

## ON THE PROFESSION

## The Second Latin American Economic History Congress Forging a Research Agenda for Economic History

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Economic history has been advancing notably as a research and teaching discipline in Latin America for some time now, but it is really at the big meetings that the richness and diversity of topics and methodologies come to the fore. This was apparent in the recent Second Latin American Economic History Congress (CLADHE-II), which took place this past February 3-5 in Mexico City.

The conference venue was the Cultural Center run by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) at the magnificent Plaza de las Tres Culturas. The sessions were held in the former building of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has a privileged location, with views of the great pyramid of Tlatelolco. Box lunches were served in the sixteenth century monastery of Tlatelolco, where the teaching friar, Bernardino de Sahagún, wrote his famous account of the history as well as cultural and religious traditions of Pre-Hispanic peoples and societies. The Plaza de las Tres Culturas is also known as the site of the terrible massacre of Mexican students in 1968, and as one of the sites where the great earthquake of 1985 hit savagely and destroyed many large buildings and killed thousands.

More than 400 researchers from Latin America, the United States and Europe (mainly Spain and Portugal) participated in the Congress. There were 27 panels, with over 300 papers presented, as well as 13 round table sessions and book presentations. For the first time in the region, there was a session that allowed doctoral students to present their research interests.

The subjects covered in the panels included a session on the origins and trajectory of income distribution and inequality in Latin America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; two sessions on the history of industrialization in Latin America; four

panels on the history of transport, services and ports; three sessions on evolution of enterprise, including family firms and global companies; and a panel on the history of corruption in business and politics.

There was also an innovative Brazilian session focusing on labor history, a Colombian panel on the economic history of that country in the last two centuries, and a Caribbean session on the history of banks and monetary policy. In the latter session the participating researchers announced the creation of the Caribbean Economic History Association, which will hold its first major meeting in 2011. There were also two comparative sessions on the tax history of Latin America, from the colonial period to the present, and two panels on the history of trade and foreign investments in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Uruguay as well as U.S. and British trade with the countries of the region. Finally, there were two panels on the current financial crisis of the early twenty-first century, seen in historical perspective.

The Congress was a collective effort that was successful due to the collaboration of the economic history associations of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay. The Spanish and Portuguese economic history associations participated as specially invited collaborators. The increasingly international focus of the field can be evaluated by the growing participation of scholars from different countries who publish a variety of economic history journals. An important roundtable hosted a series of presentations organized by Guillermina del Valle, editor of the journal *América Latina en la historia económica*, published in Mexico since 1995. Among the participants in this session were the editors of the *Uruguayan Review of Economic History*, two on-line journals published in Argentina (one on industrial history and the other on the history of enterprise in Latin

America), the *Brazilian Economic History Review*, and no less than four Spanish economic history journals that frequently publish articles on Latin America.

The Congress in Mexico has consolidated regional conferences as ideal academic forums to debate ongoing economic history research from the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula, as well as to discuss global and comparative perspectives with other regions. Latin American economic historians are very active in the International Economic History Association (IEHA). Currently, Salomón Kalmanovitz (Colombia) and Luis Bértola (Uruguay) are on the Executive Committee of the IEHA, and there is a well-established Latin American participation in all recent World Economic History Congresses.

CLADHE-II has shaped the research themes and agenda of the region's economic history. It has also promoted the strengthening of international research networks. This is clear in topics such as long-term inequality, foreign trade, long-term economic growth, as well as in fiscal and banking history. The list of panels can be found at <<http://www.economia.unam.mx/cladhe/sessions.php>>. Papers may be consulted and downloaded at <<http://www.economia.unam.mx/cladhe/simposiosyponencias.php>>. ■