogue. It is important to cooperate and create partnerships at all policy levels from local to regional and global. Regarding the conservation of the Andean ecosystems and biodiversity, key global partnerships include collaborations with international research institutes and NGOs, but also the strengthening of the position of the Andean countries in international conventions, such as Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

However, when dealing with international partnerships, on the other side of the coin is the dialogue regarding the coloniality of science (cf. Cusicanqui, 2012; Escobar, 2010; Quijano, 2001; Appfel-Marglin and Marglin, 1996). Research in the Andean region is still often led by scientists and institutions based in the global north (Eichhorn et al., 2020), and scientific publications behind paywalls are often inaccessible for research and educational institutions located in the Andean countries. Despite the effort of many initiatives to promote collaborative research, equality in scientific collaboration is still incipient. From a science-policy perspective, it is important for scientific knowledge to be produced locally, but as an integral part of the international scientific community.

## Conclusions

The Andes form environmentally, culturally and socio-economically a diverse entity with different challenges, but also opportunities. Environmental decision-making is carried out in the complex science-policy landscape that includes different actors – scientists, policymakers and other stakeholders – with a variety of desires and pressures aimed towards sustainability and wellbeing, each in their own way. This is a challenge that requires rethinking of the science-policy interface. We see this interface as a dynamic landscape or continuum, rather than a gap, where different knowledge realms meet and interact. In the optimal situation, all available knowledge can be intelligently combined to produce synergetic solutions for environmental and human wellbeing. A genuine dialogue between different knowledge realms, including the current scientific knowledge, local and indigenous knowledge and understanding of the current societal needs, can produce a high added value for the science-policy interface and policy formulation, in the form of societal learning and transformation towards sustainability. This high potential for learning from diversity and creativity, is why the Andes, and the whole of Latin America, matters.

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# 8

## Amazonia at the heart of the global ecological crisis

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### Abstract

Latin America harbours the world's largest and most species-rich tropical rainforest: Amazonia. Larger than the European Union, Amazonia stores 20% of global vegetation carbon, has around 400 billion trees, is the world's largest freshwater system and provides the home for people speaking 300 different languages. The future of Amazonia is of paramount importance for regulating global climate, maintaining biodiversity and providing other ecosystem services, but it is threatened by human activities. More sustainable management practices are needed to mitigate the threats and avoid global tragedies. Involving both local people and the global scientific community is important to achieve these goals.

### Resumen

*América Latina alberga el bosque tropical más grande y diverso del mundo: la Amazonia. Al ser más grande que la Unión Europea, la Amazonia almacena el 20% del carbono de la vegetación global, tiene cerca de 400 mil millones de árboles, cuenta con el sistema de agua dulce más grande del mundo y proporciona hogar para personas que hablan 300 idiomas diferentes. El futuro de la Amazonia es de primordial importancia para la regulación climática a nivel global, manutención de la biodiversidad y aprovisionamiento de diferentes servicios ecosistémicos. Sin embargo, la Amazonía se encuentra bajo presión por diferentes actividades humanas. Se requiere de prácticas de manejo más sostenibles para mitigar impactos y evitar tragedias globales. La participación tanto de la población local como de la comunidad científica mundial es de suma importancia para lograr esos objetivos.*

## 154 Introduction: Why is Amazonia globally relevant?

In August 2019, astounding images of burning Amazonian rainforests shocked the world. Day turned into night in São Paulo, the biggest city of South America situated more than 2500 km away from the fires. When the 12 million people living in the city witnessed the skies covered with black clouds and felt the smell of smoke in the rain, the fires and associated deforestation of Amazonian rainforests made headlines all over the world. A few months later, the attention of the international media shifted to the rapidly spreading covid-19 pandemic, but the deforestation and burning of Amazonia have not ceased. On the contrary, reports from the year 2020 and 2021 indicate that they have intensified. This is a cause for global concern, because the situation threatens important ecosystem services related to climate regulation, water supplies and food security provided by Amazonian forests. Moreover, Amazonia harbours a large part of global biodiversity and human cultural diversity, and an unknown amount of untapped potential for discovering new medicinally active compounds and genetic resources.

### Ecosystem services

Amazonia comprises the world's largest tropical rainforest, which makes it of paramount importance for regulating the global climate, maintaining biodiversity and providing other ecosystem services, as well as timber and non-timber products. Ranging from the Andes in the west to the Atlantic Ocean in the east, Amazonia covers an area larger than the European Union and spreads over nine countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela).

Amazonian forests store around 20% of the total carbon contained in the world's terrestrial vegetation (Baccini et al., 2017; Saatchi et al., 2011), which makes the region a cornerstone in mitigating the global warming crisis.

However, ecosystem services provided by the Amazonian forests depend on their proper management. When the forests are in a natural state, Amazonia not only functions as carbon storage but also has the potential to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> and act as a carbon sink. Carbon dioxide is absorbed from the atmosphere by plants, which convert it into organic material that is then stored as biomass in the vegetation and soils. Currently, indigenous lands and natural protected areas in Amazonia store more than half of the region's carbon (Walker et al., 2020). However, deforestation and forest fires release the carbon back into the atmosphere, and their high rate is already reducing the carbon stocks and changing Amazonia into a net carbon source (Baccini et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2020).

Amazonia is also an important regulator of hydrological cycles. The Amazon River basin is the largest freshwater system on Earth and secures water supplies for millions of people living in different parts of South America – from small communities to megacities. Each tree in Amazonia releases, on average, 1000 litres of water to the atmosphere every day. As a consequence, the almost 400 billion trees in Amazonia produce an enormous amount of water vapour. The forest also releases substances that are important to start the process of cloud formation and subsequently returns the moisture as rain to the forests in a semi-closed cycle. The excess moisture travels thousands of kilometres in a phenomenon known as 'flying rivers'. These water resources are responsible for regulating the climate in South America and are of crucial importance for agriculture, acting as a natural irrigation system in the more seasonal areas in the central and southern parts of Brazil and adjacent countries. Forest loss causes a reduction in the influx of humidity to these areas, inducing droughts that endanger crop production, the maintenance of water reservoirs, and hence, water supply for larger cities. Thus, the effects of deforestation in Amazonia are felt beyond its borders.

### Biodiversity and cultural diversity

Amazonia is extremely diverse culturally, environmentally and biologically, holding the trophy of the most species-rich rainforest in the world. Although the figures are uncertain, it has been estimated that Amazonian forests harbour

more than 10% of all species in the world and 25% of the global terrestrial biodiversity, with more than 15,000 species of trees (ter Steege et al., 2020). A single hectare can contain over 300 tree species (Gentry, 1988; Valencia et al., 1994), more than all of Europe. In addition, Amazonia is home to millions of people, many of whom live in remote areas in villages and communities along the rivers. The cultural diversity of Amazonia is reflected in various customs and rituals, traditional medicine and know-how, different worldviews and numerous languages (Salisbury and Weinstein, 2014). It has been estimated that the indigenous peoples of Amazonia speak over 300 languages representing fifteen or more language families (Aikhenvald, 2012). Although the forests were once thought to be uninhabited, millions of people actually lived there before European contact, and there were thriving pre-Columbian civilizations (Clement et al., 2015).

Amazonian biodiversity is especially intriguing because we still know very little about it. Scientists describe hundreds of new plant and animal species every year from different parts of the region, and no one knows how many are yet to be discovered. How the species are distributed across Amazonia and what factors constrain their occurrence is mostly not very well understood, which makes it difficult to plan conservation actions or other land use management. However, evidence is accumulating that the forests are more heterogeneous than they appear, and studies combining extensive field observations and satellite data are unravelling the regional patterns (Asner et al., 2017; Chaves et al., 2020; Higgins et al. 2011; Tuomisto et al., 2019). To what extent these patterns have been affected by pre-Columbian peoples is a hot topic at the moment, approached through studies on domesticated plants, anthropogenic soils and archaeological sites (Levis et al., 2017; McMichael et al., 2012, 2017).

## Threats

The importance of Amazonia for global biodiversity, climate and human cultural diversity is indisputable, but its future is of great concern. Amazonian forests were still largely intact in the 1970s, with deforestation concentrated in small areas in the southern and eastern parts. Since then, active colonisation policies have encouraged people from other parts of South America to move

into Amazonia, facilitated by the building of new roads through previously inaccessible regions. This has led to widespread conversion of forests into pastures and crop fields, and their replacement by mining, hydroelectric dams and other infrastructure. There have also been serious conflicts with indigenous peoples who have attempted to defend their traditional lands.

Concerted international research efforts have warned about major negative consequences if the forest-atmosphere interaction dynamics are disrupted (Marengo et al., 2018). Given that the forest itself is crucial to maintain the hydrological cycle, deforestation could lead to increasing drought, higher risk of wildfires and greater difficulties for the vegetation to regenerate. In addition, huge areas in Amazonia have poor soils where large amounts of the available nutrients are tied up in organic material, and forest growth is dependent on a closed nutrient cycle. If the forest layer is removed, the exposed soils become inhospitable for plant regeneration, making it harder for the vegetation to recover. For example, floodplain forests along the acid and nutrient-poor black-water rivers have very low resilience and can be trapped in a degenerated state after fire (Flores et al., 2017).

The burning of Amazonia received much international attention before the spotlight moved to the covid-19 pandemic. The fires are largely related to expanding agriculture and livestock farming, much of which is targeted at the international market. Indeed, Brazil is the world's largest exporter of beef, providing almost 20% of total global exports (Zia et al., 2019), and about 65% of deforestation in Brazilian Amazonia can be linked to cattle ranching and meat consumption (Recanati et al., 2015). Because the demand for beef and other products that drive deforestation comes, to a large degree, from the outside, the international community also has a responsibility to help solve the resulting problems.

Fires are only one of multiple agents that drive the loss of pristine rain forests and other ecosystems in Amazonia. Deforestation can also follow after logging of valuable tree species (e.g. mahogany), mining (e.g. gold), drug plant cultivation (e.g. coca), dam projects (for production of hydroelectricity), exploitation of oil and gas, and unsustainable use of wild animals and plants (e.g. illegal trade of

threatened species). These sectors are large and employ numerous people in different parts of Amazonia. However, these actions are often illegal and their expansion has led to violent conflicts between intruders and those aiming to protect the forests, including indigenous people.

Habitat loss is one of the globally most severe threats to the existence of numerous species, and both climate change and deforestation reduce the availability of suitable habitats for rainforest species. If current climate trends hold, Amazonia will become warmer, drier and more seasonal. These conditions may not be tolerated by most of the rainforest species, which are typically adapted to moist conditions and lack adaptations to tolerate drought. To what degree species will be able to respond to climate change by migrating is currently not known, especially as the process is constrained by both deforestation and natural heterogeneity in the environment (e.g., soil properties). Extinction is an irreparable loss, as it means that we lose the chance of understanding the role of the species in the ecosystem, its evolutionary history and its potential uses for a variety of industries, such as medicine, cosmetics and food production. Many species contain biomolecules with interesting and useful properties (such as antioxidant, antimicrobial, diuretic, antiseptic, anthelmintic, stimulant, anti-inflammatory and analgesic). Can you imagine the world without *Theobroma cacao* and, hence, chocolate?

Deforestation and forest fragmentation, as well as associated conflicts and spread of diseases, are making life increasingly difficult for native indigenous people. Some have already been driven out of the forests, which has led to social problems as well as to cultural erosion and loss. This is a humanitarian and cultural tragedy that also endangers the preservation of important but often undocumented traditional knowledge. Scientific research inspired by traditional knowledge has led to important discoveries, such as the development of new medicines. For example, indigenous people in Peruvian Amazonia have traditionally used the bark of the *Cinchona* tree to treat fever, which inspired the medical industry to look for and isolate its active substance, quinine, leading to the development of an efficient malaria medicine. How many other life-saving substances could be derived from Amazonian organisms? Unfortunately, it has been estimated that the current rate of species extinctions is faster than

the rate at which new species are being discovered, let alone investigated for useful properties. Up to 57% of all Amazonian tree species may be considered as globally threatened (ter Steege et al., 2015), while knowledge of many other organism groups (smaller plants, insects, fungi) is not sufficient to even make such estimations.

## Finding solutions through collaboration

Many of the practical problems in Amazonia are political, since both deforestation and biodiversity loss are related to economic activities that are both promoted and controlled by decisions at the governmental level. Amazonian countries export a number of commodities whose production drives deforestation (such as gold, timber, soy and beef), and Europe is an important market for these. Consequently, Europe has both a responsibility and an opportunity to ensure that the trade follows environmentally and ethically good practices. This can be done through direct negotiations about the rules of the trade itself, and through collaboration with relevant institutions in the Amazonian countries.

International collaboration can make a positive contribution to research, education and administration in Amazonian countries. Benefits include exchange of expertise in general and the sharing of complementary technologies, specific methods and best practices. International collaboration also channels international resources towards producing new information that can solve problems of global importance, and can facilitate communication between scientists and stakeholders globally, as well as enhance the flow of information about the on-the-ground Amazonian reality to the global community. Importantly, international research collaboration supports the local institutions and helps them to assimilate cutting-edge knowledge and tools as well as to design and manage relevant research initiatives. By building up and strengthening the national expertise, this ultimately improves governance of the natural resources and biodiversity.

There are obvious and urgent opportunities for international collaboration in both basic and applied sciences. Since the Amazonian ecosystems are still poorly known, research is needed to improve understanding of the structure

and function of the rainforests and their biodiversity, as well as on their natural dynamics and how external pressures impact these. International collaboration on these topics makes it possible to think big in terms of compiling and sharing extensive sets of field data, environmental layers and remote sensing data that can then be used for monitoring and impact assessment. This will allow the assessment and forecasting of the effects of the ongoing changes, which provides the backbone for informed management decisions and governance.

Many of the products exported to Europe and other parts of the world are created at the expense of deforestation, as the agricultural frontier is expanded into forest areas to satisfy increasing external demand. To prevent deforestation, non-destructive alternatives for economical use of Amazonia are necessary. As a major consumer of resources, Europe can play an important role here. Europe also affects the economy and cultural values of Amazonian countries via the tourism industry. Research is needed to quantify the ecological and societal impact of European consumption, clarify the value chains and guide decisions at the EU level, taking into account the expected consequences of alternative climatic and political scenarios.

Existing examples of sustainable use of resources demonstrate that it is possible to combine economic activities and preservation of the Amazonian forests. Good practices can be developed combining scientific knowledge of the ecology of the species with their biochemical properties, cultural value and potential production and marketing chain. Many Amazonian fruits are of high nutritive value that can be well preserved after processing for exportation, either fresh, frozen or dry (Costa et al., 2015). Locals commonly collect these from the forests without the need of killing the tree, such as Brazil nuts and Açai berries. The highly profitable industry of cosmetics has discovered the value of Amazonian products, fragrances and oils, and extracts from palms [e.g. Tucumã (*Astrocaryum aculeatum*) and Murumuru (*Astrocaryum murumuru*)] and trees [e.g. Andiroba (*Carapa guianensis*)] are widely used as moisturizing, anti-aging and anti-inflammatory remedies (Burlando and Cornara, 2017). The ornamental fishery industry has also benefited from partnerships established between International institutions, Latin American institutions and local managers (Chao et al., 2001). Both edible and ornamental fish [e.g. Pirarucu

or Paiche (*Arapaima gigas*), Tucunaré (*Cichla* spp.), Discus (*Symphysodon* ssp.) and Cardinal (*Paracheirodon axelrodi*)] have suffered from intensive fishing pressure but their populations are slowly recovering thanks to international collaborative research that has led to developing better management practices. Biodiversity-related tourism, such as bird-watching, is also an important activity that offers opportunities for economic development (Ocampo-Peñuela and Winton, 2017). However, it is important to consider that ecotourism must be carefully implemented to be sustainable and, thus, research and training activities taking into account the local and international demands can improve its social and environmental benefits.

In some research areas, there is already a history of international collaboration. Botanical explorations and data collecting were especially active in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, a single binational project increased by 50% the number of botanical collections in Brazilian Amazonian herbaria (Prance et al., 1984). Accumulation of this kind of field data has been slower in the 2000s, even though monitoring of climate change effects and biodiversity trends requires on-the-ground observations. Given the sheer size and diversity of Amazonia, it is clear that advancing the general state of knowledge is highly dependent on international collaboration.

How Amazonia fares in the future has global consequences, but there are significant gaps in our knowledge and ability to forecast those impacts. For example, although it is obvious that the climate has been changing globally, there are still many uncertainties related to how the future changes will affect different parts of Amazonia, and what will be the immediate and long-term effects of these changes for biodiversity, human health and food security. It has been suggested that if deforestation continues beyond a critical tipping point, the Amazonian rainforest biome may be irreversibly lost. This process is likely aggravated by climate change, but more information is urgently needed to assess the risk and plan mitigation measures. Research related to monitoring and management of the forests can be significantly improved through collaboration between scientists from Latin America and elsewhere. Alternative scenarios that incorporate uncertainties and the probabilities of different events can be used to evaluate different policy and management

options. Such scenarios can best be developed by multi-disciplinary, culturally diverse and international teams whose expertise, methodological approaches and data access complement each other. Incorporating knowledge of global, regional and local forces can place stakeholders one step ahead of the events and guide the development of appropriate policies to prevent undesired scenarios and help to achieve knowledge-based decision-making. Ultimately, collaboration can clarify relevant socioeconomic and environmental processes, identify the most threatened areas and propose solutions to the most pressing problems.

The recent covid-19 crisis is a clear example of how important it is to make a global effort to monitor the interactions between human consumption trends and natural resource exploitation. A sustainable future for Amazonian forests and their inhabitants is crucial for the global well-being. Global involvement of the scientific and traditional communities towards generating knowledge for more sustainable practices and mitigating the threats in the region is a key strategy to avoid global tragedies.

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# GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATISATION

# 9

## 'Prior consultation' as an instrument of participation policy: lessons from Latin America

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### Abstract

This essay presents some comments around one of the crucial political instruments for democratisation processes, the implementation of standards of vertical participation policy, and the formation of inclusive societies, namely the right of indigenous peoples to prior consultation process ('consulta previa' in Spanish). In the light of national and international documents ratified by Latin American states since the 1990s, this procedure shapes a new model of relations between the state and indigenous peoples of the region, becoming a symbol of their political, cultural and economic empowerment. Consulta previa is both an expression of efforts to respect indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and autonomy and the source of the concept of a pluralist, intercultural and democratic state. Examples of local and regional legal solutions implemented in some Latin American countries can serve as a lesson of 'good practices' in the field of economic, cultural and environmental politics and encourage similar initiatives at the institutional level on a larger, global scale.

### Resumen

*Este ensayo presenta algunos comentarios sobre uno de los instrumentos políticos cruciales para los procesos de la democratización, la implementación de estándares de política de participación vertical y la formación de sociedades inclusivas, que es el derecho de los pueblos indígenas al proceso de consulta previa. A la luz de los documentos nacionales e internacionales ratificados por los estados latinoamericanos desde la década de los 1990, este procedimiento configura un nuevo modelo de relaciones entre el Estado y los pueblos indígenas de la región, convirtiéndose durante las últimas décadas en símbolo de su empoderamiento político, cultural y económico. La consulta previa es tanto una expresión de los esfuerzos por respetar el derecho de los pueblos indígenas a la autodeterminación y la autonomía, como la fuente del concepto de Estado pluralista, intercultural y democrático. Ejemplos de soluciones legales locales y*

*regionales implementadas en algunos países de América Latina pueden servir como una lección de “buenas prácticas” en el campo de la política económica, cultural y ambiental y fomentar iniciativas similares a nivel institucional a una escala global más grande.*

## 170 Introduction

The issue of political participation is understood as an activity of citizens aimed at changing the political decisions of public institutions. It is a process by which citizens gain influence and share control over decisions and initiatives of public authorities when these decisions have a direct or indirect impact on their own interests (Długosz and Wygnański, 2005, p. 22). Participation so defined is characterised by certain features: actions are undertaken by individuals who do not belong to the political elite; actions are supposed to lead to specific results, and the goal of those actions may be any political decision made by the government. We can indicate two types of political participation: a horizontal type, which refers to cooperation undertaken by various social groups, and a vertical type, which concerns the relationship between citizens and the state and its public institutions. The simplest form of participation is information, which involves citizens to a minor extent in the activities undertaken by the state. They are only informed about decisions that have already been taken, so they are only passive recipients. Consultation is another level of citizen involvement in the participation process. During consultations, the government (the state) allows citizens to express their opinion on the planned activities, therefore they are not only passive recipients but participate in the decision-making process. The highest degree of civic participation is co-decision, which is no longer just a dialogue in decision-making, but also partnership and a cooperation in implementing specific regulations. It should be recognised that citizens gaining influence over the shape of the regulations at an early stage of their creation are more likely to become involved in its implementation (Olejniczak, 2015, p. 112; Marczevska-Rytko and Maj, 2020, pp. 9-10; Partycypacja obywatelska (n. d.); World Bank, 1995, pp. 3-4).

The right to the prior consultation procedure (from the Spanish ‘consulta previa’) became the foundation of vertical participation policy postulated

for several years in relations between the state and indigenous peoples. Procedures regulated by the provision of acts at the international and national level constitute official recognition of the indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination, understood as the possibility to freely decide on the form of their organisation (economic, social), jurisdiction, model of execution of power and methods by which they choose to preserve and express their identity. The purpose of the prior consultation process is then to ensure the full participation of indigenous peoples in all activities carried out by the state that may, in any way, affect their existence. The inclusion, based on the form of intercultural dialogue, leads to an agreement in applying specific administrative and legislative measures and adopting the indigenous perspective on critical issues important to their subsistence and the protection of their rights.

Due to the complexity of the implementation of the consulta previa process, it has been the subject of lively public debates for at least three decades. Discussions concern both the context of indigenous peoples’ rights and a wide range of activities in public politics relating to climate change, sustainable development or cultural and natural heritage protection. The consultation mechanism that aims to reconcile indigenous communities’ social, cultural and economic integrity with the implementation of development projects (often related to natural resources) is a particular challenge for national legislative institutions, which must meet the standards imposed by international law. In that context, the Latin America region deserves special attention, as an area where there exist both extreme violations and non-compliance with the rights of indigenous peoples (phenomena well described by Stavenhagen (2006) as an “implementation gap”), as well as some examples of progressive, participatory politics and consultations carried out under the standards of the democratisation process, the principles of pluralism and interculturalism.

## Norms and formal base

The prior consultation process is one of the key provisions of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention no. 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO Convention 169, 1989; date of entry into force: 5 September 1991). Article 2.1. requires states to assume responsibility for coordinated and systematic

actions to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and to guarantee their integrity and right to self-determination. In implementing the provisions of the Convention, governments should:

“(a) consult the peoples concerned, through appropriate procedures and in particular through their representative institutions, whenever consideration is being given to legislative or administrative measures which may affect them directly;

(b) establish means by which these peoples can freely participate, to at least the same extent as other sectors of the population, at all levels of decision-making in elective institutions and administrative and other bodies responsible for policies and programmes which concern them;

(c) establish means for the full development of these peoples’ own institutions and initiatives, and in appropriate cases, provide the resources necessary for this purpose” (ILO Convention 169, 1989, art. 6.1).

ILO Convention 169 defined the essential criteria for consultations, indicating the necessity to undertake these at every stage of the projects or programs relating in any way to the territories or directly to the groups of indigenous peoples, during the development, at the decision-making phase, and at the stage of the implementation. Article 6.2. also indicates that to achieve an agreement for the proposed measures, the consultations procedure shall be undertaken in good faith and should be appropriate to the circumstances. The provisions of ILO Convention 169 are intended to support the development of such a form of dialogue that will guarantee the fulfilment of the principles of the multicultural policy, based on the recognition of the complete subjectivity (legal, political, cultural) of indigenous communities. The mechanism of prior and informed consultations is included in subsequent articles of the ILO document, referring to specific issues, such as the protection of cultural heritage, way of life and the right to decide on one’s priorities in the process of economic, social and cultural development (art. 7), protection of lands, territories and natural resources (arts. 13, 14, 15), or the right to intercultural education (arts. 22, 27 and 28). Following ILO Convention 169, the *consulta previa* procedure is therefore applicable in all areas of state action that may affect collective rights, territories or directly

representatives of indigenous communities, such as in the fields of economic policy, labour issues, the justice system, security or preservation of the elements of their cultural heritage.

Similar provisions can be found in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007 (denoted hereafter ‘UNDRIP’; UNDRIP, 2007), which states *expressis verbis* that indigenous peoples can freely define their political status, cultural identification and path of social, cultural and economic development. In turn, the states and their organs are obliged to conduct a dialogue with indigenous peoples within their territories on all matters that may affect their existence and concern the lands they occupy:

“States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them” (UNDRIP, 2007, art. 19). “States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilisation or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources” (UNDRIP, 2007, art. 32.2).

The Declaration, therefore, presupposes the possibility of full participation of indigenous peoples in state decisions that may affect them, with particular regard to their free determination (arts. 3 and 4), in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent (arts. 10, 29, 32.2). While not legally binding, the UN Declaration affirms a state’s commitment to abide by its spirit and respect its principles. It is regarded as being declarative of other rules of law contained in treaties and customary law.

The process of prior consultations should be exercised in accordance with certain standards. The most important principle is that consultations should be carried out only by the state, represented by appropriate institutions at the national, regional and local level. As the term suggests, *consulta previa* must be carried out before any activities are commenced: before exploring a given

area, before granting a concession (e.g. for mining), before any exploitation, before any activities affecting the natural environment or affecting the inhabitants of a given territory. The procedures implemented by the state must be oriented towards establishing an intercultural dialogue carried out in good faith; therefore, the competent state institutions must explain how they want to apply the consultation procedures and how the views of the indigenous groups will be taken into account. In the case of complex activities and long-term projects (such as mining activities or the development of infrastructure in a given area), the participation of indigenous peoples in all phases of the activities undertaken must be ensured. Consultations cannot take the form of one information meeting, and decisions cannot be made by voting during one referendum or plebiscite. As consultations must occur through representative institutions of indigenous peoples, they must have access to sufficient and complete information. They should take place in indigenous languages, in specific locations and on dates agreed with representatives of indigenous assemblies or other forms of the local authority.

We can interpret the *consulta previa* process both as a product of the mobilisation of indigenous peoples who demand recognition of their political status and respect for their collective rights, as well as a result of the evolution of international law, with its particular emphasis on the individual right to self-determination. Respect for the dignity, collective rights and the right to self-determination means that the state should not make any decisions and initiate any actions without taking into account the voice of indigenous peoples, thus ensuring that they regain and maintain control over their lives (both in the present and in the future), on equal standards with the rest of the national society.

### Consulta previa process in Latin America - a difficult lesson of democracy

The indigenous peoples' population in Latin America is estimated at around 40 million (ECLAC, 2014: 44.7 million; World Bank, 2015: 41.8 million), and includes around 600–700 different ethnic-linguistic groups. During the last decades, Latin America became the region with the highest political and legal

(constitutional) recognition of indigenous peoples' rights globally. Since the 1980s, in successive cycles known as "constitutional pluralism", almost all Latin American countries (except Costa Rica and Chile) introduced amendments to their Basic Laws, in which the official recognition of the existence of their native populations and the political rights of indigenous communities was confirmed, including rights to participation, consultation, prior and informed consent, autonomy, and respect for territorial and cultural rights (Anaya, 2005; Assies, 2000; Yrigoyen Fajardo, 2009; Lee Van Cott, 2002; Barié, 2003; Stavenhagen, 2012; Sieder 2016)

Although the constitutional changes introduced in Latin American countries varied in the degree to which they recognised indigenous peoples' rights, all were deeply influenced by ILO Convention 169. It is worth emphasising that the Latin America and the Caribbean region is a territory with the most significant number of countries that have ratified the ILO document - in the years 1990–2018, 15 countries ratified the convention out of a total of 23 states: Argentina, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.<sup>1</sup> All the countries of the Inter-American System also voted in favour of the 2007 UNDRIP, initially except for Canada (against), the United States (against), and Colombia (abstained). Subsequently, the United States declared support for the Declaration in 2010, Canada submitted its endorsement in 2010 and its adoption in 2016, and Colombia submitted an endorsement in 2009. Based on the provisions of the 2007 UNDRIP, representatives of the member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted in July 2016 the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which included relevant sections on the right to self-determination, participation and prior consultations. In the Preamble to that document, it is recommended that the states of the region respect and effectively fulfil their obligations towards the indigenous peoples in agreement and cooperation with the given population (OAS Declaration, 2016, Preamble). Reference to the policy of participation and the process of *consulta previa* appears in many articles of the OAS Declaration, both relating to collective rights (art. 6), cultural identity and cultural rights (art. 18; 28),

the right to one's legislative system and forms of organisation (art. 23), or the right to development (art. 29). These repeat the provisions contained in the aforementioned international ILO and UN documents, recommending the principle of consultation and cooperation between the state and representatives of indigenous peoples "before approving any project that affects their lands or territories and natural resources, in particular in connection with development plans, the use or exploitation of mineral resources, water resources and others" (OAS Declaration, 2016, art. 29). Thus, the norms adopted in the 2016 OAS Declaration meet the growing tendencies to institutionalised involvement of indigenous peoples in the political life of OAS member countries through the participation of their representatives in local government administration and gaining and expanding their cultural and territorial autonomy.

As already mentioned, the *consulta previa* process aims to ensure the empowerment of indigenous peoples following the universal human right to self-determination. In Latin America, the *consulta previa* has become the most crucial instrument for implementing the principles of multiculturalism, contained in several Latin American constitutions (México, Colombia, Perú). Indigenous peoples' mobilisation and their inclusion in the participation policy contributed to the particular level of "plurinational reforms", leading to the approval of the new constitution of Ecuador in 2008 and the Plurinational State of Bolivia in 2009 (Ameller Terrazas and Chávez Rodríguez, 2012; Carrión, 2012). Both became a symbol of decolonisation processes and a high political and legal autonomy gained by indigenous peoples. In turn, the human rights-based interpretation of *consulta previa* is present in the jurisprudence of the Inter-American human rights system, where *consulta previa* is recognised as a fundamental standard and a general principle of international law. The landmark was an unprecedented case of *The Saramaka People v. Suriname* in 2007: the Inter-American Court of Human Rights set forth a rule of law that requires nation-states to obtain the consent of indigenous peoples before authorising any large-scale development or investment projects that "would impair their practice of customs and traditions, that form the basis of their physical or cultural survival, or that would physically displace them out of their territories" (IACHR, 28 November 2007, paras. 128, 131, 133-137). This rule was

reaffirmed in 2012 in *The Kichwa Sarayaku People v. Ecuador* (IACHR, 27 June 2012, paras. 168, 171, 178). Thus, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has held that state parties have a duty not only to consult with the indigenous peoples but also to obtain their free, prior and informed consent for any activity related to their lands, traditions and customs.

We are naturally aware of the fact that, despite the formal recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples in Latin America, the degree of implementation of the participatory policy and the application of the *consulta previa* procedures remains in many cases only at the phase of declarations and recommendations, and therefore constitutes a real challenge for public institutions. Although the principle of the *consulta previa* is to reconcile the interests of indigenous groups with the interests of the state, problems arise from the continuing distrust between governments and indigenous peoples. There is still a significant discrepancy between the commitments made by countries under the ILO Convention 169 on the one hand and legislation, judicial decisions and the local application of participation policies on the other. The destruction of territories, natural resources, and cultural heritage elements belonging to indigenous communities is still being witnessed — a phenomenon comparable to the discriminatory policy of extermination and ethnocide processes characteristic of the 19th and 20th centuries. Worth noting are the desolation and devastation of forest areas and water resources in the southern Yucatan territories of Guatemala; aggressive extractive activities in the Andean territories in Peru and Bolivia; brutal appropriation of territories rich in natural resources (forests, water, minerals) in Chile, Argentina and Brazil; agriculture based on monoculture and transgenic crops in Paraguay and Argentina; and devastating economic and infrastructure activity in the Amazon region. All these actions are justified by the idea of progress and the laws of economic growth, which generally involve certain social costs. The systematic, structural and massive nature of these invasions of indigenous peoples' territories disrupts their lifestyle and their territorial, biological and cultural integrity. The global demand for natural resources that drives their high prices has made Latin American countries dependent on this path of economic development. Thus, the extraction and management of natural resources have become the starting

point of the conflict between macro-economy indicators in the global context and local laws, traditions, and rights. A serious problem is also so-called “false consultations” (“consultas falsas”; “consultas mentirosas”), as they are not implemented according to the specific guidelines and are only a “mask” for the hegemonic and brutal actions of the state (e.g. Tren Maya case).

It is worth noting, however, that both the struggle of indigenous peoples, who have been using existing legal mechanisms and adopting a court trial strategy towards national and international instances, as well as the growing awareness of socio-political changes, both at regional and global scales, is gradually bringing progress in the implementation of the consulta previa process and principles of participation policy. Latin America is precisely the area where we can observe this slow progression and note the positive changes taking place in this regard. By implementing the assumptions of a policy based on the concept of ethno-development (created during the famous Barbados Conferences I and II organised in 1970 and 1979) and interculturalism (at the beginning of the 21st century), indigenous peoples have defined their own aspirations. They have forged a new model of relations with public institutions in which they are not forced to choose between marginalisation and assimilation. New standards of ethnopolitics, based on the categories of human rights, sustainable development, multiculturalism, cultural rights, participation, and autonomy derived from documents issued by international institutions, were put forward in the context of negotiations on a new idea of multi-ethnic and multicultural states. These processes took place in countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia, where the traditional elements of Quechua and Aymara cosmovision (concept of *sumaq kawsay*) were incorporated into the constitutions. Good living (*Buen Vivir*) became a promise and commitment to implement development with respect for harmony between people and various ecosystems. In some countries, decisions taken at the level of national legislative structures contribute to changing current practices and procedures in the field of economic policy and in the projects relating to the protection and management of the indigenous peoples’ cultural heritage, slowly increasing their activity in decision-making processes and their inclusion into the elaboration and implementation of public policies. Particularly during the last few years, the promise of prior

consultation has become an essential instrument of participatory democracy and fuel for indigenous peoples’ institutional mobilisations against massive infrastructure projects and extractive operations. The right to prior consultation and to free, prior and informed consent was invoked in many cases before the Constitutional Tribunals or Inter-American Human Rights Court and has become a point of reference in indigenous peoples’ campaigns against vertical, hegemonic state policy, e.g. in Colombia (the struggle of U’wa people to prevent oil exploitation in their territories), in Ecuador (the cases of the Yasuni National Park, the Huaorani peoples versus Ecuador, or the Sarayaku case mentioned above), in Guatemala (the case of the Sipakapense People’s Council opposed to gold mining), in Brazil (the Belo Horizonte Hydroelectric Central Station case) or in Peru (cases of Nación Wampís, the Conga Project in Cajamarca or the Comunidad Nativa Tres Islas in Madre de Dios, as examples of the struggle against illegal gold mining and devastation of the natural environment). In some countries, special public institutions or departments have also been established, the purpose of which is both to represent the central authority and monitor the implementation of the provisions of ILO Convention 169 and to control the proper course and execution of consulta previa procedures by adapting them to the existing legal regulations, (see inter alia: Group of Prior Consultation within the Ministry of the Interior and Justice in Colombia; National Institute of Indigenous Peoples within the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples in México; Direction of Prior Consultation within the Vice-Ministry of Interculturalism in Perú).

## Participation policy — the challenge for a better future

The significant changes taking place within the global environmental and climate policy are particularly worthy of attention. Although indigenous peoples represent only about 6–8% of the world’s population, they own or use a quarter of the inhabited territories, thus protecting as much as 80% of the world’s biodiversity. This fact is vital in the context of rapid climate change and actions taken at various levels to mitigate and prevent the catastrophic effects of global warming.

The crucial role of indigenous communities in this area was highlighted in the 1990s with the development of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international treaty adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. The UNFCCC entered into force on 21st March 1994 and has near universal membership, with 196 ratifying States. In 2015, the UNFCCC adopted the Paris Agreement, a universal agreement to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions ratified by January 2020 by 187 of the 196 States. The UNFCCC recognised that achieving sustainable development and taking measures around environmental degradation requires the active participation of all sectors of societies. Indigenous peoples constitute one of the main influential “9 actors” indicated by the UN system and thereby exercise a significant role in global climate negotiations. The actions and programmes postulated today are based on the belief that indigenous peoples hold vital ancestral knowledge and expertise on how to adapt, mitigate, and reduce climate and disaster risks on a global scale. For centuries their ability to predict and interpret natural phenomena, including weather conditions, has not only been vital for their survival but has also been instrumental in the development of their cultural practices and social structures. Simultaneously, the dependence of their livelihoods on natural resources makes them the most vulnerable group to the devastating effects of climate changes. Increasing water scarcity, rising average temperatures, and disturbed seasonal rhythms contribute to a decline in plant and livestock production, resulting in food insecurity and deteriorating health. For indigenous peoples, climate change is therefore already a reality that threatens their livelihoods and their way of life (Kronik and Verner, 2010, pp. 5-14; Macchi et al., 2008).

In most Latin American countries, the lack of an institutional framework, both at the national and regional level, has so far prevented more comprehensive and valuable participation of indigenous peoples in official climate policy initiatives. Nonetheless, we observe an increasing conviction that the mitigation and adaptation strategies to climate change implemented by government agencies and NGOs can bring effective results only if they involve all citizens in open, transparent, and participatory decisive processes. In this context, our attention should turn to the interesting and challenging initiative

of Latin America and the Caribbean region countries named “Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters” (the so-called Acuerdo Escazú, signed on 4 March 2018 in Costa Rica). It is the only legally binding agreement derived from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (also known as “Rio + 20” or “Rio 2012”), the first treaty on environmental issues in the region, and a pioneering legal instrument on environmental protection. It is also the first to include provisions on human rights defenders in environmental matters and recognise sustainable development as a right (Acuerdo Escazú, 2018).

The Agreement embodies a commitment to include those who have traditionally been excluded or marginalised or have been insufficiently represented in environmental policy. It aims to combat inequality and discrimination and guarantee the rights of all people to a healthy environment, paying particular attention to people and groups in vulnerable situations (that is, among others, indigenous communities). The agreement’s twenty articles regulate the rights of access to information, public participation and justice in areas as significant as the sustainable use of natural resources, the conservation of biological diversity, the fight against land degradation and climate change, and increasing resilience to disasters. Its objective is to guarantee the right of all people to access information in a timely and appropriate manner, participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives and environment, and access justice when these rights have been violated (Acuerdo Escazú, 2018). The Regional Agreement was opened for signature by the 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on 27 September 2018 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, coinciding with the Annual General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly. For entry into legal force, 11 ratifications were necessary, and were obtained in November 2020 (Acuerdo Escazú has been ratified so far by: Antigua and Barbuda, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Ecuador, Guyana, México, Nicaragua, Panamá, Saint Kitt and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia and Uruguay). It will therefore enter into force during 2021.

Our attention should also turn to Perú, one of the 24 signatory states of the Escazú Agreement. Although the debate on its ratification is still in progress,

at the same time there have been effective initiatives and actions related to the policy of participation and inclusion of the indigenous sector into climate policy. The main subject of discussion was the Framework Law on Climate Change adopted by Perú in 2018, then criticised for not being based on the participatory and proper consultation process with civil society, including indigenous peoples. After months of impasse followed by consultations forced by indigenous organisations, in December 2019 the Peruvian government included a new institution – the Indigenous Climate Platform – into the national Regulations of the Framework Law on Climate Change. The Platform is directly inspired by the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples’ Platform under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. It includes representatives from indigenous peoples’ organisations in both national and local climate-change adaptation initiatives. The Regulations for the final Peruvian climate law included all 10 measures that indigenous leaders successfully lobbied for. The Platform is noteworthy as it is the first of its kind globally and constitutes an avenue for recognising the work of indigenous peoples and their ancestral knowledge in biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation on a global scale (AIDSESP, 2019; Andina, 2019).

## Conclusions

When comparing the ethnopolitics of Latin American countries with the other areas of the globe, we find significant differences in the interest and implementation of the ILO and UN system guidelines. This does not mean, of course, that no measures are taken in African or Asian countries to protect the rights of indigenous peoples. We are witnessing many grassroots initiatives, actions of non-governmental organisations and growing indigenous movements to protect their right to self-determination and active political participation. However, there is still no institutional (national) framework for these activities. In many cases, we can observe minimal legal movement concerning that sector of society, or even a complete lack of any regulations or formal recognition of indigenous peoples’ socio-political status<sup>2</sup>.

The ratification of ILO Convention 169 seems to be crucial for introducing the standards of vertical participation policy. As Latin American nation-states

have historically cut out indigenous peoples from participating in the decision-making processes, ILO Convention 169 created a new legally binding form of dialogue between the government and indigenous communities, and represents a country’s commitment to respect indigenous peoples’ identities, traditions, and rights to land and resources. It is worth noting that ILO Convention 169 is also a guarantee of theoretical and administrative assistance to the countries that have ratified it: state-parties gain access to the ILO supervision and control instruments. They are covered by an assistance programme, thanks to which it is possible to monitor the execution of the Convention provisions into national laws and implement specific political decisions.

Thirty years after its entry into force, there has been no seismic shift, however we can cautiously conclude that some positive changes have taken place from analysing examples from Latin America. Progress in the implementation of ILO Convention 169 and the execution of the UN and OAS systems standards have already benefited Latin American societies. The Convention improved awareness and understanding of the rights of indigenous peoples among the general population and the indigenous communities themselves. The national laws, regulations, and court rulings that derive from it constitute the foundations for more responsible societies and more economically and environmentally sustainable public investments. In an attempt to fulfil the obligations resulting from the Convention and to gain recognition in the international arena, governments are gradually improving their ability to seek consensus through dialogue and partnership, trying first of all to overcome the state of marginalisation of the indigenous sector and the attitude of distrust towards public institutions. The aim is to involve all groups of national societies in transparent and participatory decision-making processes relating to public policy in various spheres. Building trust in public institutions is undoubtedly one of the main challenges facing Latin American and other countries globally. It is evident, however, that they can reap considerable social and political benefits by establishing more effective and trustworthy institutions, whose activities are based on adherence to the consulta previa procedure, and thus strengthen the process of democratisation in, for example, such sensitive and conflict-creating areas as economic or environmental policy.

- 1 The other countries are: Central African Republic, Denmark, Fiji, Luxembourg, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway and Spain (data for September 2020).
- 2 The Central African Republic is the only country in Africa that ratified ILO Convention 169 in 2010. Widespread lack of constitutional recognition or specific legislation persists in almost all parts of Africa. An exception is the Republic of Congo, where on 30 December 2010 the Parliament adopted a law to promote and protect indigenous peoples' rights. The Congolese law was the first of its kind in Africa. In Asia, several countries have legislation that, to some extent, protects the rights of indigenous peoples. These rights are, however, systematically ignored or overruled. The only country that has ratified ILO Convention 169 is Nepal (in 2007); nonetheless, the new Constitution of that country promulgated in 2015 denies collective rights of indigenous peoples and their aspirations for identity-based federalism.

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# 10

## A New Challenge for Latin America: Bringing Civil Society Back In

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### Abstract

This article offers a brief overview of the recent history of democratisation in Latin America. Looking back at the highlights of this process, the essay focuses on the ways in which democratic regimes, over the last forty years, have defined the relationship between the State and civil society. The latter seems to be a very useful resource that is all too often crushed. With particular regard to the rise of populist movements, cases from Latin America can offer interesting insights for European Countries.

### Resumen

*Este artículo ofrece un breve excursus de la historia reciente del proceso de democratización en América Latina. Al recorrer las principales etapas, el ensayo se centra en las formas en que los regímenes democráticos, durante los últimos cuarenta años, han definido la relación entre el estado y la sociedad civil. Este último parece ser un recurso muy útil que con demasiada frecuencia se tritura. Con especial referencia al auge de los movimientos populistas, los casos de América Latina pueden ofrecer perspectivas interesantes para los países europeos.*

In October 2019 various street demonstrations took place in Latin America, especially in Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador. Notwithstanding their simultaneity, these three cases revealed various differences. First, the three countries had three different histories. Moreover, their political backgrounds differed from each other: political systems, party systems, forms of government and, last but not least, political cultures. There were, then, different reasons that led to protests on the part of some citizens of Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador: in every national case, political reasons are interconnected, in certain forms, with social ones. If one had observed the political and social actors who participated in the street demonstrations, one would have realised that they were very different protagonists, as different as the solutions and consequences that put an end to the protests.

In the Bolivian case, protests escalated in opposition to the re-election of President Evo Morales (elected for the first time in 2005 and since then re-elected, thanks to a Constitutional reform), in the presidential elections of 20 October 2019. Once the polls opened, the demonstrations became even more extreme because there was a strong objection to the legitimacy and the validity of the electoral process, denouncing electoral fraud and vote rigging committed by the government – this accusation was corroborated within the report prepared by the Organisation of American States and released 20 days after the elections (OAS, 2019). At that time, the social and political situation of the country seemed difficult to manage: the military asked the newly elected President Morales to resign from his post; the latter stood down but the protests did not calm down. At that moment, in fact, Morales’ supporters took to the streets.

What happened in Ecuador was different. In this context, the protest developed as a result of the choice of President Lenín Moreno to accept more loans from

multilateral international institutions, among them the International Monetary Fund. Since that time, the President has initiated a series of austerity reforms aimed at defending the dollarisation of the economy. Within the structural reform package, one measure led to an increase in the price of gasoline, which had been kept low thanks to a State subsidy. The goal of this reform was to limit the fiscal deficit, however mainly indigenous groups organised a strong wave of protests. After a few weeks of direct confrontation, the President negotiated with those groups until an agreement was reached. In this sense, a complex web of social and political (but non-party) organisations emerged in Ecuador, the interaction of which in the public arena led to a redefinition of policies. A sort of civil sphere, in other words, seems capable of gaining ground in the Ecuadorian public debate.

The development of the Chilean case is different again from that of Bolivia and Ecuador. On the 6th October 2019, an increase of 30 pesos (just under 0.04 US dollar) was applied to the Metro ticket price in the Capital, Santiago de Chile. This increase, decreed by the Ministry of Transport, inflamed tensions, with the streets filling with demonstrators, and the focus of the protests immediately shifting from the issue of the cost of public transport to a more general subject, namely the Chilean development model. This model, according to the protests, had been unable to reduce the great socio-economic fractures continuing to split the country. “No son 30 pesos, son 30 años” (“They are not 30 pesos, they are 30 years”), was the motto that raised global awareness of the political times, the complexity of which was rooted in the transition to democracy – a transition that stemmed from the end of the 1980s. The Chilean crisis lasted no more than two months after it began and ended with a guarantee from the President, Sebastián Piñera Echenique, to begin a constituent process to redefine the terms of the social contract between the political class and citizenship. The distance between the ‘country at large’ and the ‘ruling classes’ was due, amongst other things, to the highly distorting electoral system, which was extremely polarising and, for these reasons, profoundly unable to represent the complexity of Chilean society.

Three different forms of street demonstrations, three different political-economic solutions, three different political systems. What do these three cases have in

common? Apart from the forms they take in certain violent cases, there are two similar traits that should be emphasised in this essay. The first trait illustrates the great activism of social and political groups that more or less tangentially have usually occurred in political reality. These groups represent a kind of 'civil society' that seeks to gain political space in Latin American democracies. The second trait concerns the close connection between questions of a purely political nature and questions of an economic nature. This connection emerges clearly from the same modality in which the democratisation processes have been taking place in the Latin American region during the so-called 'third wave' of democratisation (Huntington, 1991).

The almost simultaneous timing with which these forms of protest developed drew the attention of international analysts to Latin America. Distinct reasons, distinct outcomes, countries with distinct pasts, distinct political systems, distinct political traditions, and distinct government political orientation. In spite of everything, these events (like the protests that broke out in Brazil in 2013, on the occasion of the Confederation Cup) reveal the features of a complex process: that of the reconfiguration of political *milieux*. In this sense, political representation seems, over the last thirty years, to have changed the volume and political space it occupies – in addition to the ways in which it is conceived. In other words, in Latin America, starting from the transition to democracy, a process of re-defining the systems of political representation (in regulatory and legislative terms but also in terms of political culture) began. This evolution, in the first instance, passed through the construction of political institutions, after years of authoritarianism. The structural reforms and the redefinition of relations between the State and citizens, also in economic terms, then commenced. Now, the season of civil society appeared to have come, in search of a place in the process of representation.

A little more than thirty years have passed since the beginning of the process of transition to democracy and, although there has been (and continues to be) a reappearance of instances of authoritarianism, the system of democratic representation seems to have been firmly established in Latin America. Without any doubt, there are national contexts in which democratic institutions do not appear to be strong and others which appear to be under pressure. Nevertheless,

looking at the 'big picture' of the region, one can note a great change from what existed forty years ago. It is clear that there are realities in which the democratic representation today seems more solid and others in which it seems weaker, up to extremely complicated contexts for institutions of political representation. Indeed, Latin America today appears to be a fractured and, in some respects, contradictory reality. In spite of this, this essay aims to provide a reading of the different events and contexts, using historical tools. In fact, using a medium-long term dimension, these events acquire depth and allow us to approach one of the Gordian knots of the social sciences, the relationship between the State and civil society (Rosanvallon, 2006). In this sense, civil society is not a residual category but rather is understood following the suggestions of Alexander (2006) to be part of the discourse of the 'civil sphere' in which many actors participate. In the construction of this huge and broad 'civil sphere', it seems clear that civil society accompanies political processes and, in this specific case, the redefinition of democratic systems.

## Building Democratic Institutions

The transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic forms of government took place in variable geometries and within different timelines from country to country, starting from the early 1980s. It should not be forgotten that there were cases in which there were no authoritarian and/or military regimes (such as in the case of Venezuela) or cases in which there were one-party 'democratic' regimes (such as in the case of Mexico). Beyond the evolution of each national cases, however, a renewed confidence in democratic systems spread throughout Latin America at that time (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995; Mainwaring and Scully, 2009). This confidence had at its basis the certainty that "with democracy one can eat, with democracy one can be treated, with democracy one can educate", following the argument of the Argentine Raúl Alfonsín, as stated when closing the first presidential electoral campaign after the end of the last authoritarian regime – just before he was elected President. In short, the idea is that the democratic political system would not only allow political representatives to be freely chosen but would widely generate better socio-economic conditions. In other words, there was full confidence that democratic

political systems would perform better socio-economically than authoritarian regimes (Heredia, 2006; Ragno, 2018). This confidence, however, clashed with the economic crisis that, starting in 1982, involved the whole region. This is illustrated, for example, by events that developed in Peru, where the end of the military regime was accompanied by the creation of a Constituent Assembly. Writing a new constitutional charter restored new confidence to the young Peruvian democracy which, however, was put under pressure by inflation, a problem that gripped the country throughout the 1980s. At the end of the decade, in fact, Peru entered a hyper-inflationary spiral and culminated in the elections of 1989 where Alberto Fujimori, a political outsider who led a party founded a few months before the consultation, triumphed. With the presidential vote, the citizens of Peru rejected a political class recently returned to power, choosing a candidate who came from a reality outside politics (Cotler, 1986; O'Donnell and Schmitter, 2010).

In this sense, the history of Peru is not entirely different from that of other Latin American countries: one could take for example the case of Brazil with the election of President Fernando Collor de Mello, whose results were connected to the inflationary spiral that the country was experiencing at the end of the 1980s. The case of Brazil, like that of Peru and, in some respects, that of Argentina, highlights how the democratic institutions built after the military regimes were already in difficulty after less than a decade of existence. In a certain way, the leaders of some countries were aware of the dangers that could come from armed forces in power, which still had ambitions for political activity. In this sense, for example, the Presidents of Argentina and Brazil moved to try to protect democratic institutions, promoting the first contacts which then, in 1991, led to the regional integration of the Southern Cone area, under Mercosur (Gardini, 2010). There are, then, cases in which the deterioration of the economy could have been avoided, as in the case of Chile where the transition was channelled through the institutional directions outlined by the 1980 Constitution, with the 1988 referendum and the presidential elections of 1989.

It should not be forgotten that in those years a new spirit of the times paved its way, leading to a new relationship between politics and the economy. In those years, in fact, the idea that the State should have been less involved in

economic activity emerged. A large portion of the States that had initiated neo-liberal reforms moved in this direction. In Latin America, this process had emerged sporadically and with much reluctance during the 1980s. From the fall of the Berlin Wall, however, the principles of free market were affirmed in the Latin American context, centred on the proposals that emerged from the agenda of the so-called 'Washington Consensus'. With variable geometries, most of the Latin American countries initiated reforms that had privatised and, partially, liberalised important sectors of their economy, in order to regain macroeconomic stability after the crises that had exploded in the region throughout the 1980s. These were reforms that aimed at a drastic fiscal discipline (cutting State expenses, services and subsidies), indirect taxation extension, financial and commercial liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, and freedom of exchange rates between currencies (Weyland, 2003; Bulmer, 2006).

The Washington consensus agenda gave Latin American democratic systems a new lease of life for young Latin American democracies, establishing new terms in the relationship between a democratic form of government and citizenship. It was a form of democracy with authoritarian features, which the political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell defined as "Delegative Democracy", i.e., a type of democracy which "rest[s] on the premise that whoever wins the election for the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office" (O'Donnell, 1994: 59). O'Donnell argued, in other words, that this new type of regime was refractory with regard to respect for civil and political rights and the guarantee of political opposition and minorities. The President did not represent the nation, but rather embodied it in order to save the country from economic turmoil.

The emergence of "delegative democracies" showed two fundamental characteristics of the political systems of a large portion of Latin American countries. In the first place, reference is made to that depoliticisation of civil society which, guided by technocratic advances, took place at the end of the 1980s – re-proposing, *mutatis mutandis*, the paradigmatic monolithic representation. This image was accompanied by a profound 'leaderistic' imprint of the political

systems that limit and depress the action of Parliament and, in turn, the strength of the parties. In other words, the mystical connection between the people and their leader was based on instances and contents distinct from those of classical populism, but replicated their forms, modalities and, in many respects, their discourses.

These forms of “delegative democracies” or neo-populisms emerged in much of Latin America, interweaving the neo-liberal structural reforms with the political forms of populism. In this sense, little by little, the young Latin American democracies formally became representative democracies within a non-liberal cultural horizon, also with a tendency to repress political differences by praising the unity promoted by the technicalities of neo-liberalism. The consolidation of this peculiar political form, however, was accompanied in the nineties by certain attempts to subvert the constitutional order *manu militari*: the best known case is that of the coup promoted by a group of army officers in Venezuela, in 1992. At the same time, there were hybrid forms of political regimes that seemed to pass unscathed through to the season of the end of the bipolar world. In Mexico, in fact, the “one-party democracy” led by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (which had held the presidency since the 1920s) was able to embrace the demands coming from the free market without making any changes to the nature of its political regime. In Chile and Uruguay, on the other hand, the democratic-liberal political systems were well structured (Panizza, 2000).

The 1990s ended with the outbreak of violent economic crises in Latin American countries, which corresponded to a paradigm change in the definition of the ‘social contract’: the economic performances, in fact, highlighted the criticisms of the ruling class in solving the political and social problems that the Latin American States were experiencing. The most emblematic examples were the Argentinean crisis of December 2001 and the start of the presidency of Hugo Chávez in 1999, with the beginning of the constituent process that changed the main features of the nature of the State of Venezuela. The crises of the 1990s, in other words, allowed the emergence of a trend that attributed greater powers to the State in relation to civil society: in economic terms, the Brazilian economist (a former minister from the 1980s) Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira defined this new

model of the State as “neo-developmental”: “New Developmentalism is a project, a work in progress. Its contribution to macroeconomics and, mainly, to the exchange rate theory is already reasonably defined, but one way to summarize it is to state that it is based on the right macroeconomic prices which are not guaranteed within the market, especially in an exchange rate policy, that makes technologically competent firms economically competitive. [...] As for the political economy of New Developmentalism, its constituent elements are based on: the thesis that the industrial and capitalist revolution is crucial to the change of each country; the thesis that these revolutions were always carried out within the framework of a developmental strategy; the thesis on the decisive role of class coalitions and the developmental state; and the thesis of the complementary character of developmentalism and social democracy” (Bresser-Pereira, 2016: 261-262).

In the relationship between the State and civil society, a process very similar to that which took place in the economic sphere has occurred in the political-social field. Also within this field, the State and governments have occupied milieux once belonging to civil society, jeopardising issues and actors. Let us consider, for example, the indigenous question and the ways in which it has been addressed since the early years of the 21st century by some Andean Countries (Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador, to name a few). Political spaces once occupied by indigenous Latin American communities, today are coordinated by the State. This is a clear trend, but with nuances that are neither minor nor ignorable. In Bolivia, for example, the issue of indigenous communities has entered the Manichean dynamics of the political debate, generating division and opposition: the point is that the issue has been politicised and used for electoral purposes. In Chile, on the other hand, the process of coordinating the activities of these communities was not subject to politicisation by the ruling classes. The same can be said, for example, of human rights associations in Argentina starting from 2003, when the issue of human rights became central to strengthening the presidency of Néstor Kirchner (Alvizuri, 2012; Sarlo, 2011).

The links between State and civil society and between young democratic systems and economic development that had weakened due to the crises of the 1980s were rebuilt, starting from the neo-liberal, technician and neo-populist

paradigm. The crisis of the last years of the twentieth century also detrimentally affected this neo-populist reconstruction. The State then built new foundations of the democratic form in civil society, occupying the spaces of the latter.

## Has the time for empowering civil society arrived? Some suggestions

The trajectory described so far has again been questioned in recent years. As previously mentioned, the protests in Brazil in 2013 and those in Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador in 2019 are only epiphenomena of the difficulties that the Latin American ruling class is experiencing. This ruling class, in fact, seems to be incapable of interpreting the requests coming from the citizens who, at that time, have begun to organise themselves. The cited epiphenomena, it goes without saying, emerged in moments of great difficulty for the economies of Latin American countries, which from 2013 onwards have experienced a crisis in the international prices of commodities, on whose export a large part of their GDP is based. Furthermore, a strengthening of a self-sufficient civil society, separated from the political class, could give new life to democratic legitimacy, breaking the dependence that the latter has developed on the economic performance of Latin American countries. This is a topic that becomes even more relevant today with the economic crisis triggered by the covid-19 pandemic. How could this be possible? This essay does not intend to give solutions, nor to prefigure scenarios, but rather intends to offer some suggestions of how to strengthen the role of civil society, at a time when democratic systems seem to be definitively consolidated in much of Latin America.

In the first place, the ruling class must be called upon to make an effort to avoid representing the political and social reality of different countries in a monolithic form. Latin American societies today seem very different, with many faces and multiple identities. The spasmodic search for a principle of unity, today, therefore appears not only anachronistic but also coercive. Another aspect of recognising this process of differentiation that happens in Latin American societies should be the end of the “Trojan horse syndrome”. This is a representation of a part of national society seen as the enemy of the Nation and therefore inherently dangerous (Zanatta, 2004).

Secondly, the time for detaching civil society from the influence of political parties has arrived: that is to say establishing the independence of the former from party politics and its dynamics. In a region where populist regimes have found (and continue to find) fertile ground, this means preventing the demands of civil society from being eroded by the Manichean dynamics of politics. Civil society, in other words, could not enter the process of political delegitimisation that represents the political opponent as an enemy. This is a challenge that becomes even more difficult if we consider the situation in Latin America in the times of the covid-19 pandemic (Zanatta, 2013; Arnson and De la Torre, 2013; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

The third and final suggestion concerns the withdrawal of the political world from occupied social spaces in order to rebuild its legitimacy. In this sense, the creation of the Under-Secretariat for the Strategic Coordination of National Thought in Argentina (created in June 2014 during the presidency of Cristina Fernández and dissolved 18 months later during the presidency of Mauricio Macri), was one of the most emblematic examples of political occupation of distinctive spaces, quintessential for civil society development. On the contrary, the State should now promote spaces for the politicisation of civil society independent of political parties, to reflect the complexity of the society within Latin American contexts and to make democratic systems more complex. Moving in this direction means promoting an independent press free from the political system, strengthening institutional checks and balances between independent political powers and authorities, and promoting synergies between public institutions and private entities (for research and education, for example).

In a certain way, the path of the Latin American democracies could be seen as interesting when analysing the contemporary European reality. Firstly, the Latin American experience tells us how populist political movements have been able to hybridise democratic regimes (in some cases liberal democratic regimes, in others authoritarian democratic ones). This is significant above all for some European countries that have seen an increase in the electoral success of populist movements in recent years, albeit with due distance between Latin American and European populisms. A second aspect, intimately linked to

the first, concerns party democracy. Faced with the end of party democracy in Europe (Mair, 2013), the Latin American cases must be observed carefully. In Latin American countries, in fact, only rarely have well-institutionalised political parties been the protagonists of political regimes. Others, in fact, have been central players, such as political leaders, trade unions, and the military, which are just some examples of these actors. Where parties have assumed a certain centrality, they have not been characterised by a particularly strong level of institutionalisation. This, once again, reveals the contribution that civil society could and, in some respects, should have in defining the political space. The sphere of civil society, whether understood in economic, political and cultural terms, plays an important role as an implicit actor in enacting the checks and balances of Latin American political systems, especially in the case of populist regimes. In fact, in the presence of a continuous delegitimisation and limitation of legislative and judicial powers, a strong and independent civil society seems to be able to become the counterweight of an overwhelming executive power. If for Latin American political realities this process may seem to be a sort of *deja-vu*, for a large number of European Countries it seems to have become a novelty over the last thirty years. The weakening of political parties and the excessive personalisation of political systems of the 1990s have, in recent times, shown the strength of populist movements and leaders (both 'right-wing' and 'left'). These movements have been united by an ability to hybridise liberal democratic systems and by a critique (harsh and ferocious, in certain cases) of European institutions.

These are, to a certain extent, some of the suggestions that governments can follow to bolster civil society in Latin America, although there are important differences within the regional context. This enforcement is becoming increasingly necessary also in light of the criticisms that democratic systems are experiencing, not only in the region but more generally, on a global level. Today it is difficult to imagine a democracy without political parties and, as Reinhart Koselleck argued, it is difficult to imagine political parties without presupposing a reality in which opinions have a relative normative value (Koselleck, 1972). If civil society is one of the arenas where opinions are formed and transformed, it is precisely thanks to the strengthening of its contribution

that it would be possible to create opportunities to stem the impoverishment of democratic political institutions, in Latin America and beyond.

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# 11

## Nation-State Building in Colombia: Reflections and Lessons Learnt in a Time of Crisis<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Nation-state building in Colombia took place in a scenario of disputes between illegal, armed actors, political instability, an insurgent struggle, drug trafficking and social inequality. This complicated the implementation of models of national cohesion, state modernisation and the establishment of democracy – projects that in many cases had an impact only in urban centres and were totally unknown in the rural periphery. However, there were also policy proposals that sought inclusive and transformative reforms of the status quo. This essay presents the Colombian case as an example of the current European moment. The Colombian expansions and contractions in crisis scenarios planted responses to armed conflicts, an invaded politics of neopopulism and the rise of fake news. In this sense, migratory processes, the emergence of separatist policies and the rise of extremist and populist parties in Europe reflect the previous experience of Colombia, a country that turns its crises into a vehicle to project itself into the future.

### Resumen

*La construcción del Estado nación en Colombia se efectuó en un escenario de disputa entre actores armados ilegales, inestabilidad política, lucha insurgente, narcotráfico y desigualdad social. Ello complejizó la puesta en marcha de modelos de cohesión nacional, modernización estatal e instauración de la democracia, proyectos que en muchas ocasiones sólo tenían repercusión en los centros urbanos, pero eran absolutamente desconocidos en la periferia rural. No obstante, también aparecieron propuestas políticas que buscaban reformas inclusivas y transformadoras del statu quo. Este ensayo plantea el caso colombiano como ejemplo para el momento actual europeo. Las expansiones y contracciones colombianas en escenarios de crisis plantaron respuestas a los conflictos armados, a una política invadida de neopopulismo y al auge de las fake news. En dicho sentido, los procesos migratorios, la aparición de políticas separatistas y el auge de los*

*partidos extremistas y populistas en Europa pueden tener una experiencia previa en Colombia, un país que convierte sus crisis en vehículos para proyectarse hacia el futuro.*

## 206 Introduction

At present, when hyper-globalisation seems to be cracking apart, not just as a result of the covid-19 pandemic but also because of the degrading effect of neoliberalism on sovereignty and democracy, it has become necessary to think once more about the classic model of the nation-state.

Looking to the past gives some clues to the retroversion of the idea of globality and the recovery of discourses that demand the return of the sovereign power of nations. At the end of 2019, in the southern Latin American cone, there were strong popular demonstrations where different sectors demanded transformations in state models. Donald Trump won and Brexit passed with clear speeches that revived national borders. In Mexico, Manuel López Obrador moved foreign relations to a lower position than national issues. And, at the beginning of the millennium, proposals of 'Socialism of the 21st Century' seemed to gain ground with speeches that sought to recover the strength of the state, in addition to raising the flags of 'Bolivarianism' in opposition to imperialism. Indeed, the covid-19 conjuncture was the trigger that accelerated our return to the classic theories of the state.

In Latin America, complex and critical scenarios have provided the foundations on which nations have been built. Throughout the 20th century, countries south of the Rio Grande witnessed dictatorships, massacres, deepening inequality and widespread poverty. In the case of Colombia, political instability, violence, insurgent struggles, drug trafficking and even geographical conditions have led to the emergence of nation-state models that have been used to maintain functionality, cohesion and legitimacy, as the pendulum swung between success and failure.

For this reason, this essay aims to briefly analyse the complex process of building the Colombian nation-state against a background of permanent crisis

scenarios, with the aim of complementing understanding of the changes and challenges that Europe and the world are seeing today. In this way, Europe can learn from Colombia's experience as it dealt with actions undertaken at a time of breakdown in the social order, when the political scene became restricted to a small number of voters and political participation was nullified. As an alternative, the search for a new constitutional political pact, together with dialogue as an option for resolving armed conflicts, revived hope, although that did not necessarily mean resolving substantive problems. The rise of fake news that the world has witnessed also has an episode in the recent history of Colombia that is worth considering as it can be taken as instructive for Europe. The Colombian plebiscite reminded that taking a proposal for a political pact between antagonistic actors to the polls can cause the misrepresentation and manipulation of the electorate. Campaigns that are not based on proposals but on implausible statements, as Colombia experienced, are a threat to the stability of the democratic system. Consequently, this essay carries out a review of the history of the South American country as an example of validity for Europe as it rethinks the processes involved in the formation of its nation-states in light of cases like the Colombian one.

## Divided country and the rise of violence

Ever since Colombia gained independence, it has struggled with a great number of problems that have affected its development. Undoubtedly, the deepest problems that hampered the country's modernisation were its geography and lack of natural resources. Of course, these factors had consequences in the political sphere. For a long time (deep into the 20th century), some areas had almost no connection with the capital city, and as a result they created their own worlds. In most of the small villages, these worlds ended literally a 'few miles' away from the last dwelling. Moreover, there were no direct connections between Bogotá and other important centres, which led to the isolated development of most Colombian regions (Safford and Palacios, 2002).

In these years of 'solitude', a two-party system including the Conservative party ('Partido Conservador' – PC) and the Liberal party ('Partido Liberal' – PL) was formed, which upset the future progress of the country even more;

19th century Colombia was subject to a series of regional and countrywide civil wars caused by the leaders of the above-mentioned political groups and their supporters. The first attempts to overcome this fragmentation came with Rafael Núñez, who supported the creation of a new constitution that was finally adopted in 1886 (and remained in force until 1991).

Nevertheless, the country remained fragmented well into the 20th century. Inadequate road and rail networks made it impossible for the central government to exercise power effectively in more distant departments. Since it was unable to control the entire territory of the state, negotiations took place between Bogotá, the departments and local leaders (caudillos, gamonales). It was they who supported the above-mentioned political parties in the regions. In return, they expected to receive political and personal advantage. This created an extensive and sophisticated clientelist network, which did not, however, contribute much to the building of a unified state. Rather, Colombians identified with the region or (more usually) the political party they supported (Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1984).

The importance of interconnectedness and a working connection has become increasingly recognised in Europe as well. The European Economic and Social Committee's report on populism states that, "The general causes explaining populism are further reinforced by the territorial fragmentation affecting rural and suburban areas. Their populations feel cut off from economic development and public infrastructures for transport, health, care for the elderly, education and security" (European Union, 2019). Of course, there are other reasons for the rise of populism in the world, and geographical fragmentation is just one of them.

Nevertheless, Colombia managed to create two political parties that ruled the country at different times (and sometimes for long periods of time). Although they waged bloody civil wars against each other, with few exceptions, the country was not ruled by a military dictator, as was the case in other Latin American countries or Europe. How was this possible? Both parties had learned a great deal from history. Consequently, they not only defined themselves against the experience of the colonial period, but also wanted to

prevent political excesses associated with the later policy of Simon Bolívar. In fact, the two political parties controlled each other and, when necessary, jointly eliminated the extremes in their own ranks.

This system lasted until the turn of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1930, the era of Conservative hegemony (1885–1930) came to an end and the period called the Liberal Republic (1930–1946) began. It was during the Liberal Republic that the system began to change due to both internal and external factors. Above all, it was a fight between modernisation of the country and tradition.

Attempts at transforming Colombia are connected to the presidency of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934–1938). He was labelled a communist by some of the Conservatives, though he considered himself to be an adherent of the British economist John Maynard Keynes and a fan of the New Deal policy of US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He supported state intervention in the economy and the separation of church and state. At the same time, he wanted to improve education, achieve greater democratisation (through the extension of suffrage), develop a system of social rights and solve the long-standing problem of land tenure (Tirado Mejía, 1986).

This programme was relatively radical for Colombia, so the president antagonised most of the 'Partido Conservador' and moderate Liberals. However, a militant wing began to form in the 'Partido Liberal' itself, led by Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, for whom even these reforms were too moderate. The radical wing of the PL became more frustrated when even these 'halfway reforms' were later suspended. This added fuel to the fire of political discontent, and ushered in the era of violence.

The country was once again at a crumbling point; the well-established system that had been consolidated by a long-running Conservative government began to disintegrate. Other influences played a role, such as the prevalence of socialist ideas amongst Liberals, and the Frankist tendencies in the mainstream of the PC (Henderson, 2001).

The situation was radicalised just before the 1946 presidential election, when the two wings of the PL began to fight each other. Gaitán, as a Liberal

dissident, brought something new to Colombian politics and antagonised most political representatives. He was one of the first politicians to bring the crowd into politics. Through his populist policies, he created conflict between the country's political elite and the discontented population. Gaitán wanted to go much further than Alfonso López Pumarejo; he wanted to carry out much more radical land reform, and called for changes in the social sphere. As a result, he gained immense popularity in the lower strata of society, which he used against the established political elites (both Conservative and Liberal).

The 1946 elections marked an important milestone in Colombia's history. The Liberals were defeated by the Conservatives. As a result, clashes between Liberal and Conservative supporters took place in rural areas. Gaitán managed to gain power within the Liberal party and tried to change the PL from a traditional force into a much more radical force (Sharpless, 1978; Pécaut, 2012). In addition, in the next presidential election he had a great opportunity to become president. However, this did not happen, and in April 1948 this promising Liberal candidate was assassinated. His death had far-reaching consequences for Colombia. It provoked an outbreak of violence, especially in Bogotá but also in other cities, as the poor lost their hope in the future. Political violence continued in the countryside, with some of Gaitán's followers fleeing to the countryside and to the mountains, where they began 'resistance' activities. These groups formed the basis of later left-wing paramilitary organisations. Colombia was once again plunged into violence, from which it has failed to break free.

## The weakness of the state and the growth of drug trafficking

During the second half of the 20th century, the Colombian state showed itself to be extremely weak. It tested the classic Weberian postulate that understanding the monopoly of violence is a feature of state institutions. Nation-building was seriously affected by violence. Direct confrontation did not affect all regions equally. While some vulnerable areas suffered the deaths of many of their inhabitants, others did not; their residents simply followed events through the press or on the radio.

After the dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957), the political elites concentrated their response on delegitimising the military regime so as to implement a model of shared and systematically rotating bipartisanship called the National Front. It began in 1958 and ended in 1974. The alliance did not deal with the country's structural problems; on the contrary, it presented an image of a closed political system, in which the participation of other political forces was impossible. In addition, Bogotá's centralised regime gainsaid all plurality of thought and confronted its political adversaries with all the might of the state. This resulted in a *casus belli* that led to the creation of the communist guerrillas who, taking advantage of the international context, aligned their discourse with the ideological disputes of the Cold War and the Cuban Revolution. The warmongering narratives gained strength and promoted discourses based on the symbolic friend/enemy distinction, which was used to corral Colombian society into a counter-insurgency struggle (McClintock, 1992; Robin, 2009).

In addition to this turbulent panorama were the unresolved problems of land tenure and the agrarian question. Illicit crops bringing huge profits began to appear across the country. Thousands of people were forcibly displaced to the big cities, and inequality became even more visible (Hernández Sabogal, 2015). Bogotá's population grew from 648,000 inhabitants in 1951 to 3,983,000 in 1983, and Medellín's from 358,189 citizens to 1,468,089 in the same period. This uncontrolled expansion led to the establishment of marginalised or peripheral neighbourhoods. The inhabitants often encountered state violence, and this in turn led to more social unrest and further victimisation.

These internal processes of forced migration, in a country with regions as heterogeneous as Colombia's, marginalised the newcomers to the cities and condemned them to be foreigners in their own land. This process of transhumance undermined the power and cohesion of the concept of nation within the communities, but simultaneously enhanced the concept of region. To put it another way, the new 'foreigners' reinforced the construction of local identities (Uribe de Hincapié, 2000).

This had its epicentre in the big cities, but extended to the countryside and meshed with sophisticated international networks. Cocaine began to be

shipped and flown abroad on such a scale that in the 1980s and 1990s it came to replace coffee as Colombia's main export (Duncan et al., 2005). Criminal organisations also attempted to fill the gaps in the state's capacity to rule and actually launched campaigns to legitimise their actions. At the same time, they offered security and stability in an environment where the administration of justice was conspicuous by its absence. They entered politics, participating in electoral campaigns and taking advantage of corruption to protect their actions. The second half of the Colombian 20th century called into question the idea of the imagined nation that was the subject of dispute between state, counter-state and parastatal actors, who were engaged in a kind of competition of sovereignties (Uribe de Hincapié, 2000), where the exercise of force seemed to be the only mechanism of action. The state was incapable of pacifying society, so instead, it perpetuated unresolved promises that made Colombia a failed country.

## Constitution of 1991 and the Havana Agreement

The systematic assassination of social leaders at the hands of drug traffickers and the very erosion of society motivated the majority of political groups to demand that the country's political charter be amended. Thus, in 1991, a constitution was promulgated that depicted a social state under the rule of law, where minorities were recognised and tools were provided for the defence of the environment. The institution of the family as the nucleus of society was strengthened, states of siege were regulated and limited, and human rights were incorporated into the legal system. All this was aimed at improving the country's governance and empowering civil society, which was seen as an important element in the maintenance of the nation. Based on those postulates, an attempt was made to consolidate a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation that, instead of homogenising human and cultural expression, recognised and defended it, at least in constitutional terms, as a source of identity. It broke with the paradigm of the two-party system and made possible the opening up of the country to new political groups and movements that could enter the electoral arena simply with the endorsement of the citizens. It also recognised the need to give greater autonomy to the regions, and it decentralised some

administrative and economic activities, though without breaking the bond of authority held by Bogotá.

The 1991 constitution was, then, a normative body that, to prevent further erosion of the concept of nationhood in Colombia, proposed to order and include the actors who demanded greater political participation and respect for human rights, and with it, to pacify the country. As a result, Colombia left behind the destructive use of states of siege; stable institutions were created that contributed to the system of checks and balances, and channels of trust were created between civil society and the state. The constitutional pact marked an institutional advance with few precedents in the country's history, and it is still preserved and defended today.

At the same time, the guerrilla struggle intensified, and a parastatal actor arrived to add greater power to the armed conflict: the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia. This group began generating processes of victimisation in zones that were supposedly collaborating with the guerrilla cause and committed hundreds of massacres that justice has yet to clarify.

Presidential candidate Alvaro Uribe took advantage of Colombia's troubles in 2002 – a year marked by a failed peace process with the guerrillas, an increase in insurgent attacks, the US fight against terrorism, and the invasion of traditional communication channels to reach the masses. Uribe privileged direct contact with the electorate. He discredited the traditional political parties and sold himself as an independent candidate free of any party ties, resulting in a victory in which he secured 54% of the vote (Cardona Zuleta, 2016). His government proposed a model of 'democratic security'. The Colombian army was provided with enormous military resources accompanied by a warmongering rhetoric that was manifested in attrition against insurgents. Critics of his presidency, in turn, pointed to the violation of human rights by state entities and the killing of hundreds of young people by the army. They were counted as casualties in combat, and described as 'false positives', which, according to the latest judicial investigations, numbered more than 6,400 victims.

A new radical nationalism evoked an idea of a uniform people and charismatic leadership dynamics, which was complemented by the search for an external

enemy at a time of discursive conflict with other states in the region, in an attempt to realise a longed for and elusive social cohesion. An excellent example of this was the country's diplomatic crisis with Venezuela and Ecuador in 2008, caused by the bombing of Ecuadorian guerrillas in Ecuador. The breakdown of diplomatic relations and the dispatch of troops to the borders marked an escalation of actions and confrontational language that was unprecedented in recent times. His actions demonstrated the populist condition in which he framed his government.

At the end of his term, and with unbeatable popularity ratings, Juan Manuel Santos presented himself as the continuity candidate. Curiously, his discursive policies towards the conflict were inconsistent. He proposed a new process of dialogue with the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas. After more than four years of talks, an agreement was reached that called for demobilisation, justice, reparation and guarantees of peace in one of the continent's longest-running conflicts. However, the political actors in the country reacted with antagonism. The radical right's leader Uribe Vélez would not accept what he called the surrender of the state's interests to a terrorist group, while the centre and centre-left saw an opportunity for reconciliation and the end of confrontation. This polarisation was reflected in the polls, and in a close-run consultative plebiscite, an agreement was rejected (Laengle et al., 2020).

The vote took place in an international context that saw the rejection of the European Union by a majority of the British people and the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency. The anti-FARC propagandists promoted the idea that the agreement represented the absolute defeat of the Colombian state, the surrender of power to the insurgents, and impunity for the guerilla leaders. At the same time, President Santos was likened to a Castro-Chavista politician who was being led by the Latin American left. A friendly enemy methodology, already practised in Colombia, was added to the narrative.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Without a doubt, Colombian historical processes have many lessons to offer Europe in the midst of the renaissance of populist and nationalist discourses that are currently being lived. First, the history of the Latin American country reminds us that it is still possible to win elections by formulating policies of fear that reproduce Cold War speeches. Of concern are the European extremist movements that, after the economic crisis of 2008, resolved to return to the friend/enemy dilemmas that confront and divide society for clear electoral purposes, such as what happened in the Colombian plebiscite. Just as the La Havana accords suffered countless attacks using the tools provided by information and telecommunications technologies, Europe could face electoral processes that could take away the very essence of politics from the polls and turn them into real battlefields. Second, Colombia taught the world that plebiscites can also be lost, however laudable their cause may seem. In this South American country, few of those who proposed and drafted the agreement for the termination of the conflict imagined a scenario like the one that occurred. Burdening the population with the responsibility of approving a legal, technical and rather complex framework, with more than a thousand pages, can cause interpretations of it to be disguised, erroneous positions to be taken and other objectives to be sold. And thirdly, without a doubt, Colombia reminds us that political representation remains in force as an instrument for discussing and approving normative frameworks of such high complexity, involving matters of public order, security and coexistence.

The Colombian nation is an unfinished and fractured project that has experienced periods of expansion and contraction throughout its history. The geographic fragmentation that was strongly expressed during the 19th century and most of the 20th century created a disconnection between Bogotá and the regions. These populations were isolated from economic and political development, thus fostering the rise of local leaders (caudillos and gamonales). Undoubtedly, one lesson for Europe is that treating regions as territories with different levels of importance can lead to a rupture with the community project and the emergence of local powers that erode cohesion. A lack of political dialogue and the regular use of armed forces to solve the country's ills can

lead to a deterioration of the nation-state model. The processes analysed herein represent an accumulation of experiences designed, for the most part, by the political elites, who, in search of maintaining the status quo, adapted institutions, practices and discourses to the demands of the time. Many of these policies involved the taking up of arms, for example, in the years of La Violencia, the Rojas dictatorship or the Uribe government. Interestingly, Rojas and Uribe presented themselves as outsiders who could heal the nation, so they gained strong popular support.

However, nation-state building in Colombia has experienced successful periods where political aspects converged to promise not merely discursive but also legal (though not entirely structural) transformations. The presidency of Carlos E. Restrepo, immersed in the Conservative hegemony, sought convergence with the Liberals who felt his defeat represented his disappearance from politics. The end of the Conservative government and the arrival of the Liberal Republic represented a transition towards the incorporation of social rights and the expansion of democracy that accepted divergences in the national model, and, at the same time, their incorporation. The National Front, despite consolidating an exclusively bipartisan model, brought to the negotiating table the political parties that had clashed during the period of La Violencia. The 1991 constitution allowed for the structural renewal of democratic principles in a nation bled dry by conflict and drug trafficking. Moreover, at the same time, it opened doors to the manifestation of primary constituent power – that is, the people of Colombia expressing themselves through the ballot box. It began a national debate in which the need to change bullets for votes was recognised, and it culminated in the Havana agreement (and the end of the longest lasting conflict in the Americas). The agreement closed the long 20th century in Colombia and ended the distinction between friend and enemy that the country had inherited from the Cold War.

Not recognising the diversity of political aspects, and on the contrary, accentuating the differences, can cause a rupture of the social order in Europe, as we saw in the analysis of the history of Colombia. Preventing the democratic game, as happened in the Colombian Conservative Hegemony, with the period of La Violencia, the period of the National Front or the onslaught of drug

trafficking, can lead to much more violent reactions that open wounds that are difficult to heal. Just as Colombia experienced, these ruptures of the social order must be avoided by Europe to avoid cases of neo-populism, which, like the case of this South American country, were used as a pretext to centralise its power.

The history of nation-state building in Colombia is of relevance in a world that distrusts politics as a mechanism to resolve its deepest contradictions. In periods of crisis, such as the one that occurred in the 1990s when guerrilla, paramilitary and drug trafficking attacks were raging, Colombian society turned to politics, understanding it as a means of evoking unity in divergence based on irrefutable human plurality (Arendt, 1997).

Like Colombia, Europe should remember that it is essential to achieve a refoundation of its political project in the face of terrorism, isolationism and immigration. To return to the ethos of politics for Europe would mean facing up to the challenges and not resigning themselves to snowballing.

Colombia re-founded its state and invited the people to rethink their nation on the basis of a legitimacy that was only granted by the people through a new constitution. This did not necessarily imply the disappearance of Clausewitz from the scene, but it did introduce a discursive change that demonstrates the importance of Latin American political processes for today's world.

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HEALTH

# 12

## Conceptions of childhood development in Latin America: Between the Modern and Relational Perspectives<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This essay presents a critical analysis of the definitions and uses of the categories *childhood* and *child development* by the academic research and policymaking communities in Latin America. Regarding the conceptual definitions of these categories, a proposal is presented that considers two perspectives, which are also found in other regions of the world, including Africa, North America, Asia-Pacific and Europe: (i) the *modern* one, which draws on economic and neuroscientific concepts and proposes a conception of a universal and vulnerable child subject, whose developmental trajectories depend on specific care practices from their direct caregivers, which in turn determine her future as a productive citizen in terms of human capital; and (ii) the *relational* one, which draws on proposals from the social studies of childhood disciplines and proposes a conception of variable childhoods, not necessarily vulnerable, with multiple possible trajectories influenced by several interdependent individual, social, cultural and political factors. The first perspective is usually the one that is considered hegemonic and that nourishes the narratives of different government, NGOs, and multilateral organisations in the design of policies for children. The second perspective is usually less visible and restricted to the academic field of research in social and human disciplines. The tensions and disputes between both perspectives are usually raised by representatives of the *relational* perspective, while those who favour the *modern* perspective do not usually participate or contribute to such debates. However, during the last decade, in Latin America dialogues between both perspectives have begun to take place that could lead to a new stage of exchanges that overcome dogmatic positions and contribute to making visible the great diversity of childhood experiences. In this sense, the Latin American region stands out for its great production of relational proposals that could influence the increase in deconstruction of the modern categories *childhood* and *child development*, with the capacity to positively and productively impact the design of a new generation of policies for children based on the visibility of multiple possible experiences and trajectories.

## Resumen

En el presente ensayo se presenta un análisis crítico de las definiciones y usos de las categorías infancia y desarrollo infantil por parte de las comunidades de investigación académica y de diseño y aplicación de políticas para la infancia en América Latina. Con relación a las definiciones conceptuales se presenta una propuesta que contempla dos grupos de perspectivas, que también se verifican en otras regiones del mundo incluyendo África, América del Norte, Asia-Pacífico y Europa: (i) el grupo de la perspectiva moderna, que abrevia en conceptos económicos y neurocientíficos y que propone una concepción de un sujeto infantil universal y vulnerable, cuya trayectoria de desarrollo depende de cuidados específicos de sus cuidadores directos y que determina su futuro como ciudadano productivo en términos de capital humano; y (ii) el grupo de la perspectiva relacional, que abrevia en propuestas de los estudios sociales de la infancia y propone una concepción de sujetos infantiles variables, no necesariamente vulnerables, con múltiples posibles trayectorias influenciadas por diversos factores individuales, sociales, culturales y políticos, interdependientes. El primer grupo suele ser el que se verifica como hegemónico y el que nutre las narrativas de diferentes propuestas gubernamentales, de ONGs y de organismos multilaterales en el diseño de políticas para la infancia. El segundo grupo suele estar menos visibilizado y restringido al ámbito académico de investigación en disciplinas sociales y humanas. Las tensiones y disputas entre ambas perspectivas suelen ser planteadas por representantes del grupo relacional, mientras que el grupo de la perspectiva moderna no suele participar o contribuir con tales debates. No obstante, durante la última década, en América Latina comenzaron a producirse diálogos entre ambas perspectivas que podrían propiciar una nueva etapa de intercambios que supere posiciones dogmáticas y contribuyan con visibilizar la gran diversidad de experiencias infantiles y de desarrollo infantil que los estudios sociales de la infancia vienen construyendo a través de sus investigaciones. En tal sentido, la región latinoamericana emerge como un escenario de gran producción de propuestas relacionales que podrían influir en el incremento de procesos de deconstrucción y problematización de las categorías infancia y desarrollo infantil, con capacidad de impactar positiva y productivamente en el diseño de una nueva generación de políticas para la infancia basadas en la visibilidad de múltiples posibles experiencias y trayectorias.

*“Soy Maradona contra Inglaterra anotándote dos goles”  
(I am Maradona against England scoring two goals)*

Eduardo Cabra, Rafael Arcaute and René Pérez, “Latinoamérica”, 2010<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

The categories of *childhood* and *child development* that are dominant in Latin America correspond to modern<sup>3</sup> perspectives, which tend to represent childhood development as a much more fixed, less dynamic and variable phenomenon than what is suggested by the research evidence in several disciplines. This is due in part to not sufficiently considering the levels of plasticity and individual sensitivity to environments in the context of complex temporal dynamics that involve social, cultural and political phenomena. In this sense, the modern notion of integration considers different individual and contextual aspects – even of a cultural order – but not in the relational sense of their multiple interdependencies. Regarding the political meanings that are derived from modern perspectives, proposals are put forth that naturalise the dependence on traditional family structures, and the stimulation of competences oriented to an adult model adapted to economic productive proposals that are also hegemonic. This would imply an underestimation of the transformative value of the developmental contexts and symbolic exchanges that different cultural systems propose to care for and generate learning opportunities and social inclusion of children and adolescents, which is closer to a developmental relational perspective<sup>4</sup> (e.g., Lerner, 2018).

The objective of this short essay is to share a series of reflections on how different sectors that deal with studying childhoods and/or generating policies for them in Latin America conceptualise the categories *childhood* and *child development*. As it is a broad subject, with several decades of study by different scientific disciplines and social actors, the intention is not to carry out a review of the subject, but rather to place the focus on some central aspects that could be productive for three purposes: (i) to contribute to interdisciplinary and intersectorial efforts that genuinely and in a deconstructed manner contemplate the diversity of childhood experiences; (ii) to incorporate into discussions on

childhood studies the political meanings that the tensions between modern and relational positions imply; and (iii) to highlight the opportunities that Latin America provides as a rich context for exploring particular social constructions of childhoods and childhood policies, since modern and relational perspectives coexist in a context in which the relational perspectives question the hegemony of the modern ones. As in other regions (i.e., Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America) there is a need to problematise and deconstruct the modern categories. This is necessary in order to advance in the construction of knowledge and policies that address conceptions and practices of socialisation that do not align with the hegemonic versions, which propose a reduction that makes invisible a broad variety of social constructions (Arndt, 2020; Carli, 1999; Gibbons, 2020; Rabello de Castro, 2020; Rodríguez, 2017; Yelland and Saltmarsh, 2013). Specifically in Latin America, one of the more unequal regions, this need deepens to the extent that non-hegemonic versions tend to be concentrated in social groups oppressed by the political and economic systems that generate inequity in the region (CEPAL, 2018).

For this intellectual exercise, I will use two arbitrary categorisations. The first distinguishes between the modern and relational perspectives on the categories of *childhood* and *child development*. This differentiation has the disadvantage of reducing the eventual variety of perspectives to two, which I select because they are the most prevalent and differentiated in the contemporary literature of childhood studies. With such a simplified comparison, I seek to highlight the obstacles posed by the modern hegemonic perspective, which need to be addressed in order to reduce invisibilities and inequities. The second categorisation seeks to differentiate two contexts in which the categories are built and used: (i) that of the academic construction of knowledge, and (ii) that of the application of academic knowledge to design and implementation of policies<sup>5</sup>.

In summary, I will analyse how modern and relational perspectives on *childhood* and *child development* categories are considered in the processes of construction and application of academic knowledge in Latin America, with respect to promoting the visibility of other ways of conceiving childhood and childhood development. Beyond the fact that this brief essay pretends to be an

exercise based on an arbitrary analytical proposal that operates as a reduction of complexities, I believe that the value of such a simplified approach is to contribute to making visible some aspects that I consider central in my practice as a researcher, which presents me with the following questions: How modern and/or relational are my own research proposals and interpretation of results? How do I consider the political implications of the results of the research in which I participate? What criteria and categories should I keep and which others might I need to transform or replace? Finally: How can I contribute to the concerted effort that I am proposing in this essay?

## Modern and relational

The modern perspective of childhood proposes the idea of a sensitive child, and is particularly interested in differentiated characteristics of the adult world, such as innocence, fragility and dependency. The contemporary version of this perspective is usually illustrated by the use of economic and neuroscientific narratives – that are not necessarily supported by all the neuroscientists – to sustain the existence of early windows of opportunity, which determine the economic adult productivity or human capital (Lipina, 2016a; Smith et al., 2016). The origin of this notion dates back to the emergence of new socialisation institutions, to the progressive intensification of affective bonds between parents and children, and to the differentiation of girls and boys from adults, in the European seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this modern version of childhood, it is assumed that the fragility and dependency of young girls and boys require specific care that must be carried out by an adult who is usually associated with a mother-woman<sup>6</sup>. In turn, this attribution implied in the first place the generation of roles and expectations, which were later incorporated into norms that regulated, regulate and will continue to regulate kinship relations, care and socialisation practices (Arndt, 2020; Salazar Pérez et al., 2017; Villalta and Tiscornia, 2014).

During the 20th century, three important and complementary events occurred in the anthropological construction of the notions of family, kinship, and childhood that implied the need to revise the modern notions of these and other related categories. First, during the first half of the twentieth century,

different Western anthropologists began to explore societies beyond the West. Through these explorations, they began to find that different peoples and social groups developed different kinship systems, family relationships, and childcare practices, which generated norms that established rights and obligations different from those of the West. Second, starting in the 1960s, different Western anthropologists began to review their own societies based on the contributions of anthropological studies at the beginning of the century. At present, this perspective considers childhood as a social construction that combines experience, biological factors, social, historical, demographic categories and a *locus*<sup>7</sup> for human rights and political interventions (Canosa and Graham, 2020). Third, in the last 30 years the field of social studies of childhood began a critical movement against the hegemony of North versus South onto-epistemological perspectives in the notions of *childhood* and *child development* (Salazar Pérez et al., 2017; Rabello de Castro, 2020). Over time, in addition, the scientific and technological innovations of contraception, assisted reproduction and surrogacy were incorporated into such approaches, which contributed to deconstructing the modern categories of *childhood*, and family and kinship relationships (Villalta and Tiscornia, 2014). As a consequence of this, the norms and policies associated with such forms of social organisation and socialisation practices also began to be reviewed. In this perspective, the categories of *childhood* and *child development* are necessarily relational, insofar as any aspect of development is signified by its interdependence with social and cultural phenomena and processes of specific social and historical moments. Consequently, in the relational perspectives, categories of *childhood* and *child development* explicitly carry political meaning since they are associated with the norms and regulations accorded to them (Carli, 1999; Gibbons, 2020; Gibson et al., 2015) – aspects that tend to be invisible in the hegemonic modern perspectives.

In current-day Latin American studies, relational perspectives are usually centred in the social research of childhood, informed by proposals from researchers from the disciplines of anthropology, history and sociology. On the other hand, modern perspectives largely persist in proposals by researchers from the disciplines of economy, epidemiology, medicine, and psychology. In

general, researchers who represent the relational perspective question those who assume modern positions characterised by universal conceptions of childhood and child development that (i) are oriented to create and sustain an economic child subject, (ii) do not contemplate the diversity of local experiences, and (iii) are based primarily on economic and neuroscientific concepts. For their part, those who assume the modern hegemonic position do not usually generate or participate in discussions aimed at deconstructing categories of universal character. However, in recent years there have been exchanges between researchers representing both perspectives, which could denote the beginning of a productive dialogue in terms of interdisciplinary problematisations (Castorina, 2016; Lipina, 2016b; Smulski, 2018; Terigi, 2016). In fact, it is possible to find relational perspectives in the context of cognitive psychology and neuroscience, which can be interpreted as hybrids (Cantor et al., 2019; Doebel, 2020; Lerner, 2018; Lipina, 2016b; Smulski, 2018). This turns the Latin America context into an original and favourable space to build necessary dialogues between both perspectives that contribute to (i) generate processes of deconstruction of hegemonic categories in hegemonic contexts of knowledge building and policy design for local childhoods, and (ii) avoid dogmatic-minded silos in both perspectives that hamper the needed deconstruction processes where it needs to be done (i.e., in the modern-hegemonic scenario).

## Uses of knowledge

The tensions between the two perspectives are often clearly expressed when analysing the policies for childhood that are proposed in the region, whether from government agencies, multilateral organisations, NGOs and think tanks – a trend that is similar in other regions in the world, as in the case of academic research systems. In such settings, the hegemonic position tends also to be the modern one aligned with the narratives of The Lancet journal series on child development. This approach is based on insights produced in the context of some pediatric epidemiology, economy, developmental psychology, and neuroscience approaches<sup>8</sup> – however not all the approaches in these disciplines necessarily adopt the hegemonic perspective. In such an approach, early childhood is usually considered to be the period between birth and six

years of life, characterised by a condition of sensitivity for the development of the nervous system and consequently for cognitive and emotional, or socio-emotional development. The first stage of this period is also often characterised as a window of opportunity to implement universal-like stimulation, education and protection policies in which families and early childhood care and education centres are the main social actors involved. On the other hand, the policy proposals suggested in this context usually include intervention programs aimed at providing and stimulating what poverty produces as deprivation in the family. In general, these proposals are not concerned with questioning the mechanisms that generate the structural barriers that the hegemonic political-economic systems produce. In any case, although possible adaptations of the intervention programs are considered according to the differences between social groups, the categories *childhood* and *child development* refer to a typical and universal profile. In this way, for example, it is possible to propose the adaptation and application of an intervention program generated in one society to another, because it is assumed that developmental needs are the same<sup>9</sup>.

In such a context, neuroscientific knowledge is often used to justify a single period of determination of people's adult productivity. A brief history of this construction is useful to deepen the problematisations of the categories of *childhood* and *child development* proposed by the modern perspective. The emphasis is currently on the first thousand days, or the first three years of life, as determinants of human development during the rest of life, a characterisation which was fundamentally constructed based on sources of empirical evidence generated in the context of health sciences (Pollit and Pérez-Escamilla, 2014). An example of this is a study carried out in Guatemala between the years 1969 and 1977, which involved more than two thousand children and their mothers, who were at food risk because they lived in poverty. The results indicated that a nutritional supplement with high protein and energy content had a greater impact on different indicators of health, education, cognition and later adult productivity in those children who received it during their second and third year of life (Martorell, 1995). Another source of evidence comes from an analysis published in 2010 carried out in 54 low- and middle-income countries in which a drop in children's height scores relative to standards was

identified between their birth and 23 months of life, with no evidence of further deterioration between the following 24 and 59 months (Gomes Victora et al., 2010). A third source of evidence comes from different studies carried out over several decades, which clearly show the importance of preventing maternal health problems during the prenatal period to prevent some growth disorders in their children (Sperlich, 2020).

Another phenomenon that gave rise to the first thousand days characterisation is a critical period during which it is necessary to make the greatest efforts to ensure food and stimulation for children's learning, before this stage ends. This proposal maintains that after this supposed window of unique opportunity closes, it will no longer be possible to generate changes in what has not been previously nourished or stimulated adequately<sup>10</sup>. In other words, this notion assumes that what has not been achieved or what has been affected by poverty is irreversible at the neural level and cannot be modified, suggesting a conception of human development in which there are central determining events subject to a dynamic with few or no degrees of freedom to change. The origin of this misconception involves neuroscience insofar as its proponents combined and generalised the information from different types of studies<sup>11</sup> (Bruer, 1999). Such an operation proved highly effective in continuing to influence hegemonic rhetoric on human development. Some examples of this can be found in the communication carried out by different media, multilateral organisations, NGOs, foundations of private companies<sup>12</sup>, and less and less in academic and scientific dissemination communities. Two examples from multilateral organisations illustrate this. In early 2016, the following text appeared in the "Our Priorities" section of the UNICEF-China website:

*Children are more vulnerable to poverty than other age groups. They experience poverty differently to adults/other household members and their needs vary at different ages. Investing during critical periods, particularly in early childhood, is crucial to combat child poverty. Time-sensitive processes of development/maturation mean that the outcomes of child poverty are profound, long lasting and irreversible, e.g., malnutrition in early years prevent development of essential brain connections for learning, adversely affecting education and, later in life, earning potential. Therefore, reaching children at the right time with the right things is*

critical. Integrated early childhood development yields massive long term returns on investment (UNICEF, 2016).

Another example is that of the considerations on early childhood development published in 2019 in one of the sections of the blog “Primeros Pasos” (“First Steps”) of the Inter-American Development Bank:

*The first 1000 days of children’s lives are essential to ensure the maximum development of their potential. The investment made in this period is not only necessary to guarantee rights, it is also cost-effective ... The brain of children is the most precious thing they have, product of genes, but also of the environment. A combination of the innate and the acquired. It begins to develop before birth, and grows during the first 1000 days and up to 5 years. During the first 1,000 days, neurons can form up to 1,000 new connections every second. This will not happen again in life. The type and quality of such connections will determine the cognitive, social and emotional development of boys and girls, and even their current and future well-being (Pérez, 2019)<sup>13</sup>.*

The distance between these misconceptions and the evidence warrants reflection on two important questions. The first refers to in what way the available scientific evidence supports generalisations about the influences of poverty on the emotional, cognitive and social development of children and adolescents. The second refers to how and why misconceptions are generated, disseminated and sustained. Regarding the first question, the available evidence in the contemporary developmental psychology and neuroscience literature shows that from conception and throughout life, the nervous system is organised and modified based on the dynamic interaction between genes and the environment in ways that each individual develops their existence in a particular manner. In turn, these relational developmental processes are modulated by a great diversity of molecular, cellular, behavioural, social and cultural mechanisms. During such development there are moments of maximum organisation of different brain functions that are called critical periods, which are not necessarily fixed with respect to the moment in which they occur or to the neural networks that they involve. Evidence from the development of sensory processes (i.e., hearing and vision) shows that if there is an alteration in experience, both positive and negative, during certain periods this will

tend to be permanently incorporated into the function, affecting subsequent opportunities for reorganisation in relation to subsequent environmental demands<sup>14</sup>. In the case of the organisation of more complex processes such as cognitive, emotional, and learning processes, such organisation depends on the progressive integration of different neural networks, which process more than one modality of information simultaneously, and develop at different times during at least the first two decades of life. In such cases, we speak of sensitive periods, which differ from critical periods in that the alterations during these periods can be subsequently modified by different interventions during socialisation with variable levels of effort (Lipina, 2020a). Finally, the state of the art of the knowledge on the potentiality of changes of sensitive periods and its relation to developmental trajectories in typical neural development is still under research in the realm of neuroscience (Gabard-Durman and McLaughlin, 2020).

With respect to why a notion of a single early determination period (i.e., one thousand days) of human development is wrongly held, it relates to motivations that are not necessarily scientific. Many of these assumptions still need to be problematised (Penn, 2019; Smith et al., 2016). However, it is possible that to some degree this question lies in the economic notions that underly the concepts of human capital, since this category is usually associated with the skills that should be developed during early periods of development in diverse ways. The concept of human capital, which is not usually deconstructed in the context of the early childhood development sector, can take on different meanings depending on the economic theory considered. For example, it is not the same to consider the relationships between the members of a family as processes of supply and demand of behaviours and exchange of information (Becker, 1981) – in which a child is considered an economic subject (Gibson et al., 2015) – as to consider cognitive and non-cognitive capacities as plausible to be affected by processes of social inequality (Sen, 1981). The type of conceptual proposals based on the integration of biological and economic determinisms simply reduce and eliminate multiple complex and relational factors that do not assume single determinations (Lerner, 2018).

The misconceptions in the use of the notions of critical periods and irreversibility also merit an analysis about which social representations are proposed around the protection of early childhood in different societies, from the modern perspective. As long as terms such as “income” and “productivity” are emphasised as expectations of normative development, it could be proposed to develop a society oriented primarily to consume and work that could exclude those who do not reach these specific achievements (Gibson et al., 2015). In other words, it would be closer to a proposal of reproduction of inequality than to the construction of equity. In such a context, there does not seem to be enough room for the great diversity of possible experiences of socialisation and family relationships that characterise the diverse social groups that inhabit Latin America.

The relational perspective also faces some tensions and the need to review some assumptions, such as, for example, deepening the problematisations of: (a) some aspects of the social construction processes of the differences between children and adults; (b) the theoretical constructions of the categories of children agency and voices, whose multidimensionality and relational condition are very broad; (c) the methodological difficulties in implementing participatory research methods and their ethical and political implications; and (d) the conceptualisations of childhood proposed by relational models of developmental psychology, among others disciplines (Canosa and Graham, 2020). A particular concern in this perspective is the reproduction of dichotomous oppositions (e.g., agency/structure; nature/culture; being/becoming; global/local), which have permeated the field of social studies of childhood perhaps as a consequence of its emergence during periods of greater hegemony of the modern perspective (Prout, 2011). Therefore, in the relational perspectives of childhood studies it is also necessary to implement deconstruction processes of categories related to childhood and child development that do not adequately consider the interdependence of multiple phenomena at different levels of analysis. One example of this type of efforts is the need to consider the neural aspects of development beyond the unique lenses of bio-political approaches, which tend to consider them only as a narrative aimed at controlling children and pushing them and their families to the adaptation to the capitalistic environments.

## Reflections for the future

The construction of an interdisciplinary relational perspective that feeds the design and implementation of policies according to deconstructed and flexible notions of *childhood* and *childhood development* is an important and pending task. This task requires collective efforts that need to overcome modern notions that prevent making visible inequities and social constructions that are necessary to involve in policy design, and to co-design and co-implement research projects aimed at co-building knowledge that honours the complexity and multidimensionality of relationships that characterise human development. Concrete actions that policymakers can consider presently are (i) the inclusion of scholars and representatives of modern and relational perspectives in any technical meeting, report, media brief and design/evaluation of interventions to foster the visibility of the broad diversity of local childhoods and developmental trajectories, (ii) the planning of agendas that devote time for deconstruction of concepts and processes to make explicit the needs and resources of diverse target populations, and (iii) the reconsideration of criteria of financial support to guarantee the sustainability of these diverse actions and policies.

In such efforts, it would be necessary to promote the implementation of different actions in the context of an academic and political agreement that could generate debates that consider the possibilities and limitations of different perspectives, as well as the voices of those on whom processes and evolutions are assumed: the children, adolescents and adults involved in any specific socialisation practice. Such debates should include the consideration not only of the assumptions, the practices and their political implications, but also the methods used to build knowledge and the eventual innovations that enable combining approaches that today might seem inappropriate or difficult to accomplish, such as ethnography and artificial intelligence. The political translation of relational versions of childhood and childhood development also requires the construction of methods that are implementable and available for policy purposes. It is in itself a relational process that requires time and transformation of several social and scientific barriers. In the course of this kind of effort, tensions should function in a constructive, dialectical sense, as opposed to one in which the dynamics of interaction are based on the imposition of a

single perspective. This could be a plausible scenario for studies on childhood in the coming years in Latin America.

Finally, regarding the questions I asked in the introduction to this essay, I consider that in the research on the associations between child poverty and neural and psychological development in which I am involved, I have advanced on the path of a deconstruction of the modern categories of childhood and development. On one hand, adopting a Relational Developmental Systems meta-theoretical perspective (Lerner, 2018) helps us to visualise reductions and to appropriately consider the diversity of child development trajectories. On the other hand, as a consequence of the above, we will feel uncomfortable with modern perspectives, and realise that we still have outstanding debts in respect to the effort of contributing more to the relational perspectives.

## Endnotes

- 1 I thank Dr. Eric Pakulak from Stockholm University for his English edition, and constructive criticism and suggestions, which have undoubtedly improved the quality of this short essay.
- 2 [Calle 13 - Latinoamérica \(English subtitles\) - YouTube](#)
- 3 In this essay, modernity refers to particular socio-cultural norms, attitudes and practices associated with the development of individualism, capitalism, urbanisation and an exaggerated belief in the possibilities of technological and political progress.
- 4 These approaches emphasise that changes during development occur through mutual relationships between individuals and their contexts, in a way that (a) individuals contribute to the nature, scope and rhythm of the changes in their contexts; (b) social relationships, institutions, and ecological events regulate changes in individuals; and (c) equifinality and multi-finality characterise the dynamics of these changes.
- 5 The choice of academics relates to a specific interest in analysing this sector. This implies that in the chosen approach, I am not considering other sectors that also contribute to both aspects, the construction of categories and the design of policies.
- 6 Fragility and dependency as a notion of childhood does not necessarily relate to the fact of a long developmental time course of the brain and the consequent needs of caring that this implies. The issue here is that the modern approach assumes a unique and universal interpretation of how to fulfil such needs.
- 7 Locus is a psychological term that refers to the perception that a person has about where the causal agent of the events of their daily life is located. It is the degree to which a subject perceives that the origin of events, behaviours and her own behaviour is internal or external.
- 8 <https://www.thelancet.com/series/ECD2016>
- 9 Las familias de Jamaica aprenden jugando - Primeros Pasos (<https://blogs.iadb.org/desarrollo-infantil/es/lfamilias-de-jamaica-aprenden-jugando/>)
- 10 In this context, *adequate* means follow the modern universal stimulation proposals.

- 11 Basically, it is about research that implemented animal models to analyse critical periods of certain visual functions, as well as the impact of early exposure to complex or deprived contexts; and human models of production and pruning of synaptic contacts from post-mortem samples of people of different ages. In any case, it is crucial to understand that evidence from animal studies clearly differentiate between critical and sensitive periods, and that the problem in this case is about a misinterpretation.
- 12 Online Event: Private Sector and Early Childhood Investment - The Dialogue
- 13 Original text in Spanish; English translation by the author of this essay.
- 14 In other words, the level of neural organisation does not define or determine alone the developmental trajectories, since this depends on a complex dynamic of interdependent interactions between individual and contextual factors, among which are included the normative proposals for parenting of each society. The reduction of complex phenomena such as childhood development to a single level of organisation (e.g., the neural), without taking into account the variability of possible trajectories that prevent anticipating them, is a decision (construction) preceded by categorical and political assumptions.

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# 13

## The Fight against Childhood Obesity: What can Europe learn from Latin American Experiences?

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### Abstract

This essay engages with the problem of children's overnutrition, which is currently at the centre of a global debate. Having conducted a survey of the innovative measures enacted in several Latin American countries concerning nutritional labels on the front packaging of food items, we call for greater attention from researchers and institutional decision-makers based in Europe to learn from strategies developed in Latin America. Better knowledge of concrete experiences from the region, could be helpful in restricting the consumption of so-called *junk food* by children in general.

### Resumen

*Este ensayo trata de la sobrenutrición infantil, que actualmente está en el centro de un debate mundial. Después de haber realizado un levantamiento de las medidas innovadoras adoptadas por las autoridades de varios países de América Latina sobre las etiquetas nutricionales, señalamos que las estrategias desarrolladas en esta Región deben ser cuidadosamente analizadas por los investigadores y tomadores de decisiones en Europa. Un mejor conocimiento de las experiencias llevadas a cabo en América Latina podría ser útil para restringir el consumo de comida chatarra entre los niños en general.*

## 244 Introduction

In this short essay, we explore the problems raised by children's overnutrition, the more severe form of which is known as 'obesity', and some of the various strategies adopted to fight these challenges. We begin by summarising the seriousness of the situation at the global level, then list the main international law instruments for the promotion of healthy diets, followed by an analysis of experiences from Latin America, as this region has seen innovative developments. Several Latin American countries have enacted legislation and issued regulations concerning nutritional labels on the front packaging of food items in order to raise the awareness of consumers, including children and their parents. Essentially, there are two types of mechanisms: i) the first, probably more effective method, based on octagonal black labels that resemble a stop sign with warnings printed in white, indicates that, for certain dangerous ingredients, predetermined thresholds have been exceeded; ii) the second mechanism is based on a traffic light-style graphical system. We argue that the European Union, as well as single European states, whose action on this subject seems largely unsatisfactory, should look carefully at the experiences of Latin American countries and may take inspiration from the region's models.

### The global problem of children's overnutrition and the need to fight against it

As clearly noted in the 2019 UNICEF report "Children, food and nutrition", children's malnutrition currently comprises three key strands. Alongside undernutrition and the so-called hidden hunger (which amounts to deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals), one can find overnutrition, the more severe form of which is known as 'obesity'. The same year, the FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO jointly produced the report "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World: Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and

downturns", noting that "no region is exempt from the epidemic of overweight and obesity". This means that if overweight used to be a problem circumscribed to wealthier countries, this is no longer true. As shown in the UNICEF Report, quoting a scientific study (Ng et al., 2014), the augmentation in overweight is driven by different facets: the most important is the "rising intake of calories, a shift in what children are eating from traditional to modern diets, urbanization, and falling levels of physical activity". Overnutrition is deemed to be a key factor in the increase of diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in all age groups.

Several international instruments have underlined the need for immediate action to combat childhood obesity. Among these, of great significance is the "set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children", adopted by the WHO in 2010. The first and most important of these recommendations directed to states was to "reduce the impact on children of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt" (collectively referred to as 'High Fat, Sugar and Salt' or HFSS foods). Nowadays, the regulation of food marketing has become a pressing need in every country. There is no doubt that stricter rules are required, with the aim of covering not only marketing via television and traditional media, but also and mainly commercialisation through social media. Furthermore, we are approaching the middle of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025). This initiative is rather ambitious, since it aims to eradicate malnutrition in all its forms (undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight or obesity). It is linked to a certain extent with some of the goals contained in the UN Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda endorsed in 2015 (Hawkes and Popkin, 2015). So far neither of these strategies has been particularly successful, especially if one looks at Europe. With regard to the aforementioned recommendations and their impact in European countries, it has been shown that they have a poor implementation record (Garde and Xuereb, 2017). According to the data presented by the Regional Office for Europe of the WHO in a report released in 2018, although "a growing number of countries recognise marketing to children as a problem that requires intervention", unfortunately too many countries have not taken any action, and the majority of existing policies are

limited in their scope or are not as effective as might be desired. On the other hand, in the framework of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, nation states, regional political and economic communities, as well as the global community, are called upon to translate the commitments made through the 2014 Rome Declaration on Nutrition into SMART commitments for action. Only one European state (namely Italy) has made this kind of commitment (in practice, the objective was simply to establish a multistakeholder and multisectoral National Working Group, to implement national and international actions to fight all forms of malnutrition). Figures are also not extremely high in the rest of the world: only two Latin American countries – Brazil and Ecuador – have bound themselves to certain actions or policies.

### Innovative legal mechanisms developed in Latin America

Speaking of Latin America, something remarkable happened in the region with respect to the regulation of food marketing, which has become a significant challenge in a society where children are continuously exposed to targeted advertisement. The basic idea underlying the regulatory approach is that the reduction of children's exposure to food marketing of unhealthy food is decisive for the prevention of obesity (Smith Taillie et al., 2019). The measures adopted by national legislators try to address the problem by prohibiting some entrepreneurial strategies, or – more often – implementing techniques that are susceptible to discourage children, and their parents, from buying HFSS foods and beverages. Sometimes, the enforcement of such measures may seem too restrictive. For example, in 2018 the Supreme Court of Chile acknowledged that the decision to impose a fine on a retailer for the sale of chocolate in the form of Santa Clause was lawful, since it was grounded on a statutory provision that declares illegal the use of commercial hooks to convince children that certain products are tastier. The provision that food labels cannot feature cartoon mascots, designed to attract young consumers, obeys the same logic. Indeed, Chile has been one of the more active countries in this domain since it became aware of the seriousness of the problem for its citizens. As highlighted in a scientific study published in a world leading medical journal, in 2015 Chileans were the biggest consumers of sugary drinks *per capita* (Popkin and Hawkes, 2016).

Other important measures implemented in Chile include regulations connected to the packaging of HFSS foods. Usually, pre-packed foods display nutritional information on the back or side (and, very rarely, on the front) of the packaging. Labels provide consumers with a great quantity of information concerning the nutrient content of the food contained in the package. In theory, information on food package labels should help consumers make better dietary choices (Turley and Thompson, 2016, p. 47). However, only a small number of consumers reads the traditional labels, and an even smaller number of these really understands them, due to the fact that the analysis of the data is rather complex. In an attempt to overcome this obstacle, Chilean decision makers introduced an obligation to include specific octagonal black labels (which resemble a stop sign) on the front of the packaging with warnings printed in white, indicating that certain thresholds have been exceeded. There are four types of warnings, easily understood by the potential buyer of the product: «alto en sodio» (high in sodium); «alto en calorías» (high in calories); «alto en azúcar» (high in sugar); «alto en grasa saturada» (high in saturated fat). The system has been successful, at least with respect to the consumption of sugary drinks. A favourable outcome has been reached, as highlighted in an article published by *The New York Times* on 11 February 2020, titled “Sugary Drink Consumption Plunges in Chile After New Food Law” (Jacobs, 2020). Based on a scientific study by Smith Taillie et al. (2020), the article reported that: “Four years after Chile embraced the world's most sweeping measures to combat mounting obesity, a partial verdict on their effectiveness is in: Chileans are drinking a lot fewer sugar-laden beverages [...]. Consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks dropped nearly 25 % in the 18 months after Chile adopted a raft of regulations that included advertising restrictions on unhealthy foods, bold front-of-package warning labels and a ban on junk food in schools. During the same period, researchers recorded a five percent increase in purchases of bottled water, diet soft drinks and fruit juices without added sugar” (Jacobs, 2020).

The Chilean model has been emulated – but not perfectly copied – by other Latin American countries, notably Peru and Uruguay. Both these states have taken inspiration from Chile's experience, and decided to adopt the black octagonal signs on food packaging. Although the basic idea is the same, there

are some slight variations. In Peru, the lettering on the signs does not include the category “alto en calorías”. Beside the expressions “alto en sodio”, “alto en azúcar”, and “alto en grasas saturadas”, a new warning has been introduced: “contiene grasas trans” (contains trans fats, or trans fatty acids). In addition, white rectangles are featured below the octagons with further information. For the first three octagons, the corresponding information indicates “evitar su consumo excesivo” (avoid excessive consumption), whilst a different formulation is used for the octagon related to trans fats, simply indicating “evitar su consumo” (avoid consumption). In Uruguay, instead of the expression “alto en”, the term “exceso” (excess) is used. The term can be combined in four ways, i.e. with the words: “grasas” (fats); “grasas saturadas” (saturated fats); “sodio” (sodium); and, “azúcar” (sugars).

Recently, regulators in México, who had been considering for several years adopting a front-of-pack labelling system for food and beverages (Kaufer-Horwitz et al., 2018), enacted similar measures. The measures came into effect on 1 October 2020, although the government has authorised companies to use provisional stickers until 31 March 2021. The Mexican system consists of five octagons within which appear the following warnings: “exceso calorías”; “exceso azúcares”; “exceso grasas saturadas”; “exceso grasas trans”; “exceso sodio”. Other information, specifically devoted to children, must be visible on the packaging, in the shape of a rectangle:

- a) when sweeteners occur among the ingredients of a product, the manufacturer must include the warning “contiene edulcorantes, no recomendable en niños” (contains sweeteners, not recommended for children);
- b) when the product contains added caffeine, the manufacturer must include the warning “contiene cafeína evitar en niños» (contains caffeine, avoid for children).

In February 2020, Colombian health authorities also announced the introduction of compulsory labels on the front of food packaging. Similarly, the labels to be used in Colombia contain the expression “alto en”, combined with three possible expressions: “azúcares añadidos” (added sugars), “sal/sodio” (salt/

sodium), or “grasas saturadas” (saturated fats). Nevertheless, these labels show two significant divergences when compared with the ones derived from the Chilean experience: firstly, their shape is circular; and secondly, they include a visual representation of the dangerous ingredients.

An alternative system of front-of-package labelling is the one established in Ecuador since 2015, the so-called traffic light nutritional labelling. With respect to the levels of fat, sugar and salt, the colour red stands for high, yellow for medium, and green for low. There is no unanimity on the assessment of the said system. Some authors conclude that this kind of label “is an effective mechanism for communicating information about the fat, sugar and salt in processed food” (Freire et al., 2017); others, who focused on the consumption of carbonated soft drinks, did not find evidence that the additional nutritional label for packaged foods implemented in Ecuador affected households’ buying habits (Sandoval et al., 2019). Indeed, a serious problem related to this approach is the fact that the presence of just one green label, or even one yellow label, may lead the consumer to think that the food is not so dangerous for health. Nevertheless, the traffic light-like graphical system has also been adopted by Bolivia.

Brazil is thinking of establishing its own system of front-of-package nutrition labels. The national regulatory authority (ANVISA) has indicated a preference for the use of a magnifying glass, accompanied by the warnings “alto em” (high in) and “açúcar añadido” (added sugar), “gordura saturada” (saturated fat) or “sódio” (sodium). At the time of writing, a bill devoted to introducing front-of-package nutrition labels has been presented to the Parliament.

## The situation in Europe and the opportunity to be inspired by Latin American models

As described above, legal models are circulating in Latin America and regulations have been transferred from one country to another. Are these models also susceptible of being taken up in Europe?

What has Europe done to tackle the same problem in recent years? So far, the European Union as a whole and individual states (within or outside the EU)

have generally preferred soft tools, such as recommendations or mechanisms that promote a self-regulatory code. The latter have often proven illusory, however they have achieved excellent results in specific instances. As an illustration, in Norway the “Food and Drink Industry Professional Practices Committee” declared that the particular design of an item intended to be used as a sweets dispenser constituted marketing that was especially aimed at children under the age of 13, thereby infringing the self-regulatory code of practice. In addition, under Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, media service providers are encouraged to develop codes of conduct regarding inappropriate audio-visual commercial communications accompanying or included in children’s programmes. The directive is targeted towards foods and beverages containing nutrients and substances with a nutritional or physiological effect, in particular fat, trans-fatty acids, salt/sodium and sugars, the excessive intake of which is not recommended.

Some initiatives have recently been taken at the local level. For example, a number of municipalities have recognised the urgent need to act. In London, a ban on junk food advertising throughout the entire Transport for London (TfL) network entered into force on 25 February 2019. Some months later, the Council of one of the London Boroughs (Haringey) enforced an identical prohibition. On that occasion, one of the cabinet members stated that “obesity leads to significantly worse health outcomes and puts immense pressure on local health services”.

Existing policies and regulations are insufficient to address the challenges being faced now in this sector. Difficulties are exacerbated by the impact of social media apps and influencers on children and adolescents, as demonstrated by various academic articles. Interesting conclusions emerged in 2018 from the Council of the European Union document titled “Healthy Nutrition for Children: The Healthy Future of Europe”, which highlighted a range of critical issues. In particular, the Council of the European Union “noted with concern that the various approaches to regulation of marketing existing at local, regional or national level may not be as effective as regulation of cross-border marketing for the whole EU, bearing in mind the cross-border dimension of the problem, particularly in the digital media”.

Although the aforementioned document demonstrates an increased awareness, the situation in the European Union, and more generally in Europe, remains largely unsatisfactory. As previously argued by one of the authors elsewhere (Palmieri, 2020), European decision-makers should look carefully at the experiences of Latin American countries that have adopted the various strategies described above. Historically, Latin American legal systems have been deeply influenced by various European civil traditions, and it would now be advisable that innovations springing from Latin American countries spur action in Europe.

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# MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

# 14

## “Ningún Ser Humano es Ilegal” Migration and Human rights in 21st Century Latin America (and Europe)

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### Abstract

This essay offers an argument for why we, in the words of Don Pedro Casaldáliga, need to ‘humanise humanity’. Departing from the gruesome reality refugees and migrants experience on the U.S.–Mexico border, it is argued that even perceived progressive politicians can be villains in practice, especially when they are playing at xenophobia to gain popular support. With a critical look at these practices — also with a comparative eye on Europe — it is suggested that self-styled civilised nations are about to lose their own humanity when dealing with migrants and refugees. The essay also highlights the, perhaps little known, fact that without the contribution of Latin American states, the Charter of the United Nations would probably not have had any reference to human rights. Here are lessons to be learned of how (not) to meet migrants and a call from Latin American thinkers on how to construct a more humane treatment of what is commonly understood as ‘the other’.

### Resumen

*Este ensayo proporciona un argumento de por qué nosotros, en las palabras de Don Pedro Casaldáliga, necesitamos “humanizar a la humanidad”. Partiendo de la espantosa realidad que experimentan los refugiados y los migrantes en la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México, se argumenta que incluso los políticos percibidos como progresistas pueden ser villanos en la práctica, especialmente cuando están jugando en el rol de la xenofobia para ganarse el apoyo popular. Con una mirada crítica a estas prácticas, y con una visión comparativa a Europa, se sugiere que las naciones que se dicen ‘civilizadas’ están a punto de perder su propia humanidad cuando tratan con migrantes y refugiados. El ensayo también destaca el hecho, quizás poco conocido, de que sin la contribución de los estados latinoamericanos, la Carta de las Naciones Unidas probablemente no habría tenido ninguna referencia a los derechos humanos. Aquí hay lecciones para aprender cómo (no) tratar a los migrantes y un llamado de pensadores latinoamericanos sobre cómo construir un tratamiento más humano de lo que comúnmente se entiende como “el otro”.*

“I want to affirm with emphasis: *this world is possible*. The social order we seek is not a utopia. It is a world where political life is understood in terms of active participation by the governors and the governed in the realization of the common good. We do not believe in consensus by force. We are accustomed to hearing, wherever human rights are being violated, that it is being done in the name of higher interests. I declare that there exists no higher interest than the human being.”

– Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Nobel Lecture, 1980.

## Introduction

When the 2-year-old Valeria Martínez Ramírez and her father Óscar drowned in the Rio Grande River between Mexico and the United States in 2019, newspapers all over the world published the gruesome image. Numerous front pages showed father and daughter head down in the water – with Valeria’s arm around Oscar’s neck. Even the Vatican’s *L’Osservatore Romano*, which can hardly be described as a breaking news outlet, placed the photo in colour on their front page under the headline “Immense sadness” (*L’Osservatore Romano*, 2019). The resemblance to the photo of the 3-year-old Syrian refugee that died on the shore of Turkey was shocking. Now, the Americas had its own ‘Alan Kurdi moment’.

Valeria and Óscar’s ‘crime’ were that they had escaped a hellish reality in their native El Salvador, trying to find a humane future in the Promised Land of the United States of America. Perhaps their misfortune was that their timing was wrong.

In recent years the border between Mexico and the U.S., as well as the border between Mexico and Guatemala, have been heavily militarised. This is a direct result of extreme populist xenophobia towards refugees and migrants, especially in the United States. Thus, making the long journey to seek refuge from war-like violence and extreme poverty in Central America, hoping for security and protection in the U.S., has become an even more lethal action. Numbers show that Valeria and Óscar were among the staggering number of 497 human beings that lost their life at the U.S.–Mexico border in the year 2019 alone. This is a 23% increase in border deaths since 2016 (IOM, 2020).

## Welcoming the Migrant

Those who actually do make it across the borders alive do not experience a warm welcome, either in the U.S. or in Mexico. New policies of ‘pushback’, placement of migrants in overcrowded detention centres, militarisation of borders personnel, and intentional family separation are among the responses from both the U.S. and Mexican governments. The constant attacks on migrants by presidential candidate, and later president, Trump, have been well-documented in the U.S. and international media. Countless reports from NGOs calling for a humane treatment of migrants, point to the same. Just to illustrate the magnitude of the issue: in 2019 “69,550 migrant children” were placed in detention centres in the U.S. (Sherman et al., 2019).

Much less attention has been given to the actions of Mexico, both on the country’s northern and southern borders. In June 2019 – at the exact time of the deaths of Valeria and Óscar, the Mexican president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, reinforced the border between Mexico and the U.S. with a massive 15,000 troop deployment. One can only wonder about the possible link between this deployment and the death of Valeria and Óscar. Those who tried to escape soldiers in an attempt to cross the Berlin Wall from former East Germany, might relate to the image of Mexican troops trying to prevent human beings from reaching safety in the United States.

López Obrador’s stationing of soldiers was a response to Trump’s threat of imposing high tariffs on exports from Mexico to the U.S. (Graham, 2019).

Business interests and *realpolitik* therefore trumped the freedom of human beings. The higher interest here was not the common good or the human being, as called for by Pérez Esquivel in his Nobel lecture quoted above. Rather, human dignity and migrant rights were set aside to prevent economic loss in Mexico.

Simultaneously to the June 2019 crackdown on the northern border, Mexico also tried to seal its southern border with Guatemala and Belize, posting 6,300 National Guard troops in an effort to stop migrants from Central America entering Mexican territory. Step by step, Mexican authorities found themselves in a situation where they were literally playing a cat-and-mouse game with the migrants. This situation reached a climax in January 2020, when the Mexican National Guard became involved in direct clashes with migrants on the border with Guatemala. In the confrontation, Mexican authorities tear-gassed the migrants, including children. Perhaps Mexico had learned from U.S. authorities, who in November 2018 applied the same tactic against migrants – alas the U.S. also used rubber bullets – on the border between the U.S. and Mexico.

Portrayed by many as a humane and progressive politician, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s treatment of migrants and his dealings with President Trump on migration issues have been condemned by many. The Guardian journalist David Agren has labelled López Obrador an “immigration enforcer”, and several voices in Mexico argue that Mexico has “become Trump’s wall” (Agren, 2020). Criticism has also been voiced from Central America. Especially blunt was the archbishop of San Salvador, José Luis Escobar Alas, who sharply denounced the Mexican president for his newfound lack of humanity in dealing with immigrants (Agren, 2019).

## Xenophobia Leads to Violence

However, just like President Trump in the U.S., Mexico’s López Obrador enjoyed very strong popular support among his followers for the administration’s repression of Central American migrants. A poll published in the Mexican newspaper *El Financiero* in June 2019, showed that 63 percent of the population thought that Mexico should seal its borders for migrants (Moreno, 2019). Such xenophobic attitudes in Mexico were also on full display in Mexican

newspapers reporting on the clash between the National Guard and migrants in the period 20–23 January 2020. With reference to the migration caravan from Central America trying to reach the U.S., the front pages of the Mexican yellow press contained headlines such as ‘Migrant Tsunami’ (Unomásuno, 2020a, p. 1.), “Migration Invasion” (Diario Basta!, 2020, p. 1) and “Hondurans Invading Mexico” (Unomásuno, 2020b, p. 1.). Other news outlets emphasized that the Mexican National Guard had done a good job in stopping and arresting migrants (Mileno, 2020, p. 1; *La Jornada*, 2020, p. 1), while one headline even went as far as suggesting that the National Guard indeed had “protected” the migrants (El Soberano, 2020, p. 1).

Perhaps the most serious challenge for migrants crossing Mexico on their way to the U.S. is the risk of being massacred by criminal groups, often more or less in collusion with Mexican authorities. The two infamous San Fernando Massacres in 2010 and 2011 – where more than 250 immigrants were killed – occurred under the administration of President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012). Under the new (2018 – ) government of López Obrador many thought that such gruesome incidents were a thing of the past. Nevertheless, in January 2021, 19 bodies were found in what is now, tragically, referred to as the Camargo Massacre. 16 of the killed were migrants from Guatemala. Since the atrocity more than 10 Mexican police officers have been arrested for their involvement in the massacre (Lindsay-Poland, 2021). What will happen to the intellectual authors of the crime remains to be seen, since there is a long tradition of impunity in Mexico.

It would certainly be going too far to place the direct responsibility for the Camargo Massacre on López Obrador. On the other hand, the Mexican president’s policies in dealing with migrants from Central America, often applauded by the national tabloid media, have not done much to decrease xenophobia and repugnance among Mexicans towards migrants. Add to this a certain dose of pure racism — especially voiced in the popular public debate by the lighter skinned part of the Mexican population as well as centuries of (institutional) discrimination of indigenous groups in Mexico — and one gets an idea of why almost 60% of Mexicans polled in April 2019 perceived undocumented migrants as a threat to the community. According to the same survey, almost 25% thought that migrants

from Central America would steal jobs from Mexicans, while close to 50% feared a rise in crime simply due to the presence of the migrants (El Universal, 2019a).

With respect to the contemporary debate on migration in the U.S., one might think that expressions such as so-called “wetbacks” or the rather derogatory concept of “illegal alien”, still used today, are recent developments in the discourse on immigration in the United States. Sadly, that is not the case. Illustrative here is the recommendations from a 1951 presidential commission on Migratory Labor. It contained the subtitle “IV. The Wetback Invasion--Illegal Alien Labor in American Agriculture” (Tobin and Connolly, 1952, p. 6). This is a telling example demonstrating that the idea of an ‘invasion’ by people from Mexico and Central America of the U.S. is nothing novel. In fact, this narrative has been promoted over centuries (Flynn, 2018). This could be one explanation of why such xenophobia finds fertile ground in parts of the U.S. population, even in 2020.

Thus, there are similar mechanisms of xenophobia and racism at play both in the U.S. and in Mexico. In fact, when Valeria and Óscar drowned in the Rio Grande several cartoonists in leading Mexican newspapers hinted that the elections of 2020 in the U.S. and 2021 in Mexico were key to understanding the tragedy. The criticism was that both presidents played to their xenophobic electorate by making a pact to crack down on migration.

In El Universal (26 June 2019c, p. A17) illustrator Galindo renamed the Rio Bravo the ‘River of Indifference’, showing Trump and Lopez Obrador standing firm in the river on their respective lecterns, while numerous desperate hands reached out from the river for help. The previous day (El Universal, 25 June 2019b, p. A15), the artist Kemchs had drawn a cartoon of a Mexican armed soldier who was chasing a female immigrant and two kids with a dip net in the form of the U.S. Capitol. This was a clear statement that the Mexican government was doing the dirty work of the Trump administration in stemming migration from Central America. Mexico had become the immigration enforcer of the United States. Simply stated: Valeria and Óscar drowned in the Rio Grande River because they were perceived as mercenaries in an imagined invasion of the United States.

## Attitudes towards migrants in Europe

Sadly, the same xenophobia, and much of the same discourse, can be found among politicians in Europe. The main difference when compared to Mexico and the U.S. is that, alas with some exceptions, none of these xenophobic politicians constitute a majority in any parliament. However, this does not mean that it cannot happen in the near future. Responding to the electorate, the migration policies of the European Union and of individual countries in Europe have become more draconian due to ethical cowardice among politicians from all political colours. Today it is completely acceptable — even a winning formula — for politicians to portray migrants as something distinct, some ‘thing’ that does not completely deserve the same rights as ourselves.

A 2018 survey from Pew showed that in countries such as France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Sweden more than 40% of the population wanted fewer or no immigrants in their country (Connor and Krogstad, 2018). In France, the leader for Rassemblement National, Marine Le Pen, has since October 2020 steadily polled a few percentage points over Macron for the upcoming 2022 presidential election. Italy might soon see Giorgia Meloni, the leader of the far-right Brothers of Italy, as prime minister. The common denominator in the success of these political figures is their extreme hostility towards migrants.

## Human Rights for All (Or Only for Some?)

The erring belief that other human beings do not have the same intrinsic value, rights, and humanity as we do, is at the heart of the sick ‘rationalisation’ of treating migrants as pariahs and untouchables. This is the logic explaining the consideration of migrants as illegal aliens who are invading our ‘civilised’ nation states. The alternative would be to consider the migrants as equal members of a common humanity. This would entail to really believe that migrants are not merely migrants, but first of all human beings. Migrants have the same rights and needs as any other human being for protection and security for themselves and their beloved families. They have these rights because they are humans and have the right to be perceived as such. In other words, as all human beings, they have the right to be human (Baxi, 1986).

In her classical treatment on human rights, Hannah Arendt observed that “the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself” (Arendt, 1966, p. 298). However, it was of course not that simple, and Arendt herself warned against such a rather hopeful point of view. “It is quite conceivable”, she wrote in an astonishing prophetic announcement,

“and even within the realm of practical political possibilities, that one fine day a highly organized and mechanized humanity will conclude quite democratically — namely by majority decision — that for humanity as a whole it would be better to liquidate certain parts thereof (p.299).”

Examining what happens in practice with migrants and the kind of inhumane treatment they are subject to — by xenophobic majority decision in democracies — one can start wondering if we are getting too close for comfort to Arendt’s warning. Do the majority in democratic societies think that migrants “belong to humanity”? If they do, is there a danger that such a majority would be in the minority someday, and what result would that have? Think about the discussion, particularly in Europe, about not rescuing migrants from drowning in the Mediterranean. Or, building high walls so that human beings cannot escape from crime, war, starvation, rogue regimes, or other attacks at their efforts of striving for a human and dignified life. The U.S. has its infamous wall, while the Mediterranean Sea has a similar function for Europe.

When nation-states implement push-back policies and construct huge detention camps for migrants either in their own country or on foreign soil, where are we then as civilisations? Moreover, when judges in a Federal court need to tell the U.S. government that migrant children in detention indeed have the right to soap and toothbrushes (Dickerson, 2019), what does it tell us about the way society perceives migrants? Where would we be without the ethical sense, and political courage, of such judges when it comes to justice and human rights?

It should not be unreasonable to interpret the current debate on the (non-existing) human rights of immigrants into the framework of Arendt. In most 21st century democracies, few subjects are so inflammable as the issue of refugees, asylum seekers and immigration. Further, like a ghost from the past,

variants of an anti-immigrant rhetoric have now been adopted by almost all mainstream political parties. The echoes of Trump still have fertile ground in the U.S. debate. In Europe the xenophobic right-wing parties have pushed the so-called left to abandon their own roots, decency, history, and ethics — and the electorates are overwhelmingly responding enthusiastically to the squeeze. When this history will be analysed and written in hindsight, perhaps Angela Merkel will be one of the few political world leaders of our times that will, narrowly, escape coming generation’s ethical judgement on the contemporary world’s treatment of migrants.

### ‘Illegal’ humans?

The designation of fellow human beings with the prefix ‘illegal’ is also telling for how the powerful perceive migrants. Addressing the humanness of those who flee from insecure, threatening, and hellish conditions, Holocaust survivor Eli Wiesel masterfully commented

“You who are so-called illegal aliens must know that no human being is ‘illegal’. That is a contradiction in terms. Human beings can be beautiful or more beautiful, can be right or wrong, but illegal? How can a human being be illegal?” (Wiesel, 1985, p.10).

Wiesel’s question has inspired the now famous affirmative slogan of the Hispanic civil right movement in the United States: “Ningún Ser Humano es Ilegal” [No human being is illegal]. It is a slogan that has become emblematic for communities trying to defend the rights of migrants all over the world. Further, it is also a clear demonstration of the bridge between a European thinker and Latin American/Latino activists and practitioners.

### Human Rights – from Latin America to the World

Much of the theory and practice that has shaped the world’s notion of human rights stems from Latin America. In an exchange of thinking and theorising, as well as through political work and activism between Europe and Latin America over centuries, Latin America has been instrumental in its contribution to the current body of human rights instruments and ideas.

True, when tracing the history of human rights, one finds that the ‘School of Salamanca’ in Spain is the “creator of human rights” (Beuchot, 2018, p. 14). However, some of the earliest historical defenders of human rights can be found in Latin America, particularly in Central America. The Dominican monk and bishop, Bartolomé de las Casas, might be the most well-known figure. The important observation to be made here is the historically mutual influence between the people on the ground in Latin America and the thinkers at the School of Salamanca, through contact, conversations, and dialogues (Beuchot, 2018, p. 14-15).

If we fast forward to the 20th century, we discover that before the existence of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), countries in the Americas had already adopted their own American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man. Political scientist Kathryn Sikkink argues that in the 20th century “Latin American countries were protagonists of the idea of ‘international human rights’” (Sikkink, 2015, p. 208). Sikkink attaches so much importance to the role of Latin American states in lobbying for international human rights that she asserts that if it were not for Latin America “it is unlikely that the [UN] Charter would contain references to human rights” (Sikkink, 2015, p. 210). Further, Sikkink suggests that in the preparation of the UDHR, countries from Latin America “almost singlehandedly, inserted language about the right to justice into the UDHR, in what would become Article 8” (Sikkink, 2015, p. 214). Thus, the role of Latin America in the development of human rights, something that many people would understand as a European-U.S. phenomenon, is perhaps much larger than seen at first sight.

## Fighting for human rights

Due to the emergence of military-style dictatorships in Latin America in the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, Latin America’s legacy in the area of human rights defenders is especially rich. These were individuals that showed enormous personal courage and firmness in the struggle against oppression and human rights violations. At the same time, they were concrete expressions of larger social movements that protested against various forms of injustice in their societies. Thus, these movements and their leaders were interdependent,

working together on a common goal of ending repression from the joint-venture of elite-style politics and business who governed cynically using brute force.

In Europe, parts of the civil society engaged in solidarity work for Latin America, and over decades strong bonds of friendship and contacts were formed. Several NGOs in Europe took on the defence of human rights and human dignity against the brutal, authoritarian, and inhuman repression of military regimes in Latin America.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureates such as the Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú and Argentinean Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, became globally famous for their defence of human rights. Unfortunately, the list of human rights activists that actually ended up as martyrs in Latin America is much too long to reproduce. Many of the victims were linked to religious organizations and entities — especially hard hit was the Catholic Church. In the case of Brazil, the part that Catholic cardinal Paolo Evaristo Arns played in documenting the atrocities of the country’s military government in the 1980s, cannot be exaggerated. The detailed records of the barbarity of the military rulers were made public in the 1985 report ‘Brasil: Nunca Mais’. In neighbouring Argentina, similar work had been done to investigate the country’s Dirty War, with its report submitted in 1984. The experiences from Argentina and Brazil served as predecessors for truth and reconciliation commissions worldwide (Hayner, 1994; Wright, 2014).

The issue at hand is that Latin America provided the first examples of this human rights mechanism. In the context of the subject of this short essay, an interesting thought is what would results show if one were able to set up a truly international in scope, UN-sponsored truth commission documenting the treatment of migrants worldwide? Would the narratives be as gruesome as what we can read in reports from the ‘ordinary’ truth commissions, both in an ethical and legal sense? What kind of ethical, and strictly legal, violations would such an initiative uncover?

## A call from Latin America for ‘Humanising humanity’

In his 1986 treatment on human rights, legal scholar Upendra Baxi, creatively, has argued that what is really at stake in the discussion of human rights is

“the right-to-be-human approach” (Baxi, 1986, p. 185). This could be read as a fight for preserving the humanity of other people, and not depriving them of their human rights, thus excluding them from humanity, as in the stark warning issued by Arendt. According to Baxi, the issue at hand for “human rights is to provide the matrix for the struggle for all dominated peoples to formulate and realize everyone’s *right to be human*” (Baxi, 1986, p. 196, italics in original). Two decades before Baxi wrote this, Pope Paul VI had called for a world development with a “transition from less than human conditions to truly human ones” (Paul VI, 1967, #20).

The response from Latin America to the pope’s call was forceful and loud, especially in progressive religious circles. The so-called ‘father of liberation theology’, Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez, was crystal clear when he described the life of the poor, among other things, as “to be exploited by others, not to know that you are being exploited, not to know that you are a person” — Gutiérrez also affirmed that a life in poverty constitutes a “subhuman situation” (Gutiérrez, 1988, p. 164).

When people are not seen – neither by themselves nor by the rest of society – as human beings, there is a direct attack on human dignity at play. When people think that they are not human beings, or other people see them as some ‘thing’ else, rock bottom has been reached in society. Moreover, this notion that, for example, refugees and migrants really pertain to another category than human, can explain some of the reasons for why it is ‘acceptable’ to deal with them inhumanely and to treat them as subhumans.

Safeguarding every person’s ‘right to be human’ is, arguably, the most important task at hand for our civilised, contemporary world. As Argentinean Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, said “there exists no higher interest than the human being” (Pérez Esquivel, 1980). If we do not manage to provide more humane conditions for every human being, all other efforts in mending the world’s many global challenges will be completely in vain (Offerdal, 2020). The simple, but difficult in practice, solution lies in bestowing human dignity and the right to be human to all persons on the planet.

How can we do that? The Brazilian bishop and poet, Dom Pedro Casaldáliga, puts forward a concrete proposal that can be applied to our dealings with all human beings, which is to “humanize humanity [by] practicing proximity” to other human beings (Casaldáliga, 2006). In the thinking of Casaldáliga, humanity can choose “to have a clash of civilizations, or an alliance of civilizations” (Casaldáliga, 2006, p. 2). Playing on the famous slogan ‘Another World Is Possible’, Casaldáliga asserts that not only is another world possible, but rather stresses that “another world is necessary” if we are not going to exterminate ourselves and the planet (2006, p. 3). Concretely, for Casaldáliga practicing proximity means to ask ‘who is my neighbour’ and then be close to them. Thus, familiarising ourselves with the other, making the stranger our friend, is the only sensible way forward.

It is time to recognise that all human beings in the world are in fact on the same planet. Trying to keep other human beings away from the table — not accepting their humanity — will only result in enormous and violent conflicts. Simple mathematics, and history, tell us that if a small minority keeps all the privileges to themselves while a large majority of the population live in destitution, the outcome is likely to be some sort of violent uprising. The history of the Berlin Wall shows us that walls are only a short-term and temporary solution. If nations and people are to peacefully coexist, radical new approaches to the challenge of migration must be found. That is the crucial demand to citizens and politicians of the 21st century.

To humanise humanity is an important call from Latin America to Europe, as well as to the rest of the world. In the context of this essay: when nations stop perceiving migrants and refugees as illegals, but rather meet and treat them as fellow human beings, we might be one step closer to a world of less conflict and insecurity.

## Closure: 5 appeals to policy makers

To the extent civilised people in Europe are scandalised by practices, policies, and populist rhetoric among foreign progressive leaders when it comes to their treatment of migrants, we have a good opportunity to look at ourselves in the

mirror. Are we doing our best, or do we simply participate in a race to the bottom by insulting human dignity? And yes: how we act when faced with individual human beings merely looking for safety and protection is indeed an ethical question. The way we as societies respond to other human beings could be used as a measurement of, not theirs but our own, humanness.

If modern states would like to live up to the description of civilized nations that will survive serious scrutiny by future historians, now is the time to act. This means that nations, regional bodies and the international community as such — and Europe in particular — must secure democratic societies where:

- One secures “active participation by the governors and the governed in the realization of the common good” (Pérez Esquivel, 1980);
- It is recognised and understood that the militarisation of borders and construction of walls are short-term solutions that are not sustainable in the long run;
- Xenophobia and racism are vigorously countered in order to decrease conflicts and violence between peoples and nations;
- The practice of judicially designating other human beings as illegals is outlawed;
- Humanising humanity (after Casaldáliga) is clearly stated as a sincere political goal.

This essay began with a quote from Argentinean Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, claiming that the wish for a world where the human being is the most important is not a utopian wish, but actually a practical possibility. The essay ends with a quote from another, crucial, Latin American thinker, who at great personal risk dedicated his life to the poor and downtrodden of Central America, and in particular El Salvador. When describing the reality of the lives of people in El Salvador — which is of course applicable to underprivileged people all over the world, including migrants and refugees — theologian Jon Sobrino, borrowing from Ignacio Ellacuría, used the expression ‘crucified people’. In Sobrino’s words

“Crucified people is useful and necessary language at the real level of fact, because *cross* means death, and death is what the Latin American peoples are subjected to in thousands of ways ... It is useful and necessary language at the historical-ethical level because cross expresses a type of death actively inflicted ... it means that there are victims and there are executioners” (Sobrino, 1994, p. 50, italics in original).

Let us hope that the real crosses along the many borders and walls all across the world will soon only be a memory of a distant past and that nations will stand firmly together in humanising humanity. We owe it to Valeria Martínez Ramírez and her father Óscar, and the thousands of others who have been killed in their quest for freedom and dignity.

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# 15

## ***Pueblos en Movimiento: Rethinking Migrants, Borders, and Transitional Justice in Contemporary Latin America***

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### **Abstract**

This essay explores how issues related to the human rights of migrants, refugees, and displaced persons (*'pueblos en movimiento'*) and to migration policy increasingly represent matters of life and death, and how these issues have become central to the global generation of knowledge and engagement regarding Latin America. The emphasis here is on the neo-colonial dimensions of prevalent forms of migration policy globally and in Latin America, and on their functionality as machineries of exclusion and death, which disproportionately affect migrants of indigenous origin and those from communities of African descent. The essay also includes an emphasis on the hollowness of hegemonic versions of human rights discourses, and their implications for U.S. and European development policies and modes of intervention. This includes recurrent patterns of state, structural, and systemic violence directed at migrants, which have resulted in crimes against humanity and genocidal practices that trigger duties of transitional justice.

### **Resumen**

*Este ensayo explora cómo las cuestiones relacionadas con los derechos humanos de los migrantes, refugiados y personas desplazadas ('pueblos en movimiento') y con la política migratoria representan cada vez más cuestiones de vida o muerte, y cómo se han convertido en fundamentales para la generación de conocimiento y compromiso mundial con América Latina. El énfasis aquí está en las dimensiones neocoloniales de las formas predominantes de política migratoria a nivel mundial y en América Latina, y en su funcionalidad como mecanismos de exclusión y muerte, que afectan de manera desproporcionada a los migrantes de origen indígena y a los de comunidades afrodescendientes. El ensayo también incluye un énfasis en la insuficiencia de las versiones hegemónicas de los discursos de derechos humanos, y sus implicaciones para las políticas de desarrollo y modos de intervención estadounidenses y europeos. Esto incluye patrones recurrentes de violencia estatal, estructural y sistémica dirigida*

*contra las y los migrantes, que han resultado en crímenes de lesa humanidad y prácticas genocidas que desencadenan deberes de justicia transicional.*

278 *“During the past five years, dramatic shifts in the scale and character of migration in the Americas have unsettled regional politics and tested the capacity and political will of governments and international agencies to address and avert humanitarian crises. Violence, poverty, political dysfunction, and environmental degradation across the Western Hemisphere have led to an increase in refugees, asylum-seekers, and other vulnerable and displaced populations on a scale not seen in decades. The effects of these migrations on the economies and societies of the Americas have been profound and are likely to intensify in the months and years to come.”*  
Restrepo et al., (2019)

## Introduction

The Euro-Mediterranean region and the Western hemisphere are key case studies globally that illustrate both the neo-colonial dimensions of migration policies and their functionality as machineries of exclusion and death. In both cases these trends also underline the hollowness of hegemonic versions of human rights discourse, in practice, and the implications of this for U.S. and European development policies and modes of intervention in these contexts.

The migration policies that currently prevail in Latin America, the Euro-Mediterranean region, and beyond, increasingly represent matters of life and death. Their ultimate effects can be gauged through the complex apparatuses of violence wielded by both state and non-state actors that have become machineries of migrant death on a global scale (Weber and Pickering, 2011; Pérez-Bustillo and Hernández Mares, 2016). The U.S. policy of ‘prevention through deterrence’ that was first enshrined in the Border Patrol’s Strategic Plan in 1994 (U.S. Border Patrol, 1994) has in effect gradually become the standard approach globally, now further exacerbated through measures ostensibly related to the covid-19 pandemic.

The well-documented results of these policies include tens of thousands of migrant deaths en route towards Europe, the U.S. (an average of one death each day since 1998, some 8,000 deaths in total), and Australia as traditional migration routes are sealed off and flows are diverted to the most dangerous alternatives, producing increased reliance on smugglers and traffickers at higher cost, with greater profit. This shift also includes the consolidation of control of these routes and flows by organised crime, accompanied by increased violence and exploitation, including mass kidnappings and mass killings, often with direct or indirect complicity by state authorities (Pérez-Bustillo and Hernández Mares, 2016). At the U.S.–Mexico border and Mexico’s southern border this also means increased numbers of migrant deaths in custody and in detention, and increased vulnerability within contexts such as the current pandemic (Hope Border Institute, 2019).

## Centrality of Transitional Justice

Latin America’s key contributions internationally to human rights scholarship and advocacy include its rich, diverse experiences of processes of transitional justice, including leading cases such as Argentina, Guatemala, Perú, El Salvador, Chile, and more recently Colombia and Mexico, framed around the recognition of rights to truth, memory, justice, reparations (individual and collective, material and symbolic), and to guarantees of non-repetition (Beristain, 2009).

Mass human rights crimes, such as those of San Fernando and El Paso, and the broader patterns that they exemplify, trigger duties of transitional justice on both sides of the border. Indigenous migrants and those from communities of African descent are especially propitious for recognition as subjects for transitional justice, because of their especially vulnerable living conditions regionally. Transitional justice processes have been underway or attempted in Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador, but none of these recognise indigenous migrants or migrants of African descent as subjects, as such.

## The global migration policy paradigm

What are the core characteristics of the global migration policy paradigm that has become hegemonic since 11 September 2001? Key components include:

1) the subordination of migration policies to the supposed imperatives of 'national security' ('securitisation'); 2) the militarisation of borders; 3) the criminalisation of migrants and migrant communities; 4) the regionalisation and 5) externalisation of these policies (e.g. their application and enforcement regionally, on an extraterritorial basis); and 6) the intensified commodification of migrants as targets for exploitation, smuggling, and trafficking. The guiding threads and combined effects of these intertwined dimensions include varying degrees of state, structural, and systemic violence (Pérez-Bustillo and Hernández Mares, 2016; Weber and Pickering, 2011).

Migration policies that share these core elements have been promoted by the U.S. in the Western Hemisphere, by the European Union in the Mediterranean, North and West Africa, and the Middle East, and by Australia and its allies in the Asia/Pacific region (Pérez-Bustillo and Hernández Mares, 2016). They have also become increasingly reflected in emerging global spaces of migration policy or 'global migration governance' such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development, and the processes culminating in the recent adoptions of the Global Migration and Refugee Compacts.

Many of the supposed advances in recognition of the human rights through the Global Compacts have in practice been negated or eroded through the imposition and enforcement of 'safe third country' policies in contexts such as the U.S. –Mexico border and Mexico's southern border with Guatemala, as well as bilaterally between the U.S. and Canada, and in the Euro-Mediterranean region through the Dublin Convention. Agreements of this kind give concrete expression to theoretical concepts such as 'externalisation' and 'regionalisation', through the extra-territorial extension of policies of securitisation, militarisation, and criminalisation.

Until recently, migration issues and migrants have historically been marginalised within the dominant frameworks of academic and policy discourses and practices regarding Latin America (Herrera and Sørensen, 2017; Pisarevskaya, 2020). My argument here is that transnational, collective subjects of processes of human mobility — '*pueblos en movimiento*' or 'peoples in movement', which include migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and persons who have been

displaced (Pérez-Bustillo and Hernández Mares, 2016) — and the diverse social movements which have arisen in defence of their rights, are in fact central to Latin America's contemporary landscape, and to its ultimate horizons.

It is especially important to recognise the centrality of these issues because of the gravity and extent of human rights violations against migrants. This heightens the commensurate duties of the region's states and civil societies to redress these violations through inclusive processes of transitional justice, and to approach them as the products of multiple, overlapping dimensions of marginalisation and exclusion throughout Latin America which magnify and reproduce the region's colonial legacies. As discussed below, these dimensions of inequality should be understood as including communities of Latin American origin and descent in the U.S., especially migrants and those living in the U.S. –Mexico border region.

## Latin American migration processes: Key trends

Latin America's migration processes have longstanding structural origins that are embedded in the continuing effects of historic inequalities between the U.S. and the rest of the region. These precede the impact of the covid-19 pandemic, and the drivers persist regardless of the limitations on human mobility initially imposed due to the virus (Bárcena et al., 2020; Orozco and Chinchilla, 2020; Segnana, 2020). Our epistemology, methodology and frameworks of reflection as scholars engaged with Latin America must be redefined to take these processes, tendencies, and voices more fully into account. This is a crucial dimension of the overall process of decolonisation of scholarship and critical thinking about the region.

Moreover, Latin America's migration processes reflect broader global trends, but also present complexities and specificities that enrich global migration studies, as well as scholarship and advocacy related to human rights. This includes the relationship between current migration trends and persistent structural inequalities related to neoliberal policies and U.S. regional hegemony, longstanding patterns of discrimination and marginalisation that characterise the status of women and children living in poverty and inequality, and the

generalised negation of the conditions necessary for a dignified life among the region's indigenous and Afro-Latin American communities.

Massive processes of forced displacement in the region have unfolded in contexts such as Venezuela, Colombia, Central America, and the Caribbean (particularly Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba). The economic hardships magnified by the current pandemic have already led to a new surge in Mesoamerican migration to the U.S. (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2021). Meanwhile, Mexico's economy is experiencing its single greatest decline since 1932, of between 8.8 and 12.8% of GDP (Banxico, 2020), which converges with an estimated 9.4% contraction in Latin America as a whole (IMF, 2020), combined with one of the world's highest covid-19 fatality rates and total number of deaths.

The intensified salience of migration issues on the Latin American agenda coincides with, and is in part derived from, the increasing presence and impact of communities of Latin American migrant origin and descent within the U.S., which number over 60 million (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020; CELAG, 2019). Their numbers are greater than that of the population of any Latin American country with the exception of Brazil and Mexico. Migrant communities of Latino/a origin or descent in the U.S thus constitute the equivalent of the third most populous country in Latin America.

## Migration, 'Latin America Matters' and 'Black Lives Matter'

In this sense, 'Latin America Matters' within and beyond the borders of the U.S., for many of the same reasons as 'Black Lives Matter' is a relevant framework for scholarship, reflection and action not just in the U.S. but regionally and globally. The intertwined character of racism and xenophobia in the U.S., through prisms such as those of decolonial thinking (Dussel, 2013), 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Roth, 2013), 'racial capitalism' (Gillmore, 2007), and 'precarity' (Butler, 2020), strongly suggests that migrant lives in the U.S. and beyond will not matter until black lives do.

The increasing visibility of communities of Latin American origin and descent within the U.S. highlights the relationship between racial violence directed

at the country's African-American communities through policing and mass incarceration, and the criminalisation of migrants, mass deportations, and racist and xenophobic violence, which specifically target those identified as Latino/a, and those perceived as of Asian (and especially Chinese) ethnicity. This includes the victims of the El Paso massacre in August 2019, which was directed at repelling the supposed 'Hispanic invasion' of Texas, or migrant families subjected to the forced separation of families and related policies of mass detention, mass expulsion, and the negation of the right to seek asylum on both sides of the border. Mass human rights crimes of this kind, and their impact, have intensified in the wake of the pandemic, and have crucial structural dimensions which have persisted regardless of the transition from Trump to Biden.

The approaches and research agendas of Latin American studies scholars globally have begun to take factors of this kind into account — for example, the Latin America Studies Association (LASA) Statements on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) immigration policy (2018) and regarding systematic racism in the Americas (2020); the LAWG meeting at the University of Siena in November 2019<sup>1</sup>; the 'Fronteras, regionalización y globalización' (Borders, regionalisation and globalisation) working group of GT CLACSO (*Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales*), 2020 — but much more needs to be done along these lines. A great deal more must also be done to develop and effectively deploy comparative modes of research and analysis regarding migration processes, their relationship to poverty, inequality, racism and xenophobia, and the role of social movements in responding to such contexts in the Americas, and in the Euro-Mediterranean region. This includes cross-regional assessment of the impact of the new Global Compacts on migration and refugees and related approaches focused on global migration 'governance' or 'management' (Betts, 2011). These provide shared policy frameworks applicable to both regions that fall short of many of the deeper demands of migrant movements and human rights defenders, and of faith-based sectors, that insist on more stringent human rights standards and increasingly call for universal recognition of the right to freedom of movement.

The increasing visibility of communities of Latin American origins and descent within the U.S. is apparent at the same time as the U.S. has become increasingly interventionist in the region (e.g., Honduras in 2009, Venezuela since 2016 but also previously in 2002, Bolivia in 2019) through ‘democracy promotion’ and free trade policies, and anti-corruption and policing measures related to the so-called ‘drug war’, in ways that echo its interventions during the Cold War. Certain dimensions of these approaches will likely intensify with the Biden administration’s insistence on addressing the supposed ‘root causes’ of mass migration flows in Central America. Interventionist policies along these lines have begun to emerge as issues in domestic U.S. politics, as they did most notably in the 1980s, at the same time as its treatment of primarily Central American and Caribbean migrants at its southern border has intermittently become an issue in key countries of origin of these migration flows, and regionally. There is a longstanding correlation between U.S. intervention and Latin American migration to the U.S. that has been described as in essence the “harvest of empire” (González, 2011).

The study of Latin American migration processes has historically been focused on recurrent sources of migration with long histories such as Mexico, or on flows driven by armed conflicts during specific, relatively limited periods in contexts such as Central America, Colombia or Perú, by political repression in the Southern Cone (Chile, Argentina, Brazil) or Haiti, or in settings such as Cuba or Venezuela. In Colombia it is especially striking how long-standing processes of internal forced displacement, which led the country to rank first globally in terms of the total numbers of people displaced (7.7 million; UNHCR, 2018), have combined recently with massive flows from Venezuela (over 4 million, which have also reached Brazil, Chile, Perú, Ecuador, and Argentina and even recently the U.S.-Mexico border).

Migration crises of unprecedented scale and complexity in Venezuela and Central America (impacting both Mexico’s southern and northern borders) have begun to shift advocacy, policy analysis, and research in new directions. These new trends converge with more globalised tendencies in migrant rights advocacy during the last 20 years. This includes an increasing emphasis on strengthening the human rights dimensions of migration policy and migration

studies, and on the recognition of poverty, inequality, and environmental devastation as serious violations of human rights which are key drivers of forced migration, within the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Migrants as victims of mass human rights crimes: bio-power, bio-politics, and necro-politics

Two convergent commemorations during August 2020 highlight key dimensions that are illustrative of these broader patterns. August 23rd marked the 10th anniversary of the San Fernando Massacre, which involved the mass killing of 72 migrants in transit from 6 countries (Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Ecuador, Brazil, and India) by members of a narco-paramilitary trafficking network known as the ‘Zetas’. This massacre was followed by the discovery, also in San Fernando, of over 190 bodies in 47 mass graves, including migrants thus far identified from over a dozen countries, including Mexico (COLEF et al., 2020; Evans and Franzblau, 2013).

August 2020 also included the commemoration of the first anniversary of the mass killing in El Paso, Texas, in August 2019 of 23 people (22 of them of Mexican origin or descent, 9 of them Mexican citizens), which according to a manifesto posted by the killer shortly before the incident, was intended as an act of war in response to the ‘Hispanic invasion’, by migrants, of the U.S.–Mexico border region (Arango et al., 2019). Latino/a migrants were thus the killer’s intended target, in what became the single gravest incident of explicitly anti-Latino and anti-migrant mass hate violence in U.S. history.

Mexican migrant rights defenders had long warned of the increasing violence and territorial control of migrant trafficking by the Zetas throughout the period leading up to the crimes of San Fernando, and this threat was reported a year before by the country’s National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) in detailed data indicating a rate equivalent to about 20,000 migrant kidnappings per year. There is a well-documented convergent pattern of complicity in these processes by government officials at all levels (federal, state, municipal) and in every relevant branch of government (civil, police, military). So from

the perspective of international human rights law these ‘kidnappings’ in fact implicate the kind of state responsibility that requires their recognition as state crimes (‘crimes against humanity’ — i.e. mass forced disappearances — and where applicable, as extra-judicial executions and potentially, an emerging mode of ‘migrant genocide’ (Pérez-Bustillo and Hernández Mares, 2016). The recurrent character of these crimes is reflected in the fact that there have been at least five massacres targeting migrants on Mexican territory since 2010, including the most recent in January 2021 that resulted in the killing of 17 migrants of indigenous (Maya Mam) origin from one of Guatemala’s most impoverished regions by a U.S.-trained Mexican state police unit in complicity with local drug gangs (Arroyo et al., 2021).

All of this underlines the extent to which migration policies in representative contexts in Latin America and at borders elsewhere throughout the world reflect the deployment of bio-power, bio-politics and *necro-politics* (Mbembé and Meintjes, 2003; Mbembé, 2019). These patterns resonate powerfully with Judith Butler’s conceptualisation of ‘precarity’ (Butler, 2020), Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s definition of racism (Gilmore, 2007), and Enrique Dussel’s emphasis on life and its reproduction (Dussel, 2013), which are at the core of his understanding of the theology, philosophy, ethics, and politics of liberation. Gilmore (2007) defines racism as “the state-sanctioned or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.” In Butler’s words (2020), precarity denotes a “politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death”.

The same Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) that became renowned for its work within the context of mass human rights crimes in Argentina and later Rwanda and ex-Yugoslavia (among many other examples) is handling the arduous identification process for these cases. Crimes of this character have an inherently transnational character that transcends borders, since they are subject to what is known as ‘universal jurisdiction’, which can and must be pursued and tried anywhere, pursuant to the Nuremberg Principles and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and are not bound by statutes of limitation (can be prosecuted indefinitely).

The El Paso killer’s manifesto specifically invoked the March 2019 Christchurch, New Zealand, massacre of Muslims as they worshiped at two mosques, as a relevant precedent and inspiration. The El Paso massacre thus must be understood within a broader global context of racist and/or xenophobic violence that includes the Charleston church shootings in June 2015, which targeted members of the congregation at its historic African Methodist Episcopal church, and Norway’s Utoya massacre in July 2011, which targeted both migrants and Muslims within the context of the supposed invasion of Europe (Kundnani, 2012).

The El Paso Massacre must also be understood within the context of the targeting of Mexican migrants by former President Trump from the moment he launched his presidential campaign in June of 2015. His administration also targeted El Paso specifically (Gaviria et al., 2020) and the U.S.–Mexico border and its migrant communities more generally as ‘ground zero’ for the testing and implementation of the Trump administration’s most extreme immigration and border policies. These include ‘Zero Tolerance’, family separation, mass detention, mass expulsion, and the negation of asylum on both sides of the border. All of this unfolded in complicity with Mexican authorities and those in key countries of origin through ‘safe third country’ agreements and other bi-national and ultimately transnational, multilateral dimensions of cooperation directed at the containment and repression of unauthorised migrant flows, as in equivalent contexts at the peripheries of Europe and Australia.

## Massacres foretold

The San Fernando and El Paso mass killings were chronicles of massacres foretold: both were perfectly predictable, and thus ultimately preventable. They also reflect in concentrated form the extent to which migrants have been both essential to contemporary political economies in the region and globally, but at the same time are evidently disposable.

The crimes of San Fernando and the El Paso Massacre should be approached within a convergent, transnational framework that transcends the hegemonic limits of both geopolitical and epistemological borders. They can only be

fully understood as crimes of a regional character shaped by the intertwined machineries of state, structural, and systemic violence which characterise the treatment and targeting of migrants at the U.S.–Mexico border, on both sides, and which reflect broader regional and global trends and processes.

These include an understanding as to how approaching issues of human rights and migration policy from the margins can be strengthened by understanding borders themselves “as a method” of inquiry and reflection (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). This implies situating ourselves from a global, interdisciplinary, comparative, intercultural, and transnational perspective, grounded in critical migration, border, social movement and citizenship studies, as well as relevant dimensions of post-colonial and cultural studies, whose key guiding threads include a decolonial sensibility imbued with hybridity and fluidity.

### Migration, Decolonisation and ‘Transgressive Citizenship’: Lessons for and from Latin America

Migration itself is increasingly understood within the emerging frameworks of global critical migration studies as a decolonising process, which reconfigures sovereignty in terms of inter-connection (Achieme, 2019). This approach converges with that of other scholars who understand contemporary migration processes and the social movements they give rise to, as expressions of ‘transgressive citizenship’ (Ataç et al., 2016), which necessitates a rethinking of the traditional Western liberal definition of the nation-state. The emphasis here is on how globalised migration processes provide a basis for the redefinition of the boundaries and contents of citizenship and related modes of organising and resistance, which Hardt and Negri (2019) have characterised as a global ‘migrant insurgency’.

Migrants and indigenous peoples together — ‘peoples in movement’ — constitute crucial representative examples of the need to rethink dominant epistemologies and approaches because they are the two groups most marginalised in hegemonic versions of contemporary international human rights law and theory, and in traditional Western liberal understandings of the nation-state. These two sectors are in turn central to understanding the current

dimensions of patterns and structures that produce and reproduce poverty and inequality in Latin America, which decisively shape the region’s most contentious migration processes. Migrant and indigenous social movements thereby provide a basis for articulating demands that reclaim human rights, beyond borders and ultimately human rights, without borders.

Key dimensions of this kind of critical reflection include an emphasis on the vindication of the right to dignified conditions of life, which has been extensively developed in the case law of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Pasqualucci, 2008; Pérez-Bustillo and Hernández Mares, 2016). The origin of this lies in the re-conceptualisation of economic, social and cultural rights (or ‘international poverty law’, Pérez-Bustillo and Hernández Mares, 2016), that reflects an evolving understanding grounded in Articles 22–28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This also includes an insistence upon recognition of a universal right to freedom of movement, or to migrate (*ius migrandi*), which is detonated by the negation of the right to a dignified life, and which includes the right not to migrate, and not to be forcibly displaced, with its origins in Articles 13, 14, and 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Pérez-Bustillo and Hernández Mares, 2016). Critical scholarship and advocacy grounded in Latin America and communities of Latin American origin and descent in the U.S. can thus play a critical and unique role in contributing to the kind of rethinking of global approaches that is more necessary than ever. This is especially urgent as the current pandemic threatens to sweep away advances in the recognition of standards of human rights and human dignity that Latin American struggles and experiences have powerfully shaped. This is in essence, in this context, why Latin America matters, globally, and at the heart of the contemporary world-system.

## 290 Endnotes

- 1 The Latin America Working Group (LAWG) of the Coimbra Group met in November 2019 at the University of Siena to discuss 'Human rights and migration in Latin America'. See: <https://www.coimbra-group.eu/working-group/latin-america/>

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# 16

## Integration and Inclusion of Migrants in Latin America: The Contribution of the SDGs, GCM and 2019 Inter-American Principles and the Relevance of Indicators

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### Abstract

The Inter-American Principles on the Human Rights of All Migrants, Refugees, Stateless persons and Victims of Human Trafficking (IACHR, 2019) provide Latin America with a soft-law instrument to promote global migration goals in the region, contributing to the soft-law landscape in this field. This essay focuses on selected soft-law provisions relevant to migrant inclusion and integration processes. First, it examines why ‘well-managed’ migrant integration policies need to go beyond functional integration. Secondly, it analyses how selected soft law instruments respond to this necessity. This analysis is based on relevant provisions from the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs), the Global Compact for Migration (2018) (GCM), and the Inter-American Principles, zooming into principles 39 (the right to culture) and 63 (social inclusion of migrants). Finally, the essay highlights the relevance of indicators for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of integration policies.

### Resumen

Los “Principios interamericanos sobre los derechos humanos de todas las personas migrantes, refugiadas, apátridas y víctimas de la trata de personas” (IACHR, 2019) fueron adoptados enfatizando la necesidad de garantizar a todas las personas independientemente de su condición migratoria, el pleno respeto de sus derechos fundamentales (IACHR, 2019), contribuyendo al desarrollo de soft-law que promueve la construcción de un marco global e integral para la protección de todos los migrantes (IACHR, 2019). Este ensayo se centra en algunos principios relevantes en relación a la integración e inclusión de la población migrante. En primer lugar, examina por qué las políticas de integración de migrantes deben ir más allá de la integración funcional. En segundo lugar, analiza cómo responden algunos de los instrumentos de ‘soft-law’ a esta necesidad. Este análisis se basa en disposiciones relevantes de los Objetivos de

*Desarrollo Sostenible de la Agenda 2030 de la ONU (ODS), el Pacto Global para las Migraciones, y los Principios, específicamente los principios 39 (el derecho a la cultura) y 63 (inclusión social de los migrantes). Finalmente, el ensayo se refiere muy brevemente a la relevancia de los indicadores a los efectos de diseñar, implementar, monitorear y evaluar políticas de inclusión e integración.*

## Introduction

In the current Latin America context, migrant integration and inclusion are pressing issues. Migrant populations in Latin America are growing faster than the world average (UNDESA, 2019, p. 4), due to rapid increases in intra-regional migration (Migration Data Portal, 2020). Whilst Latin American countries were unprepared for these migratory flows shifts (Vera-Espinoza et al., 2017) this new south-south migration ‘provides an opportunity for the development of practices that can respond to related integration challenges’ (IOM, 2021). This essay focusses on this opportunity. By critically analysing selected soft law provisions related to migrant integration, it highlights the contribution of the Inter-American Principles on the Human Rights of All Migrants, Refugees, Stateless persons and Victims of Human Trafficking (IACHR, 2019) to the normative landscape.

A contribution as such is particularly relevant to international migration law, understood as the “set of international rules and principles governing the movement of persons between states and the legal status of migrants within host countries” (Chetail, 2019, p. 7). International migration law is grounded in various inter-related, though at times also overlapping, layers of norms, namely: (a) customary international law, (b) treaty law and (c) soft law. The analysis focuses on the latter as an increasingly influential mechanism that permeates the more formalistic (and legally binding) obligations set forth by the other two sources.

To contextualise the contribution of the Inter-American Principles, this essay firstly examines the relevant aspects of well-managed migration processes. It

emphasizes the importance of both, understanding integration as a two-way process and incorporating a minority rights-based approach. Then, it applies this lens to three soft law instruments, namely, the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs), the UN Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and the Inter-American Principles (2019), zooming into principles 39 (the right to culture) and 63 (social inclusion of migrants). Finally, the essay highlights the relevance of indicators for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of integration policies<sup>1</sup>.

## The Importance of Two-Way Integration Processes

A well-managed migrant integration policy provides the means for migrants and refugees to become full members of their host society, with full entitlement and enjoyment of fundamental rights (OSCE, 2012, p. 19). Conceptualised as a two-way process, integration should support the social, economic and cultural inclusion of migrants, and focus on developing strategies that better empower migrants in their new communities, while assisting receiving communities in welcoming migrants. In turn, effective, well-managed migrant integration policies require a consideration of human rights obligations, together with an understanding that two-way integration processes are essential for thriving multicultural communities (IOM, 2021).

From an international human rights law (‘IHRL’) perspective, states must recognise that all human beings are entitled to fundamental human rights (UNHRC, 2018), but also guarantee that these rights are enjoyed without discrimination between citizens and aliens (UNCCPR, 1986). Nevertheless, states still ascribe full enjoyment of human rights to citizenship, nationality and immigration status of migrants (UNHRC, 2018, para 7). To fill this gap between the entitlement and enjoyment of fundamental rights, local integration appears as ‘the most relevant durable solution’, allowing migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to play their full part in society (UNHRC, 2018). Yet in practice, states’ understanding of integration is at times used as a ‘tool to weaken human rights obligations’ (Xanthaki, 2016), particularly when assimilation strategies are considered part of integration policies. In formulating and implementing these policies, two interrelated difficulties are identified: first, the need to foster

multiculturalism and interculturalist approaches against assimilation<sup>2</sup>, and secondly, the need to go beyond functional integration.

The assimilationist approach to migrant integration supports the idea that ‘migrants can only integrate into the host society and become full members if they leave their ethno-cultural identities behind and identify as nationals of the host country’ (Goksel, 2018, p. 12-13). On the contrary, multiculturalism recognises that the ‘successful integration of immigrants can solely be possible through respecting and tolerating the ethno-cultural identities of immigrants’ (Ibid, p. 5).

International human rights law prohibits assimilation (Xanthaki, 2016, p. 822) and fosters multiculturalism (Xanthaki, 2010, p. 22-23). Assimilation falls under the definition of racial discrimination contained in article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (‘ICERD’) (UNGA, 1965) because it jeopardises the enjoyment of fundamental rights based on national or ethnic origins. Additionally, article 2 provides that states should take measures to ‘prevent practices that deny non-citizens their cultural identity’ and ‘enable non-citizens to preserve and develop their culture’ (UNCERD, 2004, para. 37). The relevant legal frameworks establish that states should pay particular attention to migrants’ “cultural identities, as well as their language, religion and folklore, and [...] their right to hold cultural, artistic and intercultural events” (UNCESCR, 2009, para. 34). This interpretation of the right to cultural life (provided for in article 15 paragraph 1a) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (‘ICESCR’), demonstrates the expansion of the objective of this right from cultural life to cultural identity. According to these commitments, states should adopt specific measures aimed at respecting cultural identity, including “the right not to be subjected to any form of discrimination based on cultural identity, exclusions or forced assimilation, and the right of all persons to express their cultural identity freely and to exercise their cultural practices and ways of life” (UNCESCR, 2009, para. 49). It follows that a migration policy would be a ‘well-managed’ one when it is a mechanism that avoids assimilation and protects the cultural identities of migrants, fostering interculturalist approaches, as promoted by international law.

The second strain facing migrant integration policies presents itself at the implementation stage. Two alternative pathways can be identified, namely the functional integration approach and the minority rights-based approach.

As a dimension of the integration process, functional integration is based on the idea that the areas of education and training, labour market, health, and housing are critical for integration (Phillimore, 2012). Consequently, they require necessary progress for the integration process to begin (ibid, 2012). Despite functional integration being a pivotal step towards the progressive building of multicultural societies, it is not sufficient for protecting the cultural identity of migrants (Berry, 2017, p. 8). Integration involves a dynamic multifaceted two-way process that should also protect the cultural and identity rights of migrants, extending beyond ensuring migrants’ basic economic and social needs. Human rights obligations require integration to go further from the immediate duty to ensure that the essential minimum content of the Covenant rights is guaranteed and to take the ICESCR – thus cultural rights – into account in defining the conditions of integration of refugees and migrants (UNCESCR, 2017, para. 11). Berry proposes applying a minority rights-based approach to migrant integration policies, as a framework to protect their cultural identity (Berry, 2017). Adopting this approach, the following sections examine the extent to which the SDGs, GCM, and the Inter-American Principles promote interculturalist approaches and minority rights-based integration.

## Is a Minority Rights-Based Approach to Migrant Integration Fostered by the SDGs?

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) represents a historic step in global development policy due to its express inclusion of migration (Laczko, 2016, p. 3) in SDG 10.7. Whilst there is no migration-specific SDG, there are 7 migration-related targets and 10 migration-related indicators. The most prominent commitment to migration is Goal 10 ‘Reduced inequalities’, which includes target 10.7. to “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies” (UNGA, 2015). This “centre-piece for migration in the SDGs” (Piper, 2017, p. 233) is the particular target from which the GCM framework stems (Guild, 2018, p. 661).

The term ‘well-managed migration policies’ presents difficulties with respect to its interpretation. The inclusion of ‘well-managed migration policies’ in Goal 10, read in conjunction with target 10.2, “aiming to empower and promote [...] social, economic and political inclusion”, and with the SDG’s overall aim to ‘leave no one behind’ could lead to an interpretation supporting an interculturalist approach. However, ‘well-managed migration policies’ could be read with an entirely different lens. In fact, the dominant narrative on a global level is that ‘management of migration’ refers to states’ legal control of migrants’ exit and entry, based on labour opportunities (Piper, 2017, p. 233). The term is also understood as necessary in order to respond to ‘increasing concerns over migration in a securitizing world preoccupied by terrorism and international crime’ (ibid, p. 234). Simply interpreting ‘well-managed migration policies’ in the light of either of these two latter interpretations, could lead to concluding that target 10.7 of the SDG is focussed on the economic and security aspects of migration. Alternatively, a holistic interpretation that understands migration management from a human rights-based approach, including key migration and refugee factors, has been proposed (ibid, p. 234). It is here submitted that migration management should be understood as per this transversal perspective; thus, it becomes necessary to analyse the other migration-related targets and indicators in the SDGs.

Amongst the migration-related targets<sup>3</sup>, only target 8.8, referring to the protection of labour rights, is directly relevant for migrants’ integration. Forming the basis of functional integration, labour markets are critical for successful integration. Yet, a rights-based understanding of target 8.8 could go beyond functional integration by encouraging the protection of cultural identity in the workplace; for example, promoting strategies including intercultural interaction opportunities (Berry, 2017, p. 12).

The particular vulnerabilities of women migrants are acknowledged in the SDGs. This factor was highlighted by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Migrants (2019b) who emphasised the importance of viewing migration issues through a gender lens. Furthermore, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (UNCEDAW) interpreted in its General Comment No. 26, that state parties should “adopt policies and

programmes with the aim of enabling women migrant workers to integrate into the new society”, affirming that “such efforts should be respectful of the cultural identity of women migrant workers” (UNCEDAW, 2008, para. 26, k). States were aware of their obligations towards women migrant workers when adopting the SDGs, however, none of the SDG indicators measure achievements on this front for the specific case of migrant workers.

Furthermore, another 24 SDG indicators relevant for disaggregation per migration status can be identified<sup>4</sup>, some of which contribute to functional integration, including target 4.3.1, “participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex”, related to education and training, and target 11.1.1., “proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlement or inadequate housing”. However, by failing to signal a pathway towards ensuring the realisation of migrants’ cultural identities, these targets only allow functional integration. In target 10.3.1 on discrimination, disaggregation per migration status is also included, which could contribute to avoiding assimilation of migrants because it includes the ground of race. Nevertheless, recognising and preserving migrant identity requires the inclusion of a discrimination indicator solely focused on migrants’ de facto equality because, to achieve full equality, states need to eliminate laws and obstacles preventing it (Berry, 2017, p. 11). This is an area where private international law has so far fallen short of its potential, as discussed elsewhere (Ruiz Abou-Nigm, 2019; Corneloup and Verhellen, 2021).

In conclusion, the ambiguous meaning of ‘well-managed migration policies’ coupled with the lack of migration-specific indicators falls short of providing appropriate guidelines for states to go beyond functional integration, towards fostering multiculturalism and interculturalist approaches. Whilst target 8.8 and its indicators should be included in states’ integration strategies, further recognition of cultural identity is needed to prevent the promotion of assimilation.

## Migrant Integration in the GCM: A Step in the Right Direction

Born as a result of the commitments adopted by the UN member states in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants of 2016 (UNGA, 2016, para. 21), the Global Compact for Migration (2018) (GCM)<sup>5</sup> is the first inter-governmentally negotiated document, prepared under the UN auspices, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner (Migration Data Portal, 2020). Building a cooperative framework based on 23 objectives for safe, orderly and regular migration, for each objective, the GCM's signatory states acquired commitments, and identified actions to realise them. The GCM emphasises the importance and relevance of data collection, measurement and indicators with states agreeing on "elaborating and implementing a comprehensive strategy for improving migration data, at the local, national, regional and global levels, with the participation of all stakeholders [...] by harmonizing methodologies for data collection, and strengthening analysis and dissemination of migration-related data and indicators" (UNGA, 2019a, para. 17(a)). In this regard, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) had previously called for internationally comparable indicators to support evidence-based policymaking (UNGA, 2017, para. 64; 2015, para. 48).

This essay focusses on objective 16, in which states commit to "empower migrants and societies to realise full inclusion and social cohesion" (UNGA, 2019a, p. 6). Whilst the GCM, in comparison to the SDGs, progresses on the promotion of inclusive societies, there are aspects of objective 16 that risk guiding states towards assimilation. States commit to "foster inclusive and cohesive societies by empowering migrants to become active members of society and promoting the reciprocal engagement of receiving communities and migrants in the exercise of rights and obligations between each other, including the observance of laws and respect for customs on the country of destination" (UNGA, 2019a, para. 32). The reciprocal engagement adheres to the conceptualisation of integration as a two-way process. However, objective 16's focus on empowering migrants to become active members of society, with no reference to the host country's role in enhancing a welcoming environment, may indicate an imbalance in the two-way approach.

A key strategy for facilitating the recognition and preservation of migrant identity, thus promoting multiculturalism, would be, for instance, to adopt measures to support the preservation of migrants' languages by "providing space for language classes for children [or] supporting the development of minority media" (Berry, 2017, p.10). Whilst the GCM encourages the creation of programmes based on rights and obligations, basic language training, social norms and customs of the host country (obj. 16, b), there is no mention of programmes directed to fostering intercultural competences in the host society, and language-sharing is not promoted.

Another GCM commitment is to "promote mutual respect for the cultures, traditions and customs of communities of destination and of migrants by exchanging best practices of integration policies" (obj. 16, a). This represents an important step towards promoting multiculturalism as it is a commitment to support multicultural activities such as sports, music, arts, culinary festivals, and other social events (obj. 16, h). Despite being in line with a key strategy identified by Berry for enhancing migrant identity, promoting multicultural social activities alone is, however, not sufficient for going beyond functional integration. Multicultural dialogue should also be encouraged when recognising social, economic and cultural rights, such as the right to housing, education, work and freedom of thought (Berry, 2017, p. 10). None of this is mentioned within the GCM.

In conclusion, the GCM appears as a step in the right direction, however, an overall lack of emphasis on respecting migrants' cultural identity could be interpreted as leaving scope for states' to adopt migrant assimilation policies.

## Migrant Integration and Inclusion in the Inter-American Principles: Fostering an Intercultural Approach

In effectively designing, drafting, implementing and assessing public policies aimed at protecting and monitoring the rights of migrants, refugees and stateless persons in line with state obligations and applicable Inter-American standards, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) deemed it important to consolidate and deepen directives and guidelines (OAS, 2020).

Pursuant to article 41.b of the American Convention on Human Rights, the IACHR, under the auspices of its Rapporteurship on the Rights of Migrants, adopted Resolution 04/19 'Inter-American Principles on the Human Rights of all Migrants, Refugees, Stateless Persons and Victims of Human Trafficking' (the 'Inter-American principles'). Through this resolution, the IACHR adopted a series of guidelines supporting state and international organisation action to develop and implement the Inter-American Human Rights System standards and best practices.

In recognising and fostering the preservation of migrants' identity, the Inter-American principles go well beyond the SDGs, GCM or any other international instrument. Whilst the term 'well-managed migration strategies' is not used nor defined, minority rights are incorporated into its guidelines, and concrete positive obligations for nurturing inclusive societies are identified.

Principle 63 'Social inclusion of migrants' identifies a concrete and direct positive obligation on states to promote and allocate public funds to the promotion of migrant integration. Principle 63 also identifies a positive duty on states to establish, as a far as possible, labour integration programmes accounting for both migrants and host populations, as a strategy to 'prevent xenophobia and address the fear of nationals of losing their workplaces and job opportunities'. A minority rights-based approach to migrant integration must challenge the risk of host societies viewing migrants' cultural backgrounds as a threat to national identity (Berry, 2018, p. 9). To make societal cohesion a reality, Berry proposed to challenge key drivers of intolerance and xenophobia (*ibid*), one of which is nationals fearing the loss of jobs. Principle 63 thus provides guidance on how to mainstream a minority rights-based approach to migrants' integration. It provides concrete strategies, addressed to the host population, on how they can implement the aforementioned two-way approach to integration; that is, fostering bi-directional efforts of migrants, to achieve a sense of belonging, and those of the host community, to create a welcoming environment.

Minority rights are also incorporated into Principle 39, 'right to culture', recognising all migrants' right to enjoy "their own culture and to use their own language either individually or in community with others". This principle is

similar to the protection of minority rights in ICCPR's article 27 which recognises the rights of persons belonging to minorities "to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language". Different aspects of minority rights are included within Principle 39. With regard to religion, Principle 39 includes migrants' right to enjoy cultural life, expressed as a freedom of migrants' parents to guarantee religious education of their children. This is especially relevant for children of families with minoritarian religions migrating in Latin America, because a sizeable percentage of its population is Catholic (Pew Research Center, 2014). Furthermore, freedom of conscience, religion and belief is recognised as a right of its own in Principle 28. Unlike the SDGs and GCM, which focus on language proficiency, the Inter-American principles facilitate the preservation of the migrants' native language, as a reflection of cultural identity. Language proficiency is a relevant functional integration tool, however, when this tool is not accompanied with strategies for allowing migrants to preserve their own language, it puts the burden of integration solely on migrants. This risks the loss of migrants' native language, thus assimilation. Additionally, migrants' participation in cultural activities ensured by Principle 39 goes beyond the GCM's reference to social activities. Instead, it includes participation in cultural and artistic life of the community, the enjoyment of the benefits of scientific and technological progress, and the right to benefit from the protection of moral and material interests in any scientific, literary, or artistic work of which they are author.

Including a minority rights-based approach to migrant integration broadens the extent of states' obligations. Cultural rights of ICESCR's article 15 are bound to an obligation of progressive realisation (ICESCR, art. 2). The obligation emanating from ICCPR article 27 is to adopt direct measures. When interpreting this article, the Human Rights Committee called on the positive obligation of states to protect the rights of minorities; protect their identity and their rights to enjoy their culture and language; and to practice their religion in community with other members of the group (UNCCPR, 1994 para 6.1.). Thus, article 27 goes beyond the obligation of progressive realisation of ICESCR article 15. Similarly, Principle 39 of the Inter-American principles identifies an obligation of direct realisation, by stating "States shall ensure the integration of migrants

into society through positive measures”, and “shall encourage and support the efforts of migrants to conserve their cultural and ethnic identity”. Furthermore, Principle 39 prohibits assimilation, by affirming that the ‘situation must not be conditional on the loss of the national and cultural identity of their countries of origin.’

Finally, Principle 12 of the Inter-American Principles includes a non-discrimination clause that could build on target 10.3.1 identified in the SDGs. Following the Inter-American human rights system, Principle 12 includes a more extensive list of grounds for discrimination. It includes a positive obligation to prevent discrimination and xenophobia against migrants “such as educational and awareness campaigns aimed at promoting multicultural societies”. By going further than any other international instrument in recognising and fostering the preservation of migrants’ identity, the Inter-American principles prove to be a valuable contribution towards fostering migrants’ integration and inclusion, promoting interculturalist approaches to integration in multicultural societies.

## Moving Forward: The Need for Indicators of Integration and Inclusion of Migrants in Latin America

The implementation stage could be assisted at a local level by identifying indicators of inclusion and integration to allow data collection that, in turn, could support evidenced-based policy making, including the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of integration policies. As exemplified by Scotland’s ‘New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy’ (2018), based on Ager and Strang’s ‘Indicators of Integration Final Report’ (Ager and Strang, 2004), developing a framework of integration indicators has been invaluable to designing and implementing Scotland’s refugee integration policy.

In the Latin American migration context, indicators could serve three main purposes. First, evaluating the impact of the examined soft-law instruments and providing policy makers with local disaggregated data necessary to promote efficient policy outcomes (Schumann, 2016, p. 5). A sound indicator framework could transform the goals, targets and objectives in the SDGs,

the GCM and Inter-American Principles into a tool to assist policy-makers to develop implementation strategies and allocate resources accordingly, providing the basis for designing, measuring and monitoring progress at local, national, regional, and global levels (Allen et al., 2017, p. 976). Secondly, as communication tools, indicators make problems visible and sensitise and inform decision-makers (Janoušková et al., 2018, p. 1542). This is particularly relevant in the Latin American context, where the realities and challenges of the migrant population remain at times ‘invisible’. Goals, objectives and targets are often complex and open-ended, so effective communication is vital between actors for a mutual understanding of necessary action (ibid, p. 1542). In multi-stakeholder processes like migrant integration, indicators must be communicable to a variety of participants, thus the key challenge is to use audience-appropriate indicators delivering evidence-based messages that are easily understood by target audiences (Allen et al., 2017, p. 976). Finally, indicators are ‘tools for measurement’ enabling assessment of achievement, and signposting social change (McInerney-Lankford and Sano, 2010, p. 14).

## Conclusion

Transformative integration processes that foster inclusion and intercultural capabilities are essential for thriving multicultural communities. Clear guidelines to formulate and implement migrant integration policies are crucial in achieving the overarching objectives of international migration law. Despite their non-legally binding nature, the SDGs and GCM indicate some progress in that direction by fostering a culture of dialogue between stakeholders. The SDGs’ indicators relevant for disaggregation are positive signs towards migrant integration, but they fall short of providing clear guidelines persuading states to go beyond functional integration. These shortcomings demonstrate the need for further efforts in this sphere, globally, and also regionally, nationally and locally in Latin America. In turn, the Inter-American principles provide Latin America with a regional soft-law instrument in this field to promote global migration goals, and in doing so, positively contribute to international migration law. As stated by the IACHR Executive Secretary Paulo Abrão: “This is a framework for international migration law and also a framework

to strengthen local migration and integration policies through a human rights lens, where all societies stand to gain whether they are migrant or host communities” (OAS, 2020). The Inter-American Principles thus form part of the decentralised (global) governance necessary to address the phenomenon of migration in the regional context.

The use of indicators of integration for data collection, design, monitoring, assessment and measurement of policy’ implementation is a methodology that appears to be underdeveloped in the Latin American region in the context of integration and inclusion<sup>6</sup>. MiLA’s research agenda aims to contribute further research in this field, premised on the understanding that studies on integration and inclusion of migrants in the region could contribute to bridging the gap between the relevant normative frameworks and the day-to-day life of migrants in Latin America.

## Endnotes

- 1 The research for this paper is part of the Migration in Latin America (MiLA) project, a GCRF-funded research project (2019-to date) led by Dr Verónica Ruiz Abou-Nigm, School of Law, University of Edinburgh.
- 2 Multiculturalism and interculturalism are differentiated approaches, none of them free from criticism in migration studies. This paper adheres to the understanding of interculturalism as complementary to a minority rights (multiculturalist) framework (Berry, 2018). Like multiculturalists, interculturalists see diversity as an asset that should be preserved, and expressly oppose measures of assimilation (Meer et al., 2016).
- 3 Target 3.c., “Substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States”; Target 4.b., “By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries”; Target 8.8., “Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment”; Target 10.7., “Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”; Target 10.c., “By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent”; Target 16.2., “End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”; Target 17.3., “Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources”; Target 17.18., “By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.”.
- 4 Indicators 1.1.1; 1.3.1; 3.1.1; 3.2.1; 3.3.1; 3.4.1; 3.8.1; 3.8.2; 4.1.1; 4.3.1; 4.6.1.; 5.5.2; 8.3.1; 8.5.1; 8.5.2; 8.6.1; 8.8.1; 8.8.2; 8.10.2; 10.2.1; 10.3.1; 11.1.1; 16.1.3; 16.9.1.

- 5 The University of Edinburgh participated in the process towards its adoption, with Dr Ruiz Abou-Nigm amongst its representatives.
- 6 Importantly, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico have recently been added to the Migration Integration Policy Index ('MIPEX'), which currently measures integration policies in 52 countries (MIPEX, 2020) representing a significant contribution to data collection and measurement and using indicators in Latin America. Importantly, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico have recently been added to the Migration Integration Policy Index ('MIPEX'), which currently measures integration policies in 52 countries (MIPEX, 2020) representing a significant contribution to data collection and measurement and using indicators in Latin America.

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# URBAN RESILIENCE

# 17

## Co-producing climate resilient communities in Latin America

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### Abstract

Growing cities in Latin America harbour urban areas exposed to a range of environmental risks that are increasing with climate change, e.g. landslides, flooding, etc. Associated with political, social and economic challenges, these risks are generating growing concerns in relation to the capacity of vulnerable citizens to build resilience. Our research has engaged with integrated risk management approaches that are rooted in the co-production of actions and strategies aiming to monitor and mitigate these risks, within a 'dialogue of knowledges'. Communities are best placed to understand their territory and identify their vulnerabilities when developing climate resilient cities, and have a key role to play in co-designing potential solutions. Our approach has promoted dialogue and collaboration among communities, institutions and academia, with the aim of increasing the role of communities in decision making, towards shared actions and co-responsibility through their involvement in developing solutions to monitor and mitigate risks. To achieve long-term impact, our work is exploring inclusive urban governance mechanisms that strengthen interconnections between community-based action and institutional policies, to reduce climate change risk and support long-term adaptive transformation.

### Resumen

*Las ciudades en crecimiento en América Latina albergan áreas urbanas expuestas a una variedad de riesgos ambientales que están aumentando debido al cambio climático, por ejemplo, deslizamientos de tierra, inundaciones, etc. Asociados a desafíos políticos, sociales y económicos, estos riesgos generan crecientes preocupaciones en relación con la capacidad de los ciudadanos más vulnerables para abordarlos y aumentar su resiliencia. Nuestra investigación se ha comprometido con enfoques gestión integrada de riesgos que tienen sus raíces en la co-producción de acciones y estrategias con el objetivo de monitorear y mitigar estos riesgos, a partir de un "diálogo de saberes". Las comunidades*

*se encuentran en una excelente posición para comprender su territorio e identificar sus vulnerabilidades al desarrollar ciudades resilientes al cambio climático, y tienen un papel clave que desempeñar en el diseño conjunto de posibles soluciones. Nuestro enfoque ha promovido el diálogo y la colaboración entre comunidades, instituciones y academia, con el objetivo de incrementar el rol de las comunidades en la toma de decisiones, hacia acciones compartidas y con responsabilidades compartidas, a través de su involucramiento en el desarrollo de soluciones para monitorear y mitigar riesgos. Para lograr un impacto a largo plazo, nuestro trabajo está explorando mecanismos de gobernanza urbana inclusiva que fortalezcan las interconexiones entre la acción comunitaria y las políticas institucionales, para reducir el riesgo del cambio climático y apoyar una transformación adaptativa a largo plazo.*

## Introduction

As cities grow, increasing vulnerability, socio-spatial segregation and inequality are aggravated by exposure to risks brought forth by climate change, together with a range of other social, economic and environmental pressures. In the Global South, rapid urbanisation is increasingly driving the growth of informal and poorly serviced communities on land that is exposed to environmental hazards, increasing the need for resilience and adaptation solutions. In Latin America, one of the major suites of hazards facing urban communities relates to hydro-meteorological factors, including drought and intense rainfall, triggering flash flooding and landslides, and their relationship with the regional climatic phenomenon ENSO (El Niño Southern Oscillation), which is evolving as a result of climate change (McPhaden et al., 2020). Recent research demonstrates that vulnerable urban communities in highly densified, informal or poorly serviced areas struggle to adapt to climate change-related risks in sustainable, affordable and appropriate ways (Satterthwaite et al., 2020).

Urban and peri-urban risk management in Latin America is usually the responsibility of government departments, which tend to focus on post-disaster relief rather than prevention, mitigation and adaptation, and these top-down initiatives are not well connected to urban planning processes or to affected

communities before disasters occur. In addition, measures to manage risk often comprise physical analyses with little attention to the human processes and behaviours driving climate change impacts. Against this background, the importance of risk management is strongly recognised, with a call for approaches that consider not only the 'sensitivity' of the region where climate change-related risks occur, but also the 'adaptation capacity' of community groups that experience such impacts (Ibarrarán et al., 2014). In this context, innovative strategies rooted in collaboration and co-creation approaches, as well as newly developed forms of association at the community level, and between community, government and academia, are emerging in Latin America. These models showcase alternative forms of governance in relation to risk management and urban planning, which promote shared responsibility between authorities and communities.

The team leading this work, which extends between the United Kingdom and Latin America<sup>1</sup>, has developed action research which involves collaborations between communities, governments and academics in Latin America (including São Paulo, Puebla, México City, Medellín and the Galápagos Islands), to co-create strategies aimed at reducing the impact of environmental risks likely to increase with climate change. Our research has demonstrated that addressing these risks should take an integrated approach aimed at empowering communities in monitoring their land, understanding potential risk mitigation strategies and therefore reducing socio-economic inequalities and poverty. Strategies should consider differences in the perception of risk among stakeholders (from community to government level), existing power dynamics, and opportunities for different types of knowledge (formal/informal, technical/social) to interact in defining risk and adaptation strategies. Our action-oriented research has demonstrated that with training and support from a multidisciplinary team of researchers and the use of information sharing technologies, vulnerable communities are capable of implementing bottom-up participatory monitoring and adaptation measures to tackle climate change-related risks<sup>2</sup>. Communities know their territory and are able to engage in mapping potential hazards, monitoring key challenges, and developing co-produced mitigation and adaptation solutions. Our pilot project experiences in

Latin American cities have also shown that relevant local government bodies and local civic organisations are willing to engage with these processes (see further details on pilot projects in the companion essay by Kaesehage et al., in this volume).

It is therefore clear that technical knowledge is only one part of the solution to the complexity of adapting to climate change-related risks, particularly within informal and low-income areas in growing Latin American cities. In addition, it is essential that the complementary knowledge held in exposed communities is understood, accepted and legitimised, in order for appropriate solutions and processes to be identified and implemented by the relevant actors (Smith, et al., 2020). Achieving this would contribute to a negotiated co-production of urban spaces (Villamizar-Duarte, 2014). To this aim, our research in Latin America has explored the interaction between the technical, socio-cultural, economic, political and institutional factors relating to evolving hydro-meteorological risks in the context of climate change. Developed in collaboration with local partners, our work has tested mechanisms for long-term sustainable processes of risk management through engaging communities, practitioners, NGOs and decision-makers in each case study urban area. This has been achieved in a constructive ‘dialogue of knowledges’, through which multi-stakeholder experiences are shared, existing capacity is strengthened, and context-appropriate solutions are co-developed.

### Co-production of knowledge and building resilience to extreme climate events in informal settlements

Our research work in Latin America has focused in informal and vulnerable urban settlements, exposed to hydro-meteorological risks, such as drought and intense rainfall causing flooding, and landslides, which represent a major cause of climate-change related fatalities in the Global South. Increasing interest in disaster risk reduction has been evident across international organisations. For example, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) provides a review of disaster risk reduction initiatives throughout the world in response to increasing concerns about ‘the impact of disasters’ that occurred between the 1970s and 1990s (UNISDR, 2010). Since the 1990s the

importance of scientific and technical knowledge has therefore been recognised throughout international policy and guidance, aimed towards disaster risk reduction. However, more recently, the emphasis has shifted towards the need to address the human dimension, including economic, social and political conditions.

For instance, Maskrey (1984, 1989, 2011), working with communities exposed to disaster risk impact with the NGO PREDES (Centro de Estudios y Prevención de Desastres – Centre for Disaster Studies and Prevention) established in Peru in 1993, linked the technical knowledge of disasters with the socio-territorial inequalities of communities, resulting in different levels of impact. Maskrey explored how communities adopt ‘coping strategies’, with varying degrees of success. His work identified a significant gap between what communities are able to do to respond to risks and the capacity of urban development actors to support them (Maskrey, 2011). This research showcases a paradigm shift between top-down disaster risk management to a broader, multilateral approach including a range of stakeholders at different geographical scales. This approach led to a range of experiences in the 1980s and 1990s focused on community-based disaster risk management, which have evolved in recent years into explorations of co-produced disaster risk management. However, our research suggests that co-production has focused mainly on urban services supply, such as water, waste management, and energy. Moving beyond a focus on service delivery, our work in Latin America, has explored how co-production can provide a platform for engagement across institutions and communities in the provision of integrated risk management, through empowering those directly affected by risks (likely to increase with climate-change).

Whereas co-production is a relatively recent approach to research and policy development in the built environment (Boyle and Harris, 2009; Stevenson and Petrescu, 2016), it is now recognised that appropriate co-production processes may strengthen community capacities, enabling more equitable collaborative processes to take place (Mitlin and Bartlett, 2018) as long as low-income and informal communities are empowered by such co-production processes to collaborate around their needs, contest power and negotiate (Allen et al., 2017; Mitlin, 2008; Mitlin and Bartlett, 2018; Watson, 2014). In addition, co-production

may help in building resilience, if communities can negotiate with local and central governments to unlock political and economic resources necessary to reduce their vulnerability and manage risk. Our research in Latin American cities has therefore explored ways in which the state and communities can jointly participate in risk management by harnessing traditionally unrecognised skills and knowledge. Moreover, co-production may provide an opportunity to question urban production processes that create social injustice and inequality (Maguire and Cartwright, 2008; Stevenson and Petrescu, 2016), moving beyond concepts of user involvement and participative design, to directly engage stakeholders on the principle of equal partnership (Stevenson and Petrescu, 2016). Through this approach, stakeholders bring a diverse range of skills and knowledge based on lived and professional experience, bridging the gap between those who produce the built environment and those who use it (Allen et al., 2017; Stevenson and Petrescu, 2016).

Our research has engaged with a consideration of co-production away from a means for marginalised communities to achieve essential services, to a means of altering existing relationships between actors and modifying ongoing practices, empowering communities with the notion of urban citizenship (Mitlin and Bartlett, 2018). Building urban resilience is a contested process, where various stakeholders may clash in terms of motivation and power dynamics (Meerow et al., 2016) and diverse social, economic, institutional and political dimensions must be considered (Aguilar-Barajas et al., 2019). Nevertheless, successful examples have shown that improving resilience through co-production is achievable, and increasingly represents a desirable national goal, due to the impact large urban areas have in the national economy (Aguilar-Barajas et al., 2019).

## Building resilience in Latin American cities

Resilience at the neighbourhood scale has traditionally been overlooked in favour of measures at the scale of either individual homes or larger city areas (Stevenson and Petrescu, 2016). However, recent studies have shown the value in connecting bottom-up strategies for resilience on the scale of neighbourhoods with more conventional top-down, city-led initiatives (Petcou and Petrescu,

2015; Stevenson and Petrescu, 2016). Our recent research in Medellín and São Paulo focussed on community monitoring and mitigation of landslide risk has shown that landslide risk management can be co-produced, but more successfully if linked with neighbourhood improvement programmes. Our experience showed that effective co-production is not simply concerned with dividing up different scales of action among community and government organisations, but giving the affected communities power in decision-making, as well as technical assistance to develop long-term landslide risk mitigation plans (Smith et al., 2021).

Considering the range of experiences of community-based disaster risk management in Latin America, it is possible to identify the connections that link the impact of a hazard on people, with a series of social factors that increase vulnerability (Blaikie et. al, 2003). A key issue is the scale at which root causes and dynamic conditions operate, highlighting the importance of place- and context-specific characteristics. In this context, household coping strategies at the community level are essential, but not sufficient. The literature shows that better forms of governance are required to build trust between communities and government organisations, in order to understand risks. This will require exploring how low-income communities perceive risk and develop their own local mitigation techniques, providing opportunities to conceptualise and validate these different forms of knowledge to implement practical strategies. Key within this process is the negotiation and agreement between community and government organisations, considering their different levels of power, to co-produce potential actions and solutions.

Our research has found that there is a need to review, conceptualise and implement action around the 'social dimension' of risk management. Communities are able to identify their own vulnerabilities considering forthcoming climate change impacts, and have collectively taken action aimed towards improving habitat conditions in their territories with technical aid and support. These actions have been rooted in processes that showcase increased autonomy to achieve rights to the city in vulnerable and informally constructed areas (Villada Rios and Jiménez Gómez, 2021). In this context, our research in Latin American cities has aimed to understand: how can

communities, local authorities and civic organisations collectively negotiate risk management?

This can only be achieved through community empowerment, considering their engagement at all levels of an agreed action, from planning to executing and maintaining, so community takes authorship of the proposed actions. 'Knowledge and 'power' building structures are needed in order to understand the capacities of different actors and stakeholders to influence decisions, in addition to understanding the 'scale' of the solution to be implemented and the willingness and capability for stakeholders to participate (Brugnach et al., 2017). Thus, 'co-production' can be implemented at different geographical scales, generating an understanding of individual priorities and collective dynamics at the neighbourhood scale, as well as the institutional frameworks that aim to manage risk and provide mitigation and adaptation solutions. This will lead to building understanding of priorities, responsibilities and roles (levels of power to influence decisions), in addition to generating and legitimising different forms of knowledge. These processes of urban construction, building from community-empowerment in the appropriation, management and protection of the territory, should be supported by equal negotiation and agreement seeking, where proposed actions seek to improve the living conditions and wellbeing in these vulnerable neighbourhoods.

These long-term, sustainable and integrated risk management processes should engage communities, NGOs, practitioners and decision-makers in a constructive 'dialogue of knowledges' through which to co-develop and strengthen existing capacity, to achieve tangible, context-appropriate solutions. Within our ongoing research this has provided opportunities for community-government-academia interactions. Drawing on Brugnach et al. (2017), collaboration is conceived as a governance mechanism that goes beyond public participation, and includes a range of necessary stakeholders. This approach proposes interconnections between different geographical scales, knowledge systems and power structures in a collaborative process. In relation to scale, this research proposes multi-scalar negotiations, referring to the range of political actors undertaking horizontal level interactions. Regarding knowledge, co-creation is the key for the integration of different knowledges, redefining the

problem in a compatible and inclusive way for all participants, or through joint knowledge production (Hegger et al., 2012). Finally, power is understood as the balancing of power structures, which might, in practice, be the most difficult part of the collaborative process. In conclusion, the outcome achieved from balancing powers, and empowering communities with their own adaptation measures, will lead to community resilience in facing climate change. Our research builds on this conceptual framework, leveraging community knowledge on adaptation towards co-created knowledge, meaningful negotiation, and connection of identified challenges, problems and solutions.

## Vulnerable communities in Latin America: the case of Medellín

Medellín, the capital of the Antioquia region of Colombia, is the country's second most populous city with 2,376,337 inhabitants according to the 2018 National Population and Housing Census, and a metropolitan region reaching 3,725,682 inhabitants (DANE, 2019). After being known as the 'murder capital of the world' in the 1990s, Medellín has pioneered innovative forms of city planning and management and was acclaimed the most innovative city in the world by the Urban Land Institute in 2013. However, it has remained one of the most unequal cities in Latin America, exemplifying significant challenges in relation to access to housing and services as it continues to experience the growth of informal settlements on hillsides with steep slopes, and a resulting increase in exposure to hazards, vulnerability and risk.

According to the 2018 census, 22,729 homes in Medellín do not have sewerage, 12,848 homes do not have drinking water service, 263,142 homes do not have access to the internet, and around 55,000 residents live in overcrowded conditions (DANE, 2019). Although there are no precise data on the geographic distribution, the Multidimensional Poverty Index map of Medellín identifies that the most precarious living conditions are predominantly concentrated on the north-eastern slopes, specifically in the perimeter strip or urban-rural edge (DANE, 2020).

Faced with these challenges, community initiatives and organisations focused on participatory planning have aimed to create or adapt risk management strategies, generating a database of emerging networks and practices where collective actions, education programmes and support networks have arisen to respond or adapt to the range of challenges in these vulnerable areas. Most of the community organisational initiatives in Medellín have a long development history. A key objective over the past ten years has been a demand for suitable housing and public services, with citizens claiming their ‘rights to the city’ since the 1980s. This has taken place as a result of Medellín’s informal urban expansion to the hillsides through self-build processes, showcasing the need to provide and improve housing conditions, and promoting the creation of organisational structures that have represented communities in decision-making. This process in Medellín links the social construction of the habitat and the co-production of the territory with collective and participatory forms of community organisation aimed at improving living conditions, providing suitable housing and habitat, and reducing levels of vulnerability and inequality.

Since the 1990s a range of initiatives rooted in Comprehensive Neighbourhood Improvement (Mejoramiento Integral de Barrios) programmes have been implemented, as an alternative to the eviction and elimination of households in these growing informal areas. An example among these programmes is PRIMED, a successful initiative led by local government institutions, in partnership with community organisations, through which risk was reduced in the three sectors where the programme was implemented. This experience demonstrated that with political will and trust between communities and government organisations, inclusive and integrated frameworks for risk management can be developed.

In these early stages, social organisations led action towards access to public services and suitable housing, however more recently, debate and action has turned towards a more complex approach to organising the territory through integrated land use planning. This is a response to the fact that the connection to water or sewerage networks is not possible in some households due to their location in areas classified as at high and non-mitigable risk. Organisations have therefore led actions addressing urban informality through a comprehensive

approach towards improving housing and its infrastructure, as well as providing land titling and on-site resettlement, and more recently focusing on risk management (Velásquez and Carvajal, 2019).

Within this approach, organisations at the community level have participated in a range of opportunities for dialogue and debate over the most significant developments in the city of Medellín, such as the overarching urban development plan for the city (Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial – POT)<sup>3</sup>. Tensions emerging with government institutions have been confronted through organised negotiation meetings, such as open councils, public hearings and popular consultations, all mechanisms of social participation in the ‘defence of the territory’. Likewise, recent exercises of co-production of landslide risk management strategies within a ‘dialogue of knowledges’ between the community and academia have allowed a better understanding of the range of perceptions around landslide risk and the possible measures to mitigate it, with community monitoring of risks and participation in the construction of small-scale mitigation works (e.g., Smith et al., 2020, 2021). This has demonstrated the pertinence of the ongoing negotiation between community, local organisations, academia and government institutions to achieve a better quality of life in informal settlements.

The right to the city is understood as a struggle to decide and plan the future of the city but also a struggle to self-build a community’s own integrated territory. This struggle implies a social and political impact on behalf of the community before the state, which is a path that social processes have already been following, through mechanisms of negotiation or agreement with government institutions. A key shift that has emerged in the context of the covid-19 emergency links to the increased importance of concepts of autonomy and self-management in the debate, where the community has a hands-on approach in the construction of local capacity for urban development in these informal areas.

The health and socioeconomic crises associated with the pandemic have shown that community organisations can engage in alternative pathways to mitigate risks via demand, mobilisation and negotiation with state institutions. Possible

alternative community-based management approaches and increased levels of autonomy could lead to strategic actions. Examples of initiatives that are beginning to develop this approach in Medellín include water management with community aqueducts in the peri-urban edge and food production with community and family gardens, as well as community schools and solidarity campaigns. These movements could contribute to, and collaborate with, state-provided aid in emergency situations. In other words, the collective actions recently developed in Medellín to respond to the pandemic are harnessing the possibility of a balance between processes of advocacy and those of autonomy.

Collective actions observed through the management of the pandemic, and in line with the management of vulnerable settlements in the past, are aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens. This is taking place within the city of Medellín, where formal development has focused on the design and implementation of mega-projects and tended to ignore the needs of people living in informal areas. A key challenge is to articulate a more complex intervention strategy between community actors, academics and institutions, so that progress can be made towards the co-management of informal and vulnerable settlements, and the development of comprehensive neighbourhood improvement programmes that address interlinked challenges, such as risk management, water, energy and food resources, as well as access to services such as drinking water and sewerage, as well as housing.

## Community autonomy as the way forward for increasing resilience and adaptation capacity to climate change-related risks

As mentioned in the previous section, a range of community organisational structures and initiatives have led to self-management strategies in the planning of the urban territory in Medellín. These have included infrastructure, such as communal aqueducts, community centres and schools, as well as capacitation programmes in collaboration with NGOs and occasionally academia. These processes of 'autonomy' are rooted in mutual support and solidarity (Villada Rios and Jiménez Gómez, 2021).

Within this context and since 2012, 'territorial schools' established in Medellín, led by communities in informal areas and supported by NGOs, have represented collaboration, mobilisation and political incidence, in knowledge development and action towards improving conditions around planning, risk management, housing and public services (Zapata et al., 2013). These 'schools' have generated a dialogue between different actors, including academia and government institutions, strengthening local knowledge and practice towards permanency in the territory, and rights to the city (Villada Rios and Jiménez Gómez, 2021). The initial approach through the 'Dignified housing, public services and territorial planning'<sup>4</sup> school focused on the planning dynamics of the hillside neighbourhoods in the context of the wider Medellín city planning development process. The work of this school was to create community organisation visibility and broaden community knowledge around public services, housing, land planning, etc. The key shift in the creation of this school was the strengthening of community organisation and the exploration of the collective construction of knowledge between communities living in informal areas.

In the following stage, the 'Territorial school of hillside neighbourhoods'<sup>5</sup> integrated three hillside sectors in Medellín (Comunas 1, 3 and 8), and aimed to exchange knowledge in the context of the municipality's macro-project 'Urban NE border' (BURNOR). This initiative aimed to promote neighbourhood improvement and community-based urban management, focused on risk management and citizen's rights to remain against eviction. This initiative responded to the challenges generated by the geological and hydrological high risk conditions of these areas, sharpened by their socio-economic vulnerability, which together constituted a justification for the lack of state action in regards to risk management, with evictions representing the preferred intervention. Against this background, this second school conceptualised risk management as closely linked with integral neighbourhood improvement, promoting that 'managing risk is managing life' (Villada Rios and Jiménez Gómez, 2021).

In 2020, the 'Popular school of autonomies'<sup>6</sup> emerged, as a result of which the 'Hillside movement'<sup>7</sup> was created. This school evolved from previous experiences aimed at strengthening community organisation and defending

the rights of vulnerable neighbourhoods. Its aim was to generate collective actions towards the autonomous management of the territory, within three key aims: autonomy in energy, food and water. Within this more recent approach, the continuation of community engagement in neighbourhood improvement can be identified, but also a tighter relationship between these actions and the local environmental conditions, including those related with the urban-rural edge. Moreover, this approach presents an alternative perspective around the role of communities in the management of infrastructures and resources at the local level, building on the solidarity and mutual support characteristic of these neighbourhoods.

The evolution of these strategies, aimed towards developing and sharing knowledge and strengthening community organisation, demonstrates an emerging approach that positions communities beyond a role of defenders of their rights to the city, towards an approach that incorporates increased autonomy at the local level to respond to growing challenges in relation to the environment, towards increased sustainability, democracy, equity and social justice (Velásquez et al., 2019). Due to the growing risks these challenges are driving globally, the strategies exemplified in Medellín and illustrated through this essay may begin to provide a potential way forward in urban management, particularly in vulnerable areas.

## Conclusions

This essay presents a glimpse into emerging alternative urban management models aimed at addressing growing challenges in informal areas in Latin American cities and growing urban regions more generally, which build from community empowerment through the co-production of strategies and solutions. Our work has explored alternative scenarios around integrated risk management in vulnerable urban areas, rooted in generating greater multi-scale action between social organisations and territorial management government institutions. These scenarios look to create intersections between the collaborative management of resources and risk, identifying potential solutions for sustainable and equitable access to basic needs, i.e., water, energy and food. This alternative approach could promote resilience by opening up a

space for negotiation and collaboration between government and community organisations, thus supporting more effective and balanced participative governance, bringing together efforts at all geographical scales.

The initiatives in Medellín presented through this essay, together with recent forms of community collaboration that emerged as a result of the current covid-19 crisis, demonstrate the potential for a more sustainable future within cities, and the wider territory, particularly in areas that do not seem to be on the planning agenda of local governments, due to the complexity of the overlapping risks they present, and their associated social, economic and environmental vulnerability. Moreover, the informal urban areas in which this research is focused on are providing alternative risk management programmes that are better oriented to the specific social, economic and environmental needs at the neighbourhood level. Communities within these vulnerable areas have the potential to collectively develop and implement solutions that, if coordinated with institutionally-led actions, can facilitate socially-constructed integrated risk management strategies.

In addition, when these collective actions are articulated with international frameworks, they can facilitate scaled-up cooperation and resource mobilisation. Communities in informal settlements can become key players in addressing their exposure to risk through collaboration and collective action, however linkages must be forged with institutional frameworks and processes at multiple scales in order to strengthen state-community dynamics and facilitate sustainable, inclusive and equal development in cities. By placing different sources of knowledge on a level platform, greater community ownership of risk management can be achieved. This will support local communities to determine their own vision of a future sustainable development in Latin American cities.

## 332 Endnotes

- 1 The researchers leading this work include academics, practitioners and members of the community: Dr Katherine Kaesehage; Dr Amelia A. Bain; Ms Stephanie Crane De Narváez (University of Edinburgh); Professor Harry Smith (Heriot-Watt University); Mr Wilmar Castro; Professor Françoise Coupé (Universidad Nacional de Colombia); and Mr Carlos Velásquez (Community leader, Comuna 8, Medellín) amongst many others.
- 2 Our research has been funded by UK-based research councils, such as NERC, British Academy, ESRC, and the Newton Fund. Further information about our research can be found here: <https://www.globalurbancollaborative.org>
- 3 In 1989, there was a fundamental change to the 1947 Urban Reform Law, linked to all-encompassing national constitutional change. The emerging law declared that those municipalities with 100,000 inhabitants or more needed to formulate an Urban Land Use Development Plan, which is known as the Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial (POT). The POT is understood nationally as a technical, normative and political tool to aid local planning. It is intended to coordinate and control urban growth over the short-, medium-, and long-term – and to ensure a better balance of ‘benefits and charges’ for housing developers (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2018).
- 4 The ‘Escuela inter-barrial en vivienda digna, servicios públicos y ordenamiento territorial’ (2012-2015), emerged in collaboration between the displaced inter-neighbourhood board and the NGO, Corporación Jurídica Libertad.
- 5 ‘Escuela territorial de barrios de ladera’ (2018)
- 6 ‘Escuela popular de autonomías’ (2020), led by Comunas 3 and 8.
- 7 The ‘Hillside Movement’ is the result of the accumulated organisational, social, community and neighborhood processes in Medellín that have vindicated the struggles for local community’s right to the city and to live with dignity in their territories. <https://www.facebook.com/MovimientoLaderas>

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# 18

## Revisiting the concept of place-making in Latin America: processes of space consolidation and co-creation of a cooperative community in Mexico City

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### Abstract

As urbanisation continues to grow worldwide, social, economic and environmental challenges make cities and their inhabitants vulnerable to crises and risks. In this context, the idea of place-making as a bottom-up process has attracted attention as part of the effort to improve living conditions, based on the notion of participation and local knowledge of the actors that pre-existed in a place. As an Anglo-western conceptualisation, place-making evolved in the Global North as a rule-guided process that includes many formal actors. It has been suggested that, in this structured environment, place-making processes have lost the originality that non-professional stakeholders bring. On the other hand, place-making practices have been expressed in very spontaneous ways in Latin American cities for decades, prior to the emergence of the term in the vocabulary of design professionals, planning authorities and academics globally. In this context, place-making has primarily been executed by informal means through a rural population migrating in large numbers to urban centres and establishing informal settlements in cities' peripheries. This essay presents an example of such a place-making process, the case of the Palo Alto community in Mexico City, which is a self-built settlement that began informally and was later organised as a cooperative to protect the land occupied by the residents. The essay argues that place-making practices may occur at a small scale but can have a wider effect in the socio-spatial cohesion of a city. Finally, the essay raises questions on how a revisited approach to place-making can benefit cities in the Global North in building community capacity and resilience.

### Resumen

*A medida que la urbanización continúa creciendo en todo el mundo, los desafíos sociales, económicos y ambientales hacen que las ciudades y sus habitantes sean vulnerables a las crisis y los riesgos. En este contexto, la idea de 'place-making' como un proceso*

*de abajo hacia arriba ha llamado la atención como parte del esfuerzo por mejorar las condiciones de vida, basado en la noción de participación y conocimiento local de los actores que preexistían en un lugar. Como conceptualización anglo-occidental, place-making evolucionó en el Norte Global como un proceso guiado por reglas que incluye a muchos actores formales. Se ha sugerido que en este entorno estructurado los procesos de place-making han perdido la originalidad que aportan las partes interesadas no profesionales. Por otro lado, las prácticas de place-making se han expresado de manera muy espontánea en las ciudades latinoamericanas durante décadas, antes de la aparición del término en el vocabulario de los profesionales del diseño, las autoridades de planificación y los académicos a nivel mundial. En este contexto, la creación de lugares se ha ejecutado principalmente por medios informales a través de una población rural que migra en grandes cantidades a los centros urbanos y establece asentamientos informales en las periferias de las ciudades. Este ensayo presenta un ejemplo de tal proceso de place-making, el caso de la comunidad de Palo Alto en la Ciudad de México, que es un asentamiento autoconstruido que comenzó de manera informal y luego se organizó como una cooperativa para proteger la tierra ocupada por los residentes. El ensayo sostiene que las prácticas de creación de lugares pueden ocurrir a pequeña escala, pero pueden tener un efecto más amplio en la cohesión socio-espacial de una ciudad. Finalmente, el ensayo plantea preguntas sobre cómo un enfoque revisado de place-making puede beneficiar a las ciudades del Norte Global en la construcción de capacidad y resiliencia de la comunidad.*

## Introduction

Rapid urbanisation, increasing inequality, and climate change are just a few of the major social, economic, and environmental challenges facing growing cities. According to the 2010–11 UN report on the ‘State of the World’s Cities’ (UN, 2010), the ‘urban divide’ between social strata is increasing, causing the socio-economic and cultural marginalisation of the urban poor. The financial crises of the past decade combined with neoliberal forces in the housing market and urban development, along with the reduction of the welfare state, have led to the commodification of housing and public space. In Latin American cities, these factors and the adoption of dispersal policies have resulted in population displacement and unsustainable urban expansion. These pressures have generated urban fragmentation and increased vulnerability to risks from natural hazards, pandemics, and risks related with socioeconomic issues, such as unemployment, gender inequality, etc., that particularly affect low-income communities.

In contrast, in cities of the Global North, financial crises, urban regeneration projects and the expanding activities of short-leasing platforms, along with the growing housing crisis and gentrification, create vulnerability. Furthermore, in Europe, the ‘Refugee crisis’<sup>1</sup> has raised questions in relation to the provision of good quality living conditions and social integration for the arriving vulnerable population. Under these circumstances, the concept of place-making has gained attention as a response to the urban challenges described above. Countries such as Scotland<sup>2</sup> (Horgan, 2020) have integrated the principle of place-making into planning frameworks, and design processes have been adapted to include the active participation of the public in making decisions about the places they inhabit.

This essay argues that, although place-making is considered as a new concept in the field of urban studies, it has long been practiced in an informal way by

communities in the Global South. Over time, informal communities in Latin America for example, have succeeded in appropriating land and building urban neighbourhoods through acts of self-organisation and self-production of living space, similar to those promoted by place-making processes. These actions of creating places for living have led to initiatives towards reclaiming the inhabitants' right to be part of the city. Despite the significance of these place-making processes for the integration of communities in the urban fabric, their potential in addressing urban fragmentation and the lessons that can be learned for the global context require further study.

### Place-making for the socio-spatial integration of vulnerable communities

As a concept, place-making emerged in the 1960s and 70s, through the work of activists such as the journalist Jane Jacobs, who fought against large-scale urban regeneration projects in New York that threatened existing neighbourhoods with demolition and displacement. However, it was not until the 1990s that efforts to create a place-making framework began. A clear and official definition of place-making does not exist due to its abstract and multi-dimensional nature. The place-making concept is used to refer to a broad spectrum of socio-spatial processes that "transform any place into a place for living" (Schneekloth and Shibley, as cited in Lombard, 2014). The academic literature on place-making draws on approaches in various fields, including geography, social anthropology, architecture, planning, environmental psychology, and philosophy (Friedmann, 2010). Essentially, place-making has been used to understand the meanings assigned to particular places (Lombard, 2014) towards the appropriation of space (Friedmann, 2007).

The form of place-making as developed in the Global North includes public participation in decision-making around urban planning via formal channels that involve design professionals from different disciplines, planning authorities and the public (Beza, 2016). It is closely associated with "direct citizen participation" (Kalandides, 2018) through consultations, workshops, surveys, etc., and various methods to assist community participation (Mateo-Babiano and Palipane, 2020). Nevertheless, its

implementation lacks mechanisms of protection against gentrification and displacement.

Place-making has also been described as a bottom-up process that encompasses participatory actions of co-creation (Project for Public Spaces, 2015), thus offering interrelations with Lefebvre's theory on the 'right to the city' by acknowledging the inhabitants' right to active citizenship (Friedmann, 2010). The 'right to the city' includes all efforts towards equal, sustainable, and inclusive cities (Purcell, 2014) and captures the abstract right of urban inhabitants to interact, belong and participate in the production of urban space (Aalbers and Gibb, 2014). A non-traditional type of active citizenship is required in the 'right to the city' for the realisation of urban change socially and spatially (Purcell, 2003), while addressing the right to adequate housing, education, work, and health (Aalbers and Gibb, 2014). The association of the two concepts allows place-making to be considered as a tool that, through place-specific interventions in marginalised communities, contributes to the construction of an integrated place, and the development of a sense of belonging to the city by its inhabitants (Rolnik, 2014).

To achieve socio-spatial integration, it is important to address spatial, social and users' activity parameters to establish the physical existence of a 'place' as part of the urban fabric, to give meaning and to add use value to the place. Firstly, place-making involves tangible and continuous processes of constructing a place: the location, access to critical infrastructure, and construction of residences determines the relationship of a place to the rest of the city, the acknowledgment of its presence and its needs from the authorities and, consequently, the levels of isolation and marginalisation of its inhabitants. Secondly, the social place-making process includes all the actions that give meaning to a place and contribute to a 'sense of community and belonging' through the common struggles for tenure rights. These place-making processes contribute to a shared identity through the collective construction of habitat, with social infrastructure and architecture, as well as symbolic place-naming, following common references between inhabitants (Lombard, 2014). Finally, they drive vitality, through a diversity of primary and secondary uses, which then attract a diversity of people and promote the local economy. Place-making brings liveliness at the street level by promoting visibility and continuous

physical movement flows, as well as a clear distinction between the private and public realm.

Overall, a place-making approach aims to improve living conditions and erase the stigma and discrimination of marginalisation and “otherness” of vulnerable populations by officials, the public sector and other citizens (Lombard, 2014). It seeks to address socio-spatial segregation by appreciating the space production efforts of informal communities, while also criticising the mass-produced, large-scale social housing projects constructed at the outskirts of cities. Thus, place-making promotes quality instead of quantity in the production of urban space, in which habitat is integral to wellbeing and resilience.

## Place-making in Latin America and the ‘Social Production of Habitat’

The rapid urbanisation of cities in Latin America, due to the industrialisation of economies followed by a debt crisis in the 1980s, was accompanied by a series of challenges and risks that mainly affected the new population of rural immigrants arriving in cities. The application of neoliberal policies in the housing market in the 1990s, the privatisation of public space and the reduction of the welfare state have exacerbated the displacement of the urban poor to informal settlements in city peripheries and on high-risk land. As inequality has increased, social and spatial boundaries have resulted in the fragmentation of urban landscapes.

The high degree of segregation in fragmented Latin American cities, such as Mexico City (Bayón and Saraví, 2013), Sao Paulo (Pessoa, 2019) or Lima (Peters and Skop, 2007), requires radical and dynamic solutions. The dearth of basic infrastructure, adequate housing and financial resources has led to the emergence of do-it-yourself community initiatives in the development of urban space in the Global South (Beza and Hernández-García, 2018). These initiatives have taken the form of informal land consolidation by rural migrants flowing into urban centres, and whose exclusion from their right to housing has forced them to self-produce their settlements and other aspects of their habitat under precarious conditions and without support. However, there is

a distinction between these actions and the place-making ‘philosophy of co-creation’ that includes the collaboration of professional and non-professional stakeholders, regardless of their level of expertise (Teder, 2019). The concept is not as developed and researched in the Global South (Strydom et al., 2018). Instead, in Latin America, place-making has been practised through the ‘Social Production of Habitat’. According to the Habitat International Coalition, the social production of habitat refers to all the processes at the margins of the market that “generate living spaces, urban components and housing, carried out under the control of self-producers and other social agents acting without lucrative purposes” (HIC-AL, 1995).

The informal actors of these processes may act individually or be organised as cooperatives or NGOs. Under these circumstances, the production of housing is treated as a process that evolves over a long time period. The process involves participative responsibility, organisation and active solidarity among the inhabitants, contributing to stronger community practices and a form of urban citizenship that includes direct and active democratic exercise and participation (HIC-AL, 1995). These processes of social production of habitat create a consolidation of the ‘right to the city’ through the acquisition of land or buildings, and allow people to claim and appropriate the places that they produce via alternative solutions tailored to the needs, available resources and culture of each community.

Thus, place-making in the context of Latin America can be understood as a bottom-up process created, guided and implemented by informal communities, in which formal actors have a secondary role. The process goes beyond the production of public space to include the right to land and adequate housing, while addressing issues of legal ownership. This approach allows deeper and wider issues to be addressed than those directly related with quality of living at a small scale and with specific boundaries alone. It places the members of a community at the centre of change and recognises their rights as active citizens, and thus, as part of the city.

This informal but dynamic approach can inform theories of place-making and offers a framework that could be applied at a larger scale and have a wider effect

beyond the boundaries of a neighbourhood. In Latin America, the scale and level of these practices have opened the way for neighbourhood improvement programmes in informal areas and participatory budget policies, and have forced authorities to recognise these places as part of the city, with rights to access infrastructure, urban amenities and opportunities.

### Place-making in Mexico City: the case of Palo Alto

The challenge of urban fragmentation is highly relevant to the case of Mexico City, as non-traditional urbanisation patterns have resulted in dispersed development in the Metropolitan Region (Aguilar, 1999), and the segregation and marginalisation of low-income settlements (*colonias populares*) stigmatise much of their population (Bayón and Saraví, 2013). Housing organisations' influence on housing policies (Rodríguez Cortés, 2017; Reyes, 2018) and inhabitants' own place-making activities (Lombard, 2014) have led the way to claim their 'right to the city' through programmes for the regularisation and improvement of urban informal settlements. However, studies on the efficacy of such initiatives and the role of place-making on the socio-spatial integration of these settlements are limited.

In the 1980s, the Urban Popular Movement (*Movimiento Urbano Popular – MUP*) was mobilised in Mexico City in response to the government's inability to deal with the housing crisis (Neuhausen, 2019; Rodríguez Cortés, 2017). The MUP later led to the emergence of the neighbourhood assemblies (*Asambleas de Barrios*), which opposed urban renewal projects, housing unaffordability and population displacement (Rodríguez Cortés, 2017; Reyes, 2018). Even earlier, housing cooperatives emerged as an alternative form of housing production based on citizen initiatives. The objective of a cooperative was not just to secure housing for its members but to establish a community with services and amenities. The families of a cooperative were not owners of their individual property but of the whole community establishment. Today, there are five housing cooperatives in the city, in which inhabitants cannot sell or rent, and the construction belongs to everyone.

The best-known cooperative is that of the Palo Alto community, which represents an excellent example of an organised group of residents in Mexico City claiming land rights through a cooperative system. For more than 30 years, the residents of Palo Alto, without being owners (in terms of having bought the land), have occupied this land as a community. The occupation initially originated with the arrival of migrant workers, mainly from the state of Michoacán, who were seeking to work in nearby sand mines. They built their houses on land rented to them by the mine-owner. After 30 years, the mines were closed, and the owner threatened the ex-workers with eviction. The workers became organised in the form of the Palo Alto Housing Cooperative, to fight for their right to remain on the land by presenting their case to the city's legal authorities. After a long legal battle, the cooperative was granted the land and the construction of permanent housing began, with the assistance of the Operational Centre for Housing and Population (COPEVI), a civil organisation (De Tavira Servitje, n.d.).

The persistent fight of the community to claim the right to the land they have lived on for many years, has made the Palo Alto cooperative synonymous with the 'right to the city'. When the land was obtained, the community built housing with financing from the Fund for Housing in Popular Co-operation (FOMVICOOP) for the acquisition of building materials. The Operational Centre for Housing and Population (COPEVI) also offered architectural advice. The cooperative opted for a housing design that allowed the progressive growth of the living space, with an identical format for all to express how their collective struggle unlocked this achievement. The housing form became a symbol of identity and eventually the logo for the cooperative.

The construction of the housing was completed through self-build methods by the community members. Women played a significant role in the construction of Palo Alto, and are still considered the heart of the community today. When the mines closed, men had to find employment in factories, while women stayed in Palo Alto to protect the land from evictions. They became local authorities by developing cooperation strategies to guide the construction of their housing, which was achieved through their own and their children's labour, with no help from the state (Landa, 2016).

According to Enrique Ortiz Flores, from the International Habitat Coalition of Latin America (HIC-AL), housing cooperatives are excellent examples of social production and participative management of habitat. This housing organisation model can offer the people belonging to underprivileged and underrepresented communities the chance to acquire knowledge on place-making practices of co-creation, while being empowered as a community to organise and fight for their 'right to the city'.

## Lessons from informal place-making practices in Latin America

Cities in Latin America have experienced the negative effects of neoliberal policies on the housing market and the privatisation of public space on the cohesion of the urban environment and its inhabitants. Furthermore, the resultant urban fragmentation and uncontrolled expansion have made them vulnerable to risks and shocks. The socio-spatial challenges faced by Latin America cities, require radical and creative solutions that make up for the lack of formal aid mechanisms from the state. The self-production of habitat through community initiatives, expressed in this context, offers valuable lessons on the capacity of people to self-organise to claim their rights to land, housing and public space, and develop solutions that work for their needs and aspirations. These processes contrast with the formal structures that produce urban space in the cities of the Global North, although inequality and segregation also persist there. The 'epistemological blindness' of the North has prevented learning and benefitting from the knowledge produced in the South (Santos, as cited in Camargo-Borges and Ferragi, 2020). However, the knowledge produced on the urban issues described above could benefit the Global North through offering innovative, bottom-up and inclusive solutions for capacity-building and community resilience.

More specifically, the case of the Palo Alto cooperative model can offer a valuable alternative pathway illustrating how to make cities inclusive, resilient and integrated. This example highlights the importance of local knowledge and how pairing communities with civil organisations can provide support with legal and design knowledge, empowering the community to implement

its own vision in relation to planning and inhabiting their urban environment. Moreover, the model of cooperative ownership enhances the results of place-making as it protects the community property from being sold and eventually offers a protection mechanism against the forces of gentrification. The Palo Alto community has managed to survive until the present day, despite the constant pressure of offers from private developers to purchase the land for high-end development, as has been occurring in the surrounding area of Santa Fe.

A holistic approach to place-making can include interventions at different urban scales, from the level of the dwelling and block, to that of the neighbourhood, benefitting the city as a whole. The design of the community at the neighbourhood level allowed the inhabitants of Palo Alto to customise the public space and land uses according to their needs at any given time. The housing design chosen by the community became a symbol of Palo Alto and demonstrates how participatory design can work as a reference point for the inhabitants, providing a communal sense of ownership. Similarly, the active engagement of the community members in the construction of their place and the shared memory of the struggle for land consolidation and the construction of the community contributed to a sense of belonging and identity among the inhabitants of Palo Alto. Women also played a significant role in the establishment of the community and the creation of a common identity. Empowering women to take on a central role in place-making can address issues of accessibility, safety and gender inclusion in the public space. A similar approach should also allow the active participation of children in these processes to address similar issues, as well as to help them to develop a sense of community at an early age, and promote active citizenship for the future.

Studying Latin American examples can lead to the recognition of place-making practices, which can then be translated into policies and the institutional recognition of the 'right to the city'. The extreme manifestations of urban fragmentation and segregation conditions in Latin America offer a rich field of research into innovative urban practices, based on local knowledge, aiming towards building urban resilience. Cities of the Global North can learn from the cooperative approach to place-making to safeguard existing communities from gentrification. This approach can also help build new communities to house

incoming vulnerable populations of refugees and avoid their segregation. Such a model of place-making that ensures ownership allows its inhabitants to practice their right to the city and active citizenship. In turn, this can help achieve the socio-spatial integration of low-income communities and contribute to social cohesion, creating conditions for a resilient future of the city as a whole.

## Endnotes

- 1 The term 'Refugee crisis' refers to the flows of refugees from Africa, Asia and Middle Eastern countries, especially Syria, that began in 2014, surged in 2015, and is currently continuing at lower rates. Southern European countries such as Spain, Greece and Italy have been particularly affected, as transitory spaces towards northern European countries, such as Germany, France and the UK.
- 2 After a number of poorly planned urban renewal projects that resulted in the displacement of social housing tenants, Scotland aims to become a world leader in place-making. Based on feedback from the public, the Scottish Government introduced public involvement in the design process through a Charrette mainstreaming programme that expanded into a wider "Making Places" initiative, and has developed a participatory design tool known as the 'Place Standard'.

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# 19

## Action Research as a Channel for Integrating Community-Based Risk and Resource Management into Governance Frameworks

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### Abstract

As outlined in the companion essay by Garcia Ferrari in this volume, modern unprecedented challenges such as the covid-19 pandemic and climate change-related risks require innovative research methodologies that promote community agency and empowerment. Whereas the companion essay presents the analytical framework for our work, this essay engages in more depth with specific examples in Latin America, through which our international research team has led innovative transformation processes in vulnerable urban areas. We describe three case studies of action-research in the Galapagos Islands (Ecuador), the city of Puebla (Mexico), and the city of Medellín (Colombia), in which a co-production approach to integrated risk management has been adopted. In these projects, our research teams from multiple disciplines collaborated with communities and other stakeholders to understand their perceptions of risk. We have co-developed transdisciplinary research methodologies and appropriate adaptation solutions that have the potential to be scaled up to other at-risk communities and integrated with government-led policies and programmes. Based on these experiences, we argue that the value of co-production approaches to integrated risk management, when confronting modern intractable challenges in urban areas, lies in their contribution to both the research process itself – through co-creating methodologies that integrate pluralistic viewpoints, perspectives and needs – and to the research findings, through setting up a continuous ‘dialogue of knowledges’ creating shared responsibility, through locally-oriented actions. These contributions present opportunities to develop research methodologies that may achieve a greater impact within the context of Latin American cities, where inequality, poor governance and increasing urban sprawl commonly co-exist.

## Resumen

Tal como se describe en el ensayo complementario de García Ferrari en este volumen, los desafíos modernos e intratables, como la pandemia del covid-19 y los riesgos relacionados con el cambio climático, requieren metodologías de investigación innovadoras que promuevan la agencia comunitaria y el empoderamiento. Mientras que el ensayo complementario presenta el marco analítico sobre el que se basa este trabajo, el presente ensayo se centra con más profundidad en ejemplos específicos en América Latina, a través de los cuales el equipo de investigación internacional ha liderado procesos de transformación innovadores en áreas urbanas vulnerables. Describimos tres estudios de caso de investigación-acción en las Islas Galápagos (Ecuador), la ciudad de Puebla (México) y la ciudad de Medellín (Colombia), en los que se ha adoptado un enfoque en la coproducción para la gestión integral de los riesgos. En estos proyectos, investigadores de múltiples disciplinas colaboraron con las comunidades y otras partes interesadas para comprender sus percepciones del riesgo y desarrollar conjuntamente metodologías de investigación transdisciplinarias y soluciones de adaptación apropiadas que tienen el potencial de ampliarse a otras comunidades en riesgo e integrarse con las políticas y programas dirigidos por instituciones gubernamentales. Con base en estas experiencias, argumentamos que el valor de los enfoques de la coproducción para la gestión integral del riesgo, al enfrentar desafíos modernos en las áreas urbanas, radica en su contribución tanto al proceso de investigación en sí, a través de metodologías de co-creación que integran puntos de vista pluralistas, perspectivas y necesidades - y a los resultados de la investigación, mediante el establecimiento de un “diálogo de saberes” continuo que genere una responsabilidad compartida, a través de acciones de orientación local. Estas contribuciones presentan oportunidades para desarrollar metodologías de investigación que puedan lograr un mayor impacto en el contexto de las ciudades latinoamericanas, donde comúnmente coexisten la desigualdad, la falta de gobernanza y el crecimiento urbano acelerado.

## Introduction: The role of action-research in vulnerable urban communities 355

To address the pressing challenges of climate change and covid-19 in vulnerable urban areas, our research has focused on understanding bottom-up, collective practices that enable communities and their stakeholders to adapt to shocks and mitigate against the risks they are exposed to (framed in the companion essay by Garcia Ferrari in this volume). Working together with impacted communities across Latin America, we have designed innovative and co-created action-research methodologies to (1) understand the evolution of integrated risk adaptation and mitigation solutions through community-led networks and practices, and (2) strengthen and sustain those strategies in collaboration with diverse stakeholders to achieve more balanced and participative governance. We have found through specific action-research projects that this methodology is a key element in vulnerable communities achieving agency, from social (e.g., strengthening organisational capacities), political (e.g., facilitating negotiation and agreement-seeking) and environmental (e.g., enhancing water and risk management on a community level) perspectives. Our research has demonstrated that communities are best placed to tackle the intractable challenges of risk exposure as they know their territory and are able to engage in identifying and mapping risks, participating in monitoring activities, and developing co-produced mitigation and adaptation solutions through a ‘dialogue of knowledges’ (*diálogo de saberes*) that places local knowledge and other forms of knowledge (e.g., community, academia, political institutions) on a level platform (e.g., Kaesehage and Leyshon, 2018; Smith et al., 2020).

This work has been possible through collaborations built on relationships of trust and maintaining regular communication between academics<sup>1</sup>, community members, and other stakeholders across governments and NGOs, in the places where risks are being experienced, mitigated and adapted to. In this essay, we

document a set of diverse experiences working with marginalised communities in the Galapagos Islands (Ecuador), the city of Puebla (Mexico), and the city of Medellín (Colombia), outlining the challenges they face and the integrated risk management responses that have emerged. We describe our action-research approach in working together with these communities to design and implement methodologies that build understanding of risk adaptation and mitigation in these settings, and support the strengthening of those strategies and the empowerment of community stakeholders. The overarching goal of our work is to assist in connecting community-based local adaptation strategies with government-led actions to promote more inclusive, equitable and integrated development planning and risk management.

### Co-Created Action-Research Projects in Latin America

In many cities of Latin America, rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation in the absence of integrated risk management has driven the growth of service provision-poor communities exposed to overlapping risks. Communities living under these conditions are vulnerable to current and future crises, such as the effects of climate change (e.g., drought, intense rainfall, triggering flooding and landslides), as well as health-related hazards, as illustrated by the current covid-19 crisis. However, recent research, media coverage and online discussions have demonstrated that these marginalised communities are quick to adapt and alter their social practices when confronted with sudden and, in the case of the covid-19 pandemic, unprecedented events related to these phenomena. Bottom-up collective actions across the Global South provide insights on potential strategies, forms of communication and cooperation between stakeholders, and the development of local solutions that also represent interesting opportunities for tackling future challenges in similarly vulnerable communities. It is therefore important and timely to understand the evolution of community-based risk adaptation and mitigation strategies through a focus on these bottom-up collective actions. It is particularly fruitful to analyse how these practices are shaped, in order to preserve and sustain their structures and replicate these innovative approaches to build resilience to current and future intractable challenges. This approach is especially

important in water management and governance, as the failure to understand the interaction between climate change and the water system may exacerbate issues in exposed communities and increase vulnerability, for example due to the consequences of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies applied in other sectors (Sadoff and Muller, 2009). We review three examples of our own action-research projects in Latin America, followed by a synthesis of lessons learned from these experiences that are relevant to other vulnerable communities of the Global South as well as the Global North.

### Covid-19 Adaptation and Mitigation in the Galapagos Islands

Prior to the onset of the covid-19 crisis, tourism represented the primary economic driver in the Galapagos province of Ecuador (MINTUR, 2010), not only through direct employment in the tourism industry, but also indirectly through the tourist demand for food (particularly from the local fisheries), and to a lesser extent local craft. The sudden disappearance of the tourism industry in March 2020 due to the global covid-19 pandemic therefore brought on a sharp economic crisis in the archipelago (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2021), illustrating the vulnerability of the island economy to global crises. Livelihoods were immediately impacted, in a province where 11% of the population is estimated to be living in extreme poverty (defined as lacking two or more basic needs) and a further 40% are estimated to be living in poverty (lacking one basic need), as measured using the Unsatisfied Basic Needs Index (Karakiewicz, 2019).

In response to the crisis, Galapagos residents reverted to previously more dominant forms of economic activity, particularly fishing and agriculture, which supported food security and helped meet the needs of the most vulnerable. In the fisheries sector, surplus fish was offered to local communities and outdated forms of bartering, associativity and collective action re-emerged. In parallel, there was a shift in social practices. For example, online networks were established via WhatsApp groups and Facebook, bringing these communities together in new ways. Covid-19 risk mitigation and adaptation actions, such as ensuring access to clean water for health and hygiene, and re-farming available land to diversify livelihoods and provide local produce, were coordinated and

implemented through these media. Through the adoption of these new practices, the communities acted to minimise their risk of covid-19 exposure and adapt to the shortage of food and other essential goods. Actions included solidarity campaigns, increased activism and mobilisation networks, the protection of human rights (in particular women's rights), alternative communication and information sharing, fund-raising and local production networks.

Our work in Galapagos is exploring these innovative social practices and collective actions to understand how perceptions of risk may be shifting due to the pandemic, and how these actions are creating opportunities for more sustainable management of resources and a greater awareness of other risks, such as those generated by climate change. A project carried out in June 2020 aimed to understand how covid-19 risks can be managed in ways that recognise and adapt the practices and capabilities of vulnerable community groups. The project was built on existing relationships with the communities, local NGOs (e.g., Charles Darwin Foundation, Frente Insular de la Reserva Marina de Galápagos), the provincial government (Consejo de Gobierno del Régimen Especial de Galápagos), as well as with local academics in/near those communities (e.g., Universidad San Francisco de Quito). The study included the collation of experiences and network interactions through virtual semi-structured interviews with social network participants, including residents and community leaders, as well as joining the local WhatsApp and Facebook groups. The research was conducted virtually to a large degree, by engaging in the communication networks of local people via social media.

The research identified that collective actions are showcasing both tactical and strategic bottom-up approaches to local agriculture production, the protection of the most vulnerable within the community, and control of increasing domestic violence under lockdown measures. Some of the most significant consequences of these collective actions are a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between communities and their natural environment, as well as the strengthening of local organisations, empowering them to participate in the development of integrated neighbourhood improvement plans.

Further, the research identified how covid-19 risk mitigation networks evolve and are managed/recognised within the community groups, which yielded lessons on how to mobilise risk mitigation measures and practices in other vulnerable communities. A broader understanding of how these risk-mitigation structures might be preserved, scaled and replicated has the potential to assist in mitigating future risks, such as those associated with climate change.

## Flooding and Drought in the city of Puebla, Mexico

Mexico is expected to be heavily impacted by climate change, resulting in extreme droughts and flooding (Seneviratne et al., 2012). The country's population largely lives in urban areas, with a significant proportion living in vulnerable city fringes. Mexico's climate change aims and policies are defined on the national level, and many of these apply mostly to the country's capital, Mexico City. This leaves other urban areas with insufficient climate change-related regulation, financial support, and protocols to address the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change-related risks.

In the state of Puebla, the quality and availability of water is severely compromised (e.g., Bressers and Flores, 2015; Flores-Márquez et al., 2006) and is expected to worsen under increasing sprawling development. Coupled with inadequate waste management capacities, especially for industrial waste, this situation poses a tangible threat to water security (OECD, 2013). In the city of Puebla, the largest urban area in the state, the city government has attempted to address some of these concerns in vulnerable communities by implementing technology-based solutions (see Wattenbarger, 2018). However, these solutions tend to be driven by top-down understandings and initiatives, which often do not consider the needs of, or benefits for, the communities living under such risks.

Our approach in Puebla focused on understanding local perceptions of climate change impacts and how these are being addressed from the perspectives of the community in San Andrés Cholula. Through qualitative methodologies and in collaboration with community members, government institutions, NGOs, private businesses and other stakeholders, we identified climate change-

related impacts, as well as current efforts and possible appropriate technology-based strategies to address these impacts. Over twelve months, researchers from the University of Edinburgh and the Ibero-American University of Puebla (Universidad Ibero-Americana de Puebla) developed and implemented action-research methods such as focus groups, workshops, site visits and semi-structured interviews with these local stakeholders.

The first field visit focussed on understanding local perceptions of climate change-related impacts and risks through interviews, site visits and workshops with local communities (residents of Santa María Tonantzintla, San Francisco Acatepec, Cabecera de San Andrés Cholula, San Bernardino Tlaxcalancingo, San Antonio Cacalotepec and San Rafael Comac, who belong to a grassroots movement named “Cholultecas unidos en Resistencia”) and focus groups with representatives from social, public and private organisations (including environment and urban planning researchers, local public officials, smart city entrepreneurs, civil organisations and risk management NGOs such as Oxfam, UNDP and Ayuda en Acción). Five community-led workshops were then held during a second field visit, with key themes including the impact of local urban planning programmes on the community’s exposure to climate change risks, adaptation activities, and water/food security. Further capacity-building workshops on planning tools and guidelines were requested and conducted with community representatives. During the third field visit, the focus was on creating climate change-related communication tools (such as infographic materials, a community-led documentary, and an interactive risk map). This was achieved through workshops and focus groups with community representatives and local organisations to discuss possible mitigation and adaptation solutions, communication strategies, and required policy changes.

The research revealed complex climate impacts in the region, including damage to housing, problems getting to work due to flooding, work security issues, and health issues. However, water security was identified as the main concern, as the impacts from climate change are increasingly exposing risks to water and food security related with water pollution, decreased agricultural yield due to drought, and water scarcity in households, coupled with flash flooding due to excessive paving and a lack of suitable water drainage. A range of adaptation

solutions that could be implemented and scaled up beyond these local communities were identified, such as: education on daily decision-making in relation to the environment and the impacts of climate change-related risks; information sharing tools around the risks of and preparedness for flash flooding events; and access to water-related educational resources to empower communities to negotiate with local authorities around urban development planning and the impacts of associated decisions on communities. In addition, a group of local residents in Santa María Tonantzintla has also been engaging in community-led projects to recover old water channels and ditches, plant trees and transform their own houses to contribute to rainwater harvesting. Such efforts could be supported and scaled up to achieve wider impact.

Identifying the challenges perceived at the community level contributed to a dialogue between the community and local institutions on necessary adaptation solutions and long-term planning. The project provided a platform for dialogue and reflection among local residents, authorities and academic representatives, on the basis of which agreements were reached to incorporate community needs into the Urban Development Plan and Environmental Management Plan that were in preparation. A follow-up research project is currently establishing water security indices for the wider water catchment area in Puebla (the Alto Atoyac River Basin), taking into account social and environmental factors and local climate change projections.

Our research in Puebla has evidenced that through dialogue with and support from a multidisciplinary team of researchers and the use of information sharing technologies, vulnerable communities are capable of developing and implementing bottom-up participatory monitoring and adaptation measures to tackle climate change-related risks. In addition, relevant local government bodies and NGOs are willing to engage with these processes. Through generating trust and commitment from local organisations and communities, the research uncovered a knowledge gap around the challenges and needs of local communities, and demonstrated that ‘smart’ decision making should not only be rooted in public participation but also in informed public action with a long-term vision.

## Integrated Water and Risk Management in Medellín, Colombia

Rapid urbanisation driven in large part by the migration of people from internal zones of conflict in Colombia in recent decades has led to the growth of informal, largely self-built neighbourhoods on the steep slopes surrounding the city of Medellín (Garcia Ferrari et al., 2018). Built on landslide-prone land, in areas of what local authorities consider to be largely ‘non-mitigable’ risk, these informal settlements typically lack basic services such as connections to the centralised water network (Furigo et al., 2020), and therefore represent sites of overlapping risk and extreme vulnerability. Water management in these areas in particular is a key factor for the implementation of environmental risk management, as the infiltration of water within unstable land is increasing with higher levels of rainfall driven by climate change (Smith et al., 2021). This infiltration generates landslides, flooding, agrochemical contamination of water and land, and deforestation, among a range of other hazards. Water management is therefore recognised in research and policy as essential to ensuring the well-being of these communities. However, mitigation and adaptation measures, including necessary infrastructure, are difficult to implement in these areas due to resource implications, but also due to complex socioeconomic, political and institutional processes around informal settlements. Our work has shown that there is a research gap around how acceptable and appropriate risk reduction solutions based on water management can be implemented based on knowledge held within these communities, and in integration with initiatives from national/local authorities and NGOs.

Building on an established dialogue between local community boards and government organisations, our ongoing research in Medellín aims to co-produce and test infrastructure solutions that respond to communities’ needs, while integrating and articulating these interventions with city-level infrastructure networks and systems. A key objective is to co-produce pilot infrastructure prototypes that can be designed and tested to allow a harmonic articulation with environmental conditions in three case study areas, the neighbourhoods of El Faro, Bello Oriente and San José la Cima 2 in the northeast sector of the city. These pilot interventions aim to address social, economic and environmental challenges, through engaging local community knowledge,

technical appraisals and institutional policy design and implementation. This includes identifying and scoping solutions for joint decision-making between communities and government agencies around housing and neighbourhood planning in the rural-urban edge, aimed at reducing structural inequalities and risk, and increasing social equity and wellbeing. With this approach, the goal is to identify solutions at the intersection of technical and community knowledge, aiming towards the empowerment of residents, who can take ownership of the infrastructure solutions and approaches developed through the project.

The problem-focused nature of this approach builds on previous research around water-related risks and is being conducted in collaboration with Colombian academic organisations (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Universidad de Antioquia), as well as local government institutions (Administrative Department of Disaster Risk Management (DAGR), Aburrá Valley Early Warning System (SIATA)), community organisations (Comuna 8 Housing and Habitat Board, Local Administrative Board (JAL), Community Action Board (JAC) and Water Committees) and NGOs (Corporación Convivamos, Corporación Ecológica y Cultural Penca de Sábila and Colectivo Tejearaña) in order to achieve a range of negotiated risk reduction strategies. These strategies and alternatives are based above all on the strengthening of community risk management, accompanied by participatory action-research processes and the establishment of Escuelas Populares (Popular Schools, community-based knowledge exchange groups focussed on increasing community autonomy and well-being, see companion essay by Garcia Ferrari for more details), which evolve the notion of participation into a drive towards autonomy in resource management, and position the community at the core of decision-making processes.

Initial findings have demonstrated significant contamination of water sources in the case study communities, due to pollution and the expansion of agriculture and farming practices in the urban borders. This water pollution is impacting residents’ health through the contraction of diseases related with the consumption of untreated water. Related to this are important deficiencies in the neighbourhood community aqueduct infrastructure (i.e., in the physical and chemical treatment of water, and the working order of tanks and other

infrastructure), as well as the lack of sewerage services – sewage and rainwater are transported through artisanal pipelines that lead directly to natural streams without any type of treatment. Access to water is also not universal in the case study communities, with limited access in some catchment points.

In relation to service provision from the municipality of Medellín, various problems have arisen due to interventions carried out by the municipal service provider (Empresas Públicas de Medellín) that are perceived as violations of the community's right to water, such as service disconnections, increases in rates, and access restrictions due to privatisation and exclusion processes. These actions affect the dignity of the families and people who live on the periphery of the city, and are also perceived as an impediment to the right to community water management. Meanwhile, internal dynamics and practices within community organisations, such as clientelism, authoritarian leadership, corruption and individualism also generate mistrust within the community, and cause fragmentation in the construction of water, risk and territorial management processes. Finally, on a territorial planning level, our research in Medellín has identified a non-recognition by the state of the cultural references of residents when defining the limits or scope of territorial divisions. These initial findings illustrate the complex socio-cultural background that must be understood prior to seeking negotiated solutions between the communities and the state/local authorities.

## Action Based Research: Key Messages from Latin America

The three examples of action research above demonstrate that communities are willing and able to engage in the co-production of research and strategies to mitigate and respond to climate change impacts and other unprecedented risks, such as those related to the covid-19 pandemic. Through the co-creation of research methodologies, pluralistic viewpoints, perspectives and needs can be integrated to identify solutions that are sustainable, meaningful and appropriate. The approaches highlighted above allow the concerns of communities to guide what is ultimately being researched and how. These methodologies have demonstrated how a structured 'dialogue of knowledges' can create shared responsibility and impact by involving all local stakeholders from the research design stage.

Within participatory action-research processes, establishing shared responsibility is crucial for two reasons. First, it invites different stakeholder groups to contribute their ideas, thoughts and concerns. Creating a space for these negotiations to take place helps not only to resolve conflict before and during the research process, but also to identify potential challenges when solutions are being implemented and research is complete. Second, shared responsibility enables solutions that can have an impact over the long term, with stakeholders themselves driving further communication, system maintenance, and development. In addition, the early involvement of stakeholders across decision and power levels allows for the methods, and hence the solutions under investigation, to be adaptive, allowing stakeholders to collaboratively develop solutions on an ongoing basis that can address context-specific issues and help communities to cope with changes and shocks (e.g., environmental, economic, political) by building resilience. Most importantly, implementation of co-created research methodologies ensures that solutions are based on social cohesion through learning and dialogue. Whilst implementing a 'dialogue a knowledges' helps to strengthen community autonomy, interlinking local government with community organisations provides overview and control for governments. Once negotiated agreements have been reached, more effective and long term solutions can be established through the shared responsibility built through the research process.

A co-production approach to integrated risk management also allows for the findings and potential research impact to be relevant to all the involved stakeholders. This allows for the identification and strengthening of existing solutions based on local knowledges, creativity and appropriateness – regardless of their scale – as well as co-creating new solutions through balancing local knowledge with knowledge that may be external to the communities, such as technical studies or academic research. In addition, the action-research process contributes to identifying knowledge development needs at the community and government levels, for which academic input is valuable, in particular to strengthen capacity based on dialogue. Importantly, this research approach ensures that community priorities are addressed and thus contribute to the reduction of risks as perceived by these communities. These co-created research

approaches therefore allow the concerns of participants to be met, while providing sustainable and context-specific solutions that are aligned with the objectives of the research.

## Concluding Remarks

Risks associated with intractable challenges such as climate change and pandemics require the co-creation of research methodologies that integrate pluralistic viewpoints, perspectives and needs through a structured 'dialogue of knowledges'. The covid-19 crisis has aggravated existing challenges and brought additional, unprecedented risks to vulnerable urban areas. Our research before and during the crisis has highlighted that technical interventions (e.g. infrastructure) and technological solutions, particularly aimed at facilitating knowledge exchange and multi-stakeholder communication, can contribute to tackling these challenges and building resilient communities. However, to be effective, these solutions must be rooted in an understanding of community needs and priorities, in balance with governments' desire for overview and control. Research methodologies that (i) create a sense of community ownership of implemented solutions, (ii) enhance community autonomy, and (iii) build trust and a shared sense of responsibility between stakeholders, are therefore highly valuable in addressing issues of integrated risk and resource management at the local level.

To this aim, our research has promoted an approach that builds on dialogue and collaboration, as well as negotiation and agreement-seeking to understand local risks and impacts, and develop potential actions towards monitoring, mitigating and adapting to these. Future urban strategies oriented towards increasing resilience and adaptation capacity should connect bottom-up approaches at the neighbourhood level, with city-level initiatives. The long-term success, continuity and sustainability of co-produced actions in growing urban areas will be rooted in the power of local communities to influence decision-making and technical appraisals to ensure that risk and resource management integrate a meaningful social dimension with clear roles and responsibilities across stakeholders.

## Endnotes

- 1 The research team is much broader than the authorship of this essay, and includes, among others working on related projects throughout Latin America: UK researchers - Prof Soledad Garcia Ferrari, Ms Maritina Iliadi (University of Edinburgh), Prof Harry Smith (Heriot-Watt University); Ecuador - Ms Lucia Norris (independent researcher); Mexico - Dr Emma Morales Garcia de Alba, Dr Maria Eugenia Ibarra, Dr Valentina Campos Cabral, (Universidad Ibero-Americana de Puebla), Dr Milton Montejano Castillo (Instituto Politécnico Nacional); Colombia - Ms Ani Lady Zapata Berrio, Ms. Maria Alejandra Villada Ríos, Mr Andrés Jiménez Gómez, Ms Carolina Maria Valencia Tobón, Ms Manuela Restrepo Duque; Dr Guillermo Antonio Correa Montoya (Universidad de Antioquia); Ms Elizabeth Arboleda Guzmán, Mr Wilmar Castro Mera, Ms Nubia Laverde, Mr Yeison Castañeda Castaño, Ms Karolina Naranjo Bedoya (Universidad Nacional de Colombia). Further collaborators can be found on the website: [www.globalurbancollaborative.org](http://www.globalurbancollaborative.org).

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# 20

## Notes on Urban Informality: transformations, places and practices

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### Abstract

The challenge of urban informality has received increasing attention, motivating conceptual debates and schemes for responsive intervention. In Latin America, these concerns have manifested in a wide range of spatial interventions incorporating public space as an essential tool for the social transformation of their informal urban areas. Although they constitute remarkable examples, a nuanced analysis may expand their contributions. Debates tend to focus on a few well-known upgrading projects, and the daily experiences from many cities of the region tend to remain overlooked. The diverse trajectories of the informal neighbourhoods in the region have shaped places and practices that manifest in informal public spaces. This essay argues that the places and practices resulting from the long, intense and sustained trajectory of urban informality in the region and decades of spatial interventions represent a rich intermingling of elements to learn from. Drawing from empirical work in Guayaquil, Ecuador and from the examination of relevant literature, critical aspects of the upgrading initiatives in the region are discussed, and inhabitants' practices in public space are illustrated. Learning from relevant experiences and everyday practices involves a methodological focus on situated narratives and descriptions that can develop alternative interventions and notions about urban informality.

### Resumen

*El desafío de la informalidad urbana ha recibido una atención cada vez mayor, lo que ha motivado debates conceptuales y la formulación de esquemas de intervención. En América Latina, estas preocupaciones se han manifestado en una amplia gama de intervenciones espaciales que incorporan el espacio público como una herramienta esencial para la transformación social de áreas urbanas informales. Aunque algunas de ellas constituyen ejemplos notables, análisis más profundos pueden ampliar sus*

*contribuciones. Los debates tienden a centrarse en algunos proyectos bien conocidos, de forma que las experiencias cotidianas de muchas ciudades tienden a pasar desapercibidas. Las diversas trayectorias de los barrios informales de la región han moldeado lugares y prácticas que se manifiestan de forma cotidiana en sus espacios públicos. Este ensayo sostiene que los lugares y prácticas resultantes de la larga, intensa y sostenida trayectoria de la informalidad urbana de la región, y las décadas de intervenciones espaciales representan una rica mezcla de elementos de los que aprender. A partir del trabajo empírico en Guayaquil, Ecuador y de la examinación de literatura relevante, se discuten los aspectos críticos de las iniciativas de mejoramiento de áreas informales de la región, y se ilustran las prácticas de los habitantes en el espacio público. Aprender de las experiencias relevantes y las prácticas cotidianas implica un enfoque metodológico centrado en narrativas y descripciones situadas que pueden contribuir a desarrollar intervenciones y nociones alternativas sobre la informalidad urbana.*

## Introduction

As the world's population becomes increasingly urban, rapid urbanisation, inequalities, and environmental threats pose enormous challenges for sustainable urban development. In the “developing world,” these challenges emerge together with increasing informality, which has become a ubiquitous urban condition. With about a billion people living in informal urban areas, global agendas<sup>1</sup> call for attention to this phenomenon and encourage the formulation of responsive interventions (United Nations, 2014, 2020). At the same time, scholars, policymakers, practitioners are increasingly interested in understanding urban informality. Many approaches suggest overcoming dualistic conceptualisations that situate the “informal” as the contrasting and negative “other,” separated from the dynamics of the formal city. They advocate for recognising the agency of marginalised groups and call to challenge interpretations based on western cities’ notions (Roy, 2004; McFarlane and Waibel, 2012). Similar approaches have also emerged in architecture and design, motivating spatial responses focused on the informal areas of cities in the global south.

In Latin America, this interest has manifested in a range of spatial interventions in its informal consolidated areas. In addition to a long trajectory of research focused on self-built housing, land tenure, and the informal economy, the debates about collective life conditions in these areas have increasingly gained attention. In this sense, recent upgrading programs have demonstrated the critical role of public space as an essential mechanism to achieve inclusion and social transformation. The achievements and contributions of these experiences and their progressive discourse on rights and justice have become relevant sources of knowledge. However, narrow analyses tend to overlook the complexity of the interaction between multiple forms of spatial production and appropriation in these contexts. In fact, there are a few fine-grained accounts of the interaction of inhabitants and informal public space. Their widespread recognition has also motivated the production of simplified analysis centred on a few cases and the daily experiences from other cities of the region tend to remain overlooked.

Nuanced analyses of the Latin American upgrading projects and situated perspectives, looking at the informal practices in public space, can provide interesting insights for interventions. Critical analyses of decades of spatial interventions intermingled with accounts of the everyday interaction of people, places and practices make the study of Latin American informality a fertile ground of insights relevant for other regions. The visibility of local knowledge, practices and actors can help counteract institutional hegemonic spatial practices based on unitarian notions of urban life and define alternative ways of intervening. The following sections briefly reflect on the Latin American experience of intervening in informal spaces. The case of Guayaquil, Ecuador is then used to illustrate the interaction of people and informal urban spaces with a focus on the appropriations taking place beyond government-led projects. The following brief accounts do not constitute a comprehensive analysis; however, they reveal some fundamental aspects of the practices that configure the everyday dynamics in the public space of informal areas.

## Transforming spaces

Latin America is the world's most urbanised region, with more than 80% of its population living in cities (UN Habitat, 2012). Although there has been a decrease in urbanisation rates and a reduction in poverty in the last decades, many urban centres increasingly present inequalities and socio-spatial fragmentation (Janoschka, 2002). A tendency to develop private residential enclaves and privatisation of urban space coexists with a long process of informal urbanisation (Caldeira, 2000, 2017). Informality is part of everyday life for most of the region's urban population who live in vast self-built areas developed since the second half of the 20th. Century. These areas redefined the peripheries of many cities following an accelerated rural-urban migration and a lack of responses to the enormous demand for housing. Market reforms that reduced the role of the state in the economy and housing policies influenced their expansion. They gradually became an integral part of many urban landscapes, challenging modern urban ideals and planning models across the region.

As new informal neighbourhoods continue to emerge, the living conditions in many consolidated areas are also unsatisfactory. Today, in Caracas, Sao Paulo, or Lima, emerging self-built neighbourhoods occupy hillsides and flood-prone areas lacking infrastructure and access to urban services and workplaces. Inhabitants in these areas are highly vulnerable and permanently exposed to environmental risk. At the same time, many consolidated areas still present high poverty levels and disadvantages despite the massive spatial transformation and improvements achieved through self-built interventions. The conventional schemes for formalisation have not been able to tackle the effects of persistent urban injustices and asymmetries. Recurrent generalised notions and misconceptions also perpetuate their stigmatisation and segregation (Bayón and Saravi, 2013). Although institutional and governmental initiatives exist, many still fall short in giving adequate responses to the logic of their development.

In the last decades, the upgrading of informal areas has taken on relevance for local governments and practitioners. Policies and programs have captured

international recognition because of the incorporation of innovative planning schemes and urban design as fundamental devices for social transformation (Silva and Vaggione, 2016; Rojas, 2010). In Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela, mobility and public space have represented mechanisms of distributive justice. Political leadership, citizen participation, and civic engagement emerged as crucial elements of these processes (Cruz and Forman, 2015). Beyond a purely architectural focus, many analyses of these initiatives have linked them with operational frameworks and narratives engaged with the potential of informal spaces as places for innovation. To some extent, these discourses and practices can be associated with global debates that underscore counter-narratives, socially produced transformations, and cultural and political specificity.

These practices represent significant contributions that offer many positive lessons. Critical analysis can identify also several shortcomings to learn from. Often, many analyses tend to a "*physical determinism*," overlooking a broad range of socio-economic and cultural issues, as well as the role of inhabitants in the process of transformation (Hernández and Becerra, 2017). Further analysis of their actual impact at the local scale is still needed. In addition, the sustainability of these transformations and the mobility of these tactical approaches and "best practices" are questioned (Angotti and Irazábal, 2017). As highlighted by Holston (1989) the desired positive outcomes are hindered by planning and design practices rooted in imported urban models and generalised ideals of space (Holston, 1989). The un-articulated character of this urban acupuncture approach seems to fall short concerning broad social struggles and urban transformations. At the same time, the engagement of architects with informal contexts has not inquired about longstanding power structures and capita-driven forms of producing the city. They have not attended issues of race, class, or the legacies of cities' colonial trajectories.

Nevertheless, beyond their limitations, critical examinations of these experiences and schemes of interventions are important sources of knowledge. The insights from the conditions for intervening in informal areas can be expanded from the analysis of the complexity of diverse contexts and not only from a few experiences of upgrading. The construction of new narratives can be leveraged through the exploration of the interaction of informal environments

and daily lives and a street-level perspective can be the resource for expanding notions, methods and theories. In this sense, theories and practices may engage with the everyday to tackle the tensions between the spatial transformations and the local dynamics. As mentioned, urban interventions are vulnerable to private interests, political agendas, abandonment of projects, becoming missed opportunities, and reducing their effectiveness and potential to encourage appropriation and social empowerment.

### Guayaquil: everyday places and practices

In places like Guayaquil, the most populous<sup>2</sup> city and main port of Ecuador, informality is inherent to inhabitants' everyday routines. For most of its population, informality is linked to possibilities to work, play, cooperate, and associate in open space. Streets are the primary sources of income and places of social interaction in this unequal city (INEC, 2019). The materialisation of informal practices in urban space is particularly evident in the consolidated informal neighbourhoods that constitute the larger portion of the built urban area. They result from more than fifty years of progressive self-construction of dwellings and urban space that has transformed the city's southern periphery (Rojas and Villavicencio, 1988). Although they have improved in terms of infrastructure, land tenure, and connectivity, they still face acute socio-economic conditions and environmental threats.

During the last two decades, some of these informal areas have been places for the implementation of spatial interventions in public space. Areas for recreation, waterfronts, and aquatic parks have to some extent, played a role in the physical improvement of consolidated informal areas. They are part of a city-wide urban regeneration program based on punctual interventions and large-scale projects seeking to attract capital and investments to the city (Navas Perrone, 2019). The urban upgrading model has been highlighted as a successful process by the local and national governments and international institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank. However, critical voices have raised concerns about certain aspects of the interventions. Their focus on embellishment has overlooked local dynamics and citizen participation during the design and implementation (Allán,

2011; Andrade, 2006). Their promises of economic development and tourism have also brought about spatial arrangements that influence appropriation and local dynamics.

Several projects developed in the consolidated informal neighbourhoods present a limited interaction with the local informal economy and local practices. Controlled access, regulations, material abandonment, and standardised spatial models influence the capacity for inhabitants to appropriate some public spaces developed by the local government. Inhabitants' role in the functioning of spaces has also been neglected in recent interventions led by the national government. The redevelopment of 16 km of waterfront at the Salado Estuary significantly increased the number of areas for recreation in the southern consolidated informal areas. However, it also meant the relocation of more than 15 thousand people to a far periphery in the north of the city (MIDUVI, 2015). In this way the development of the project had important implications for the local social structure. In these conditions, the potential of spatial interventions to contribute to local development and urban inclusion becomes substantially weak.

The consolidation of areas such as *Guasmo Sur*, *El Cisne Dos* and *Santiagoito Roldós*, is primarily the result of continuous everyday efforts by inhabitants. In addition to their agency for transforming the environments' physical aspects, inhabitants' informal practices influence collective life and the liveability of public spaces. By adding, adapting, assembling, transporting objects and materials, they alter spaces and define social interaction and livelihood opportunities. Throughout these neighbourhoods, temporary spatial arrangements allow appropriation and enable informal economy, recreation, and association. These ways of operating unfold mainly on streets and sidewalks but are also visible in other collective spaces and dwellings. Although the nature of everyday relational practices cannot be generalised, similar characteristics can be found in many emergent and consolidated neighbourhoods.

For inhabitants of *Guasmo Sur*, the informal economy is the primary mechanism for securing inhabitants' livelihoods and an essential element for the vitality of places. Mobile selling, static sidewalk selling, and small retailers on the

streets operate at different spatial scales and locations. Temporary commercial activities can be found next to supermarkets, commercial chains, public facilities, or in front of private houses. Although non-regulated street vending is often criminalised in many streets, “touristic” zones and even at redeveloped public spaces, in the streets in Guasmo Sur there is a high degree of tolerance. These income source activities are enabled through a variety of building additions and ephemeral structures that recall the logics of incremental construction that have kept transforming the urban fabric since the 1970s. These spatial alterations represent devices contributing to the improvement of the living conditions of many households. In this way, open spaces interact with a multiplicity of daily negotiations that shape the local economy and social interactions.

Collective life in these neighbourhoods is also significantly characterised by inhabitants’ everyday recreation and leisure in improvised spaces, defined by their needs and desires. Often gathering and playing occur in streets and near home spots which are perceived as safer places, open to be managed and controlled by themselves. In *El Cisne Dos*, multiple self-made sports areas on the streets serve as recurrent nodes of interaction, negotiation and potential cooperation. As the organisation of sports has attracted people from other neighbourhoods, the current appropriation of these streets not only involves the participation of people living in the area. Although these activities might seem spontaneous, they require coordination and self-organisation to set up spaces, matches and manage unexpected conflicts. Similar conditions are also necessary for the organisation of itinerant sessions of Bingo in the neighbourhood’s streets. For some hours, each afternoon, this temporary association of bodies and objects is enabled by the temporary arrangements of plastic furniture and the negotiation of space with passers-by, cars, and *tricimotos*<sup>3</sup>. These recreation and leisure practices represent forms of conviviality and operations that subvert conventional expectations of the use of streets and sidewalks.

Although formal institutions do not fully regulate many of the daily activities in the public space of these neighbourhoods, there are some schemes of self-regulation and organisation determining how some places work. For instance, self-organized vendors distribute sidewalk spaces and organize vending spots and negotiate space in the street markets in *El Cisne Dos*. In *Santiaguito Roldós*,

multiple neighbourhood committees – officially and unofficially recognised – have an important role in encouraging appropriation and maintenance in public space. The representatives of these groups worked as a parallel system of justice, control, and safety on the streets during the first years of consolidation. Currently, they are key actors for articulating community needs and institutional initiatives as well as for coordinating neighbours’ interaction in collective spaces. Their role in improving the socio-material conditions of public space is also relevant given emerging tensions related to their use and negative perceptions about some of them.

### Reconsiderations from daily practices

In Guayaquil and many other cities in which the *urban majority* lives, urban informality is more than a problem to be erased or solved. Formal and informal practices are juxtaposed in the public spaces of its informal areas, configuring collective life and everyday rhythms. Similar to many cities from the Global South, informal practices are essential for livelihoods, socialising, and support networks that are fundamental to manage daily urban life (Simone, 2014; Bayat, 2010). By looking at underexplored cities such as Guayaquil, we could feed broad discussions on appropriations and daily practices that can influence urban upgrading schemes. A focus on the everyday can also expand the notion of public space in informal areas, integrating the understanding of the role of multiple actors and the link with neighbourhood identities. In this sense, the insights from the everyday collective life from Latin America might help formulate responses based on local dynamics and develop appropriate ways of reading and intervening in the context of informality.

Policies and practices of urban upgrading influence daily lives and should attend to the specificities of places. The analysis of relevant experiences should also explore micro-processes and transcend generalisations of the “informal city”. If narrow views of spatial interventions in informal contexts may overlook people’s practices, alternative approaches should highlight a “*diálogo de saberes*” (“*dialogue of knowledges*”), and the visibility of local knowledge and practices. Looking at the mechanisms of appropriation, understanding cultural practices without losing attention to the influence of persistent schemes of

socio-spatial transformation can be useful for developing approaches more sensitive to the context. Nuanced examinations of the upgrading programs in Latin America might be helpful to avoid the uncritical implementation of “best practices” and the generalization of technocratic solutions (Klaufus and Jaffe, 2015). This situated perspective becomes particularly crucial in moments of crisis and uncertainty, such as during the covid-19 pandemic, when urban inequalities are exacerbated and global measures and prescriptions do not fit in the realities of many places.

From this view, Latin America can be seen as fertile ground for redefining interventions in informal areas. The challenge of learning from relevant experiences and everyday situated practices will be to build alternative narratives to reformulate the ways of operating through design and planning. Urban design practices found in the region can be articulated with discourses, theories, and methods suitable for developing alternative urban visions. The contributions from Latin America can add to a multiplicity of theorisations of the informal emerging from other continents and disciplines. Some scholars claim that “building knowledge from the often precarious mobilisations of residents, new arrivals and marginalised groups is an essential methodological choice for opening up insights into alternative urban futures” (Robinson, 2016, p. 24). In this sense, fine-grained examinations of informal spaces in Latin America can be helpful to understand how everyday lives intersect with informality and urban space. These situated analyses can feed a dialogue between diverse cities and can contribute to defining a more encompassing urban theory and practice.

## Endnotes

- 1 For instance: the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda.
- 2 By 2017, Guayaquil’s population was 2,644,891 inhabitants. (INEC, 2019)
- 3 In Santiaguito Roldós, inhabitants rely on informal transportation - only partially regulated by the state - for moving in the area. With low car traffic on the streets, “tricimotos” have become part of the everyday landscape.

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Professionally qualified in Psychology in Argentina, Sebastián has extensive expertise in developmental psychology and developmental cognitive neuroscience, with a focus on how poverty impacts cognitive and neural development, the design, implementation and impact evaluation of interventions aimed at optimizing self-regulatory development, and scientific-

policy transfer efforts. He is Codirector of the International Mind, Brain and Education School (Ettore Majorana Foundation, Italy), fellow of the Centre of Neuroscience and Society (University of Pennsylvania, USA), and member of the IRB and the Committee of Bioethics at CEMIC (Buenos Aires, Argentina).

## Daniela Irena Łukaszewicz

*Independent Researcher*

Daniela has expertise in comparative law and consumer protection. After graduating in Law from the University of Siena, she started collaborating with the 'Centre for Legal Studies on Artificial Intelligence' based at the same University. Daniela is actively involved in the Jean Monnet Project 'European Legal Strategies for payment systems in the Open Banking Age'. In 2021, she was a member of the organising committee of the international scientific conference "Contracts and Payments in the Digital Age". Daniela is currently a trainee in a law firm.

## Henrike Neuhaus

*PhD candidate, Goldsmiths University of London, United Kingdom*

Henrike explores dimensions and tropes of ethics of care and caring relationships in the realm of martial arts practice. She undertakes her PhD in Visual Anthropology at Goldsmiths University of London. Henrike teaches ethnography modules and methods courses that focus on visual- and multimodal approaches at Goldsmiths and is an Associate Lecturer at the University of Buenos Aires in documentary filmmaking. She also served as a part of the organising board of the UNSAM Science Fair and Short Film Festival 2018, pushing the boundaries of academic engagement. Henrike is now involved inter alia the Latin America is Moving Collective, encouraging transdisciplinary encounters.

## Xavier Méndez Abad

*Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Architecture, KU Leuven, Belgium*

Before joining the Urban Projects, Collective Spaces and Local Identities Research Group in 2018, Xavier graduated as an architect from the University of Cuenca and obtained a Master of Science in Architecture at Politecnico di Milano in 2016. He was awarded a SENESCYT scholarship to develop his ongoing research investigating the interplay between the design of collective spaces, everyday practices, and urban informality. Currently, he collaborates in academic projects exploring practices of co-production and participatory design in consolidated informal urban areas in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

## Gabriel M. Moulatlet

*Lecturer, Universidad Regional Amazónica Ikiam, Ecuador*

Gabriel is a biologist and holds a PhD in Ecology. He is especially interested in tropical ecology, with a focus on the distribution of understory species along environmental gradients. Currently, he is also involved in environmental assessments projects within various ecosystems of Latin America.

## Hans Egil Offerdal

*University of Bergen*

Hans holds a Candidatus philologiae (MPhil) degree in Christian studies from the University of Bergen. He has been a visiting professor at Tecnológico de Monterrey, Campus Estado de México (ITESM-CEM), and at Central Missouri State University (CMSU), and a senior research associate at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (UASB). He is especially interested in the links between ethics/religion, social justice, poverty, and human rights. Hans was co-editor (with Genaro Zalpa, UAA) of the book *¿El reino de Dios es de este mundo? El papel ambiguo de las religiones en la lucha contra la pobreza (CLASCO, 2008)*. He currently works as an adviser for international affairs at the University of Bergen.

## Alessandro Palmieri

*Associate Professor in Comparative Private Law, University of Siena, Italy*

Alessandro has expertise in the legal aspects of the Digital Age and in consumer protection. He was visiting Professor, or visiting Researcher, at various universities in Europe, Latin America and Asia. He is the author of more than 300 scientific publications, including five books. Alessandro has organised several international conferences. He is currently Academic Coordinator of the Jean Monnet Project “European Legal Strategies for payment systems in the Open Banking Age” (€LSOBA), selected for EU co-funding in the 2020 call for proposals, and Chair of the Teaching Committee for the Single Cycle Degree in Law at the University of Siena.

## Camilo Pérez-Bustillo

*Stanford University/ National Taiwan University*

Camillo is a visiting Professor in Human Rights and Social Justice in the College of Law at the National Taiwan University (NTU, Taipei), and is a Fellow in the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences at CASBS-Stanford University. Camillo is also an affiliated researcher with the Global Research Programme on Inequality (GRIP-University of Bergen, Norway), the Institute for the Geography of Peace in Ciudad Juárez (México), and the University of Dayton (Ohio) School of Law. He is lead author of ‘Human Rights, Hegemony, and Utopia in Latin America: Poverty, Forced Migration, and Resistance in Mexico and Colombia’ and is co-founder of Witness at the Border and the International Tribunal of Conscience of Peoples in Movement.

## Pablo Pérez Chaves (PhD)

*Environmental and biodiversity expert*

Pablo has 10 years of international experience in environmental impact assessments, natural resources management, biodiversity action plans, spatial analyses, project management and capacity building. He has working experience in more than 40 development projects in Latin America and the

Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Europe and the Pacific. Pablo is currently Director of Environmental Services with Finnish Overseas Consultants (FinnOC), and a visiting researcher at the University of Turku (Finland) working on the use of satellite images and machine learning to map biodiversity patterns.

## Francesco Davide Ragno

*Professor of Latin American Relations and Development, University of Bologna, Italy*

Francesco's research focuses on Latin American historical and political issues. His field of research includes topics such as the history of political parties in contemporary Argentina, the relationship between politics and sport in historical perspective in the Americas and the transmission of development models between the United States and South America. Francesco has collaborated with many academic and non-academic institutions in Europe (Italy, Switzerland) and America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, United States, Uruguay). Francesco is currently a Junior Assistant Professor at the University of Bologna in the Department of Political and Social Sciences.

## Juan-David Restrepo-Zapata

*Historian, University of Antioquia, Colombia*

Juan David is a MA History scholar at the National University of Colombia in Medellín. He is a researcher of the political history of Colombia, in particular the socio-political networks during the first half of the 20th century. Juan David also specializes in the study of national formation and Latin American geopolitical dynamics.

## Valentina Rioseco Vallejos

*Research Assistant at MiLa, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom*

Valentina is a PhD Law Student at the University of Edinburgh. Her doctoral research is titled 'Incorporating a human rights-based approach to irregular migration. A Chilean case study'. Valentina is also a Teaching Fellow at the Centre for Open Learning at the University of Edinburgh, where she teaches

International Human Rights Law. Valentina was awarded an LLM (2018) in Human Rights with distinction at University of Edinburgh, for her work-based project dissertation for Amnesty International, Scotland, titled 'Human Rights Standards for Assessing the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 - 2022.' She is also a qualified lawyer and holds a bachelor's degree in Legal and Social Sciences from the University of Concepcion, Chile. In 2015, Valentina founded the Legal Clinic for Migrants at the University of Concepción, which she coordinated until 2017.

## Verónica Ruiz Abou-Nigm (PhD)

*Principal Investigator (PI) of the MiLA project, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom*

Verónica is a Senior Lecturer in International Private Law at Edinburgh Law School. Professionally qualified as a solicitor in Uruguay, with extensive practice in international litigation, Verónica's research focuses on the intersections between private international law and various other disciplines, within and beyond law, including migration studies. Her scholarship promotes the transnational mobilisation of private international law, developing knowledge in which private international law can foster intercultural integration, contributing to accommodate different legal traditions and cultures in cross-border cases. Verónica has extensive research experience across jurisdictions in the UK, Europe and South America. She has published widely in the field of private international law.

## Ilari E. Sääksjärvi (PhD)

*Professor of Biodiversity Research at the University of Turku, Finland*

Ilari has studied Amazonian biodiversity since 1998 and has discovered hundreds of unknown insect species from Western Amazonia. Currently, he is leading two large research consortiums operating in the biodiversity-economy interface. Ilari also specialises in science dissemination. He is currently Director of the Biodiversity Unit and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the University of Turku. He is also Vice-Chair of the Finnish National Nature Panel (IPBES).

## Matti Salo

*Senior Scientist, Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), Finland*

Matti is an ecologist and environmental scientist, and Adjunct Professor in Biodiversity and Natural Resources Governance, with over 20 years of research and work experience in governance studies concerning the Amazonian and Andean region. He integrates ecology and conservation biology into social scientific environmental research, developing expertise on societal and political processes. Matti's research on biodiversity and natural resources governance spans diverse geographic areas and topics, including land use planning, resource conflicts, and human-wildlife interactions. He has a long-time interest in the role of knowledge and information in the governance of socio-ecological systems.

## Raphael Schapira (PhD)

*The Graduate Institute Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland*

Professionally qualified in Anthropology and Sociology in Germany and Switzerland, Raphael has extensive research experience in Brazil and Mexico focussing on questions related to sport and urban space. Raphael's doctoral research investigated how the martial art Brazilian jiu-jitsu gains meaning as a life-changing activity in Rio de Janeiro's periphery. For his Master's thesis, he researched how street vendors in Mexico City conceptualise urban space. Raphael has worked as a project manager, facilitating educational project between NGOs from Germany, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, and has also completed community projects in Rio, bringing together anthropology's transformative potential with local communities' social engagement.

## Yves Schoonjans

*Professor in Architectural History and Theory at KU Leuven, Belgium*

In 2013, together with Kris Scheerlinck, Yves initiated the 'Urban Projects, Collective Spaces and Local Identities' research group. His research is structured in two lines (1) Practices and discourses in a recent and contemporary context

– relation between theory and practices; and (2) Everyday local identity, appropriation and urban development. Yves was Vice-Dean for International Affairs (2013–2017), Chair of the Interfaculty Research Department (2019-2021), and is now the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture.

## Jaromír Soukup

*Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary History at the Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic*

Jaromír specializes in the history of international relations in the 19th and 20th centuries and the history and development of Latin America (mainly Colombia). In this respect, he is interested not only in the processes that Colombia went through in the 19th and 20th centuries, but also in its relations with other countries. He is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University.

## Hanna Tuomisto (PhD)

*Professor of Ecology and Vice Head of the Department of Biology at the University of Turku, Finland*

Since 1990, Hanna has led many research projects on the ecology and biogeography of tropical American rainforests. In collaboration with local research institutes, she has organised 20 scientific expeditions, many of them to remote parts of Amazonia. Hanna has broad expertise in analytical methods related to community ecology, systematics, diversity analysis, spatial analysis and remote sensing. She currently leads a multinational research consortium assessing the effects of past and future climate change on Amazonian biodiversity.

## Johanna M. Toivonen (PhD)

*Researcher, University of Turku, Finland*

Johanna is an ecologist holding a PhD in Biodiversity research. She has research experience in the Andean-Amazonian ecosystems, with a special focus on the

Andean treeline ecosystems. Johanna is also currently working at the University of Turku's research funding support services, focussing on Global South research topics and collaborations with Global South partners in general. She is interested in the science-policy interface to achieve higher research impact, in relation to topics such as biodiversity loss.

## Gabriela Zuquim (PhD)

*Ecology researcher at the University of Turku, Finland, and Aarhus University, Denmark*

Gabriela has been studying Amazonian biogeography since 2003 and lived in Amazonia for 7 years. She has extensive experience in field work and in analysing data from megadiverse biological communities. Currently, Gabriela is a collaborator in the Brazilian Program for Biodiversity Research, as well as a participant in a multinational research consortium assessing the effects of past and future climate change on Amazonian biodiversity, and in a binational project aiming to link information gathered from space (remotely sensed data) and from the ground (biological inventories).



# WHY LATIN AMERICA MATTERS

## - A collection of essays

This collection of essays exploring Why Latin America Matters aims to make the case for the importance of Latin America as a crucial region in global politics and development. With its rich history, culture, enormous resilience and creative innovation in the face of constant threats against nature and human dignity, Latin America can indeed show the way forward for the world.

These essays are presented as an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of significant social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural approaches that have taken place in Latin America during recent decades. These experiences, and perspectives, offer concrete lessons that can provide a decisive framework for profound reflection over growing challenging issues in other regions – particularly in Europe – and at a global scale.

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