

# From the President

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While the president of the United States opts for isolationism, building walls to keep out immigrants and denying the need for global cooperation to protect the future of our planet, Latin American studies are experiencing unprecedented dynamism around the world. This is reflected in LASA itself, which after 51 years of existence has become a truly global academic organization, with 12,000 members from over 50 countries. Some 49 percent of LASA members reside in Latin America and the Caribbean, 38 percent in North America, and 13 percent in Europe or Asia.

Our transformation is not only in numbers. Gone are the days when LASA was fundamentally a space for exchange between academics and activists in the so-called North and South of the Americas, and when the vast majority of LASA congresses were held in the North. This year we met in Lima, in 2018 we met in Barcelona, and subsequent congresses should alternate in order to reflect our presence in distinct countries and regions of the world.

The expansion and diversification of LASA membership has been made possible, in the first instance, by the expansion of Latin American studies in the region itself. Changing relations of economic and political power at the global level have motivated those of us who live in Latin America to rethink what “Latin America” is today and what we want it to be in the future, in terms of models of development, values, and alliances. This renewed interest in and identity with the region is seen not only in the major universities in capital cities but also in numerous regional and provincial universities, research centers and NGOs as well. Meanwhile, centers for the study of Latin America have also bloomed across Asia and Oceania, and interest in Latin America has also seen a revival in

Spain, France, the United Kingdom, and across Europe.

As incoming president of LASA, I consider it fundamental to incorporate other centers of research and teaching from outside the Americas, with their distinct perspectives and traditions, into our common effort to understand this region and its relation to the world. Intellectual curiosity leads us to ask what questions, perspectives, and findings these centers of knowledge can bring to the table and how we can generate a fruitful exchange that can renew our own forms of understanding the complex reality of Latin America.

Globalization not only feeds interest in Latin America in other regions of the world, it also demonstrates our need to have a more profound understanding of those other parts of the planet and how we engage with them. It is undeniable that global interests—be they economic, social or geopolitical—affect and give shape to diverse Latin American problems. From the expansion of the extractive industries to the social and environmental organizations that question them, recent studies show there are important transnational components to these phenomena that we must understand. Our research networks increasingly opt for comparative studies that cross borders and regions, giving rise to transcontinental collaborations that can generate truly new knowledge and innovation.

This worldwide interest in Latin America, and Latin American studies, also reflects the maturity of our field. Over the last half century, Latin Americanists have produced an enormous and diverse body of research, with a strong commitment to interdisciplinarity as well as to teaching about this part of the world. Latin American studies has produced concepts



and knowledge that have helped people around the world to understand processes of social, cultural, and political change that go well beyond this region. Latin Americanists have been at the forefront of debates about the difficult relationship between democracy, development, and dependence on natural resource exports—challenges faced around the globe. Migration, immigration, and the displacement of people due to political violence and economic need are also deeply rooted phenomena in our region, and pioneering work from Latin America can shed light on comparable experiences in other regions today. The magic realism in our literature has been loved and emulated around the world, and the experience of Latin America’s various truth commissions has also been repeated in other places affected by violence and civil war. Needless to say, Latin American studies also have much to contribute to discussions about populism and authoritarianism in their various forms in Europe and the United States today.

But the globalization of LASA also raises challenges for our organization and institutional culture. If we are to continue to have a presence in distinct parts of the world, we must be conscious of the academic schedules of all of our members and try to program LASA congresses when as many colleagues as possible can be present. We must work harder to be flexible and adapt LASA to the global era.

Furthermore, our LASA congresses should continue to have local academic partners, a situation from which we all benefit.

The presence of hundreds of panels and world-class experts in diverse disciplines can vitalize local academic communities and activists, while LASA panelists have the opportunity to interact with distinct communities from those with whom they regularly engage. The experience of LASA Lima 2017 was magnificent, with 6,643 registered participants, panels formed by talented senior and junior scholars, and rooms full of students avid to hear and ask questions of the presenters. In Lima we also had a large number of activities run by thematic networks outside the Congress itself, which were self-denominated as pre-LASA and post-LASA events. Hence I consider it essential to continue the policy of admitting students and nonmembers as listeners, particularly those with lower incomes and from traditionally underrepresented sectors or regions. In Lima 1,730 people attended under this policy, and it will continue in Barcelona 2018.

Another important step for LASA as an organization is to embrace more forms of open government, with greater participation and transparency in the decisions made by those of us who temporarily assume positions of leadership. The policy of open access in publications such as the *Latin American Research Review* (LARR) is also a sign of the times, without sacrificing the academic quality and rigor that have always characterized our association.

A third step for LASA is to extend further our interdisciplinarity by including more colleagues in the natural sciences, environmentalism, and law. Our region faces serious threats to its biodiversity, its land and water supplies, and to its many native and indigenous peoples, whose ancestral territories and lifestyles are at risk. In many parts of our countries, human

rights and civil liberties remain a challenge to guarantee for all.

In sum, in a context in which globalization is challenged by reactionary and xenophobic forces, LASA is embracing openness—in its diversity of members and disciplines, academic agenda, and physical presence. When I think of LASA, I think of people who are not only researchers, teachers, and writers, but also progressives in the broadest sense, who speak out about injustices and work to change their own societies and others around the globe. This is also my commitment as incoming president of this association. ■