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► **To cite this version:**

Juliette Dumont. Latin America at the Crossroads: The Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations and the Pan American Union . Alan McPherson; Yannick Wehrli. Beyond Geopolitics: New Histories of Latin America at the League of Nations, University of New Mexico Press, 2015, 978-0-8263-5171-5. halshs-01455439

HAL Id: halshs-01455439

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01455439>

Submitted on 3 Feb 2017

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Latin America at the Crossroads

The Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation,
the League of Nations, and the Pan American Union



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In 1921, the League of Nations (LN, or League) founded the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC). Five years later, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) was inaugurated, designed to be the executive organ of the ICIC—and a way for France to maintain its cultural influence all over the world, as the institute was located in Paris and the French government provided, at the beginning, for its financial needs. The International Organization of Intellectual Cooperation (IOIC) gathered the ICIC and IIIC. Mostly European rooted, the IIIC nevertheless attracted many Latin American governments and intellectuals: national committees were created in several countries and national delegates were appointed in Paris.¹

Meanwhile, the Pan American Union was developing its program in intellectual cooperation on a hemispheric scale. Since the Fourth Inter-American Conference in Buenos Aires in 1910, the topic had been on the agenda. Moreover, in 1917, a section of the Pan American Union was created to facilitate intellectual cooperation; in 1929, it became the Office of Intellectual Cooperation with an expanded scope of action. This new committee was meant to deal with everything related to “the cultural development of the Continent.” The previous year, during the Sixth Inter-American Conference in Havana, a resolution was adopted calling for an Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IAIIC).

The relationship between the League of Nations and the Pan American Union under the umbrella of intellectual cooperation has not benefited from extensive scholarship. Because the proposed IAIC would have competed with the IIC, however, it fuels the debate between universalism and regionalism. This is clearly how European representatives perceived the proposal even though they refrained from criticizing it openly.

On this issue among others, Latin America stood in the middle of the rivalry between Europe and the League of Nations on one hand and the US-influenced Pan American Union on the other. The projected IAIC found itself at a crossroads of diverse and at times diverging stakes and interests, and its story sheds light on the role and position of a Latin America torn between influences from both sides of the Atlantic. It also provides an understanding of the relationship between the League of Nations and the Pan American Union through a little-known angle, enables an understanding of Pan-Americanism through intellectual cooperation, and avoids reducing Pan-Americanism to the bilateral relationship between the United States and Latin America.

THE IAIC PROJECT

Despite tensions over judiciary and political issues, the 1928 Havana conference at which the IAIC was proposed saw many advances in intellectual cooperation. Nine topics on this theme were on the agenda and, as a result, the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History was formed in addition to the IAIC resolution. The Inter-American Congress of Rectors, Deans, and Educators in General, which took place in Havana on 20–23 February 1930, appears to have continued what started in 1928.

This second meeting in Havana led to a panegyric of inter-American cooperation. Ricardo Dolz, senator and dean of the Faculty of Law of the University of Havana, proclaimed in his speech, “Our continent offers, in the matter of intellectual cooperation, lofty and indefatigable labour which allows us to cherish hopes of progress.”² He continued in detail:

My hopes are based upon the more than twenty treaties, conventions, or agreements reached in this important sector of our civilization by the American nations. Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, the United States, Honduras, Mexico, Uruguay, and

other nations have adopted rules and regulations concerning intellectual cooperation. Scholarships are established for students by Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, the United States, and other countries. Organizations for the advancement of university relations have been created in Argentina, Chile, the United States, Paraguay, and other states; and in addition to this inter-American conference, there have been almost a hundred conferences, missions, institutes, congresses, scientific organizations, sections of cooperation, associations, colleges, federations, confederations, voyages, museums, and offices, etc., which have furthered relations in the fields of international law, science, medicine, social welfare, education, etc. Each deals with governmental relations, international and municipal law, sciences in general—archeology, geography, history, chemistry, agriculture, architecture, medicine . . . all of which the cultured countries of the Western Hemisphere brought into being through their devoted labor for the glory of American civilization.³

Intellectual cooperation thus appeared a rich field of exchange in the hemisphere and not just an instrument of North American influence.⁴ The Havana conference demonstrated this well, Mexican and Cuban representatives having initiated the creation of the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History. In the same vein, the IAIIC resolution originated in Brazil: in 1926, Xavier de Oliveira published a series of articles in *Jornal do Brasil* asking for the creation of a body for intellectual cooperation on the scale of the American continent. The same was again suggested by Pedro Erasmo Callorda, a representative from Uruguay at the Havana conference, and reported on by the Argentine delegation.

The institute came into being thanks to a resolution adopted on 18 February 1928. Its Article 1 established it “with a view to assisting and systematizing the activities that tend to establish intellectual cooperation in the branches of science, arts and letters between the nations of the American continent.” Article 2 proclaimed the IAIIC’s aims:

- a. To stimulate and systematize the exchange of professors and students, whether from universities or high primary schools, of the different American countries;
- b. To promote in the secondary and superior schools of all American countries the creation of special chairs of history,

- geography, literature, sociology, hygiene and law, principally constitutional and commercial law, of all the signatory states;
- c. To favor the creation of a university town, or students' home, in the countries of America.⁵

The institute thus initially targeted schools and university exchanges. This distinguished it from the League of Nations' IIC, the actions of which seemed limited to intellectual circles and for which it had been criticized. The importance given to education in the IAIC project stemmed from intellectual exchanges, mainly of university students and teachers, between the United States and Latin America from the nineteenth century to the end of the 1920s.

The organization of the IAIC, however, was very similar to that of the IIC.⁶ "Under the direction of the Governing Board of the Pan American Union," the IAIC, like the IIC, would be made up of a "central coordinating office" led by a director "assisted by a technical and clerical staff." Moreover, "National Councils for Intellectual Cooperation in each of the American Republics" would be made up of representatives from universities as well as "other institutions of higher education, academies, associations, institutes, museums, libraries and similar bodies devoted to the advancement of the arts, letters, [and] sciences."⁷

**THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF INTELLECTUAL
COOPERATION AND THE PAN AMERICAN UNION:
BETWEEN CORDIALITY AND DISTRUST**

Between the Havana conferences in 1928 and 1930, exchanges took place between the Pan American Union and the League of Nations' IIC. But previous relations between the IIC and the United States had shaped the cautious attitude of the IIC toward the project of the IAIC.

In a protest against the refusal of the United States to join the League, US intellectuals, convinced of the inevitability of international interdependence, became very active in international cooperation. Throughout the existence of the ICIC, a representative of the United States was appointed.⁸ The American Committee on Intellectual Cooperation was even created in 1926. Private institutions such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

and the Rockefeller Foundation contributed increasingly to finance the IIC's special accounts. The Rockefeller Foundation financed most of the International Studies Conference, organized under the auspices of the IIC. US support for international intellectual cooperation was considered very important in Europe: it was a guarantee of legitimacy and prestige but also financially crucial.

Accordingly, it was in the IIC's interest to be on good terms with the United States and all the institutions in which it took part. That is why the ICIC and the IIC could not but cooperate in the activities of the IAIC when they were asked to do so.

Following the 1928 resolution creating the IAIC, Heloise Brainerd, chief of the Education Office of the Pan American Union, wrote to Alfred Zimmern, assistant director of the IIC, "to ask what you consider the most fruitful activities of the Paris Institute. There are many lines of work that a regional Institute such as is proposed could take up, but as it will doubtless be limited in funds and personnel, we are anxious that it shall undertake only those that promise most."⁹ "Another point on which I would like information," she added, "is with regard to students from Latin-American countries who are studying in Europe."¹⁰ She wanted "to know how much is being done to attract these students to European centers, and by what agencies."¹¹ By appealing to the IIC, Brainerd showed that the Pan American Union did not ignore its accomplishments. Nevertheless, her objective was to set up an organization that would compete with intellectual cooperation designed in Europe.

Furthermore, the IAIC's national councils could compete with, or even substitute the national committees that the League of Nations had so much difficulty establishing in Latin America. The executive secretary of the US national committee, David Thompson, was aware that such a possibility could make the IIC reluctant to collaborate. He wrote confidentially to IIC director Julien Luchaire and suggested that existing national committees serve as national councils. "Any new National Council or Committee which may be organized," he added, "should operate as part of the Intellectual Cooperation Organization [IOIC] of the League of Nations as well as of the Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation."¹²

Thompson thereby presented himself as an advocate of the IIC and the League of Nations. He even suggested that the creation of the IAIC would encourage the creation of national committees in the countries where they did not yet exist.¹³ Yet he elaborated on his strategy:

I think it is very important that this Inter-American development should be received with the utmost cordiality by the Intellectual Cooperation Organization of the League of Nations and that it should be considered a regional grouping of intellectual cooperation agencies which at the same time should be encouraged to form part to [*sic*] the whole international activity in this field. . . . I hope that you will feel the same way about it, for the Latin American States are attempting to realize in the Western Hemisphere an agency analogous to the Institute under your direction.¹⁴

Thompson thus deprecated the IAIC as nothing but a regional organization while viewing it as an important competitor for the Institute of Paris. He co-opted an important Latin American claim to having a distinct identity within a largely European institution. Thus did Thompson introduce the threat of Latin American disaffection for the League's work in intellectual cooperation. This threat had to be taken seriously because European cultural influence, especially that of France, was fading in Latin America to the benefit of the United States.

European actors in intellectual cooperation were privately wary of the IAIC threat. In public, the ICIC in 1929 "welcome[d] with interest the project of the creation of an Inter-American Institute for Intellectual Cooperation" and "hope[d] that in this frame built from a universal point of view, the collaboration with the Inter-American Institute will work successfully on intellectual cooperation."¹⁵ Behind these cordial words, however, was the desire of the League of Nations—and therefore of Europe—to remain the leading actor in intellectual cooperation. The League cleverly presented the American project as deriving from the European organization. Officials feared that the future Inter-American Institute could also be an instrument for US hegemony in the Western Hemisphere.

Previously, in June 1928, the secretariat of the ICIC had sent to Luchaire of the IIC a report on the resolutions adopted at the Havana conference.¹⁶ It wished to draw Luchaire's "attention to [the resolution] which indicates the approaches adopted in order to create an Inter-American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation," revealing the secretariat's concern with the scope of the resolution. Soon after, Georges Oprescu, the general secretary of the ICIC, warned Luchaire that "the Americans want to fully reproduce the activity of the ICIC."¹⁷ From the beginning, those in charge at the IOIC were



Julien Luchaire, director of the Paris International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation from 1925 to 1930. Courtesy of the United Nations Archives at Geneva.

aware of the danger that the IAIC could represent. Nevertheless, to avoid a conflict with the United States, they remained cautious.

THE LATIN AMERICANS' ATTITUDE

The IAIC never saw the light of day, notably because of the reactions among the Latin American intellectual community. This project even seemed, according to Jean-Jacques Renoliet, "to entail a reaction in favor of the International Organization of Intellectual Cooperation and the League of Nations on the part of Latin American States."¹⁸ He mentioned that the 1936 Pan-American Conference called for the creation of national committees by Latin American states. The League of Nations' secretariat considered this a

way to avoid "the creation in Washington DC or anywhere else in America of a continental Institution that would only complicate and maybe even significantly reduce the very coordination which was the responsibility of the IIIC."¹⁹ From the Havana conference in 1928 to 1939, many Latin Americans, indeed, claimed their attachment to the IIIC and therefore to Europe and France.

Chile's and Ecuador's officials had expressed some reluctance to support the IAIIC in their correspondence with the IIIC's director. In a long letter to Luchaire about the Inter-American Institute, Ecuadorian Gonzalo Zaldumbide explained that Uruguay's delegate to Havana proposed a Pan-American project of academic collaboration "whose main idea was to call a university presidents' convention," which was at odds with IIIC purposes, but also that "for the rest, he had been inspired by the Intellectual Cooperation Institute's statuses, goals and functioning, without naming it."²⁰ Zaldumbide reported that he had "tried to oppose the discussion about this project but to no avail," emphasizing that "the intensification of North American influence on the cultural and intellectual cooperation field should not be encouraged," for the United States was already strong enough economically.²¹ He advised instead strengthening the relationships with the IIIC, given "how important it was to keep in touch with Europe concerning everything that is connected to education, training and developing culture."²² According to Eugène Pépin, a former Quai d'Orsay juriconsult and an assignment manager for Pan-American conferences who was in Havana in 1928, Zaldumbide's intervention was crucial to protecting the IIIC and France's interests: "Thanks to Mr Zaldumbide, . . . this Institute's scope of action was reduced so that it would not undermine the prerogatives of the Parisian one; he also obtained that the teaching of the French language and French literature was maintained as part of the organization's program."²³

Zaldumbide was not the only Latin American trying to reassure IIIC leaders and French diplomats. In 1930, Francisco Walker Linares, a kingpin in the Chilean Committee for Intellectual Cooperation, was glad that the latter was born "before the creation of a national council linked to the Pan American Union, as was recommended at the Havana Conference."²⁴

Later, in 1936, during the Buenos Aires Pan-American Conference, Colombia and Bolivia raised the idea of a Pan-American institute once more. And once more, several Latin Americans showed their loyalty to the IIIC. Indeed, the final convention included no mention of the Colombian and Bolivian proposal but instead a recommendation to create national

committees in the countries where they did not yet exist. This was also true of Colombian Max Grillo, whose article published on 29 November 1936 in *El Tiempo* was a stirring defense of the IIC and France.²⁵

In the wake of WWI and during the peaceful respite allowed by the legal organization of the League of Nations, the country which received the heritage of Antiquity—during the modern age and like no other Latin country—created, under the auspices of the League, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, whose hard work shines like a steadfast and serene beacon through the disorder and concern which hold sway over the spirit of the new generations. What an amazing task the Parisian Institute has achieved. It has intervened in all the fields of intellectual activity.²⁶

Antonio Aita, from the Argentine Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, also argued against a project that he deemed embodied “the dispersion of endeavors” of the IIC and “represented another reason for getting away from Paris and Geneva.”²⁷ The loss of overall legitimacy of the League at that moment, reinforced by the coming of World War II, lent urgency to the calls to not further diffuse its power through the IAIIC. Aita and Grillo were perfectly aware that the Old World’s situation, already undermined by World War I and likely to fall into chaos once more, could deal a fatal blow to the attachment of Latin American states to the IIC.

The reaction of those intellectuals can seem contradictory since the idea of an Inter-American Institute was raised by Latin Americans in 1928 and in 1936. Furthermore, Zaldumbide in 1928 and Grillo in 1936 did not condemn such a project wholesale and were aware of its relevance. At the end of his article, Grillo wrote that “the initiative of Bogota’s PEN Club during the Buenos Aires Conference through the voices of Colombian delegates, which consisted in suggesting the creation of an American Intellectual Institute based in a Spanish-speaking city, deserves an applause from the similar associations which already exist on the Continent.” He continued, “America is called upon to maintain the cultural values which are today under threat in European nations because of the bloody confrontation of antagonistic interests which already imperiled the Western civilization once.”²⁸ Because war had broken out in Europe, the IAIIC could appear as a legitimate heir and successor of the IIC, which would probably suffer from the conflict.

In 1928, Zaldumbide had tried to explain to the director of the IIIC why his opposition to the IAIIC was not easy to defend given that its “main goal . . . would be to increase the intellectual connections between the [Latin American] Republics.”²⁹ Zaldumbide could not “sabotage a project which conveyed so many good intentions and whose dangers were either denied or overlooked.”³⁰

Yet, like Aita, Walker Linares, and others, Zaldumbide feared that the IAIIC might lead to the “intensification of North American influence on the cultural and intellectual cooperation field” and to a “fully-fledged Pan-Americanism” that would tend to “detach [Latin America] from Europe.”³¹ For those intellectuals, the United States was already present enough in Latin America economically, and maintaining ties with Europe culturally and intellectually could ensure a certain balance.³²

In 1928, after the Havana conference, French diplomat P  pin shared these concerns and wavered between pessimism and hope about the larger geopolitical question—Latin America’s ability to stay equally independent from the United States and from Europe:

All Latin American Republics need US financial help too much to show a clear independence. . . . One may understand why the United States of America, by creating exclusively American institutions, is trying to attract and keep other American countries in its orbit while striving to free them from any European ascendancy and reduce their relationships with the rest of the world. This is the reason why an American Institute of History and Geography as well as an American Institute of Intellectual Cooperation were created. . . . But American Republics have become aware of the danger; they cannot forget either that Europe is also one of their clients.

This yearning of the United States of America for a general governance can be found in its endeavors to organize Pan-Americanism. With its secretariat, its General Manager, its periodic conferences while waiting for its Court of Justice, the Pan-American Coalition is trying to oppose the League of Nations. However, during the last Conference the Latin American Republics understood even more clearly that their only real way to resist American absorption was to cling to the League of Nations even tighter.³³

In addition, some concern was expressed, from 1930 on, about the isolation that an IAIIC might create. During the Havana congress of rectors and deans, attendees debated “the presence of ‘Inter-American’ in the title” of the future institute because it “would seem to limit its activities” and “would forbid a larger outlook, whereas there are no frontiers to the Republic of Letters.”³⁴ The president of the Brazilian Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, Miguel Ozório de Almeida, who was in charge of writing the report on inter-American intellectual cooperation in general during the 1937 General Conference for National Commissions held in Paris, later recalled Latin Americans in 1930 fearing that the IAIIC “would not appear as a separation move—the creation of an exclusively American intellectual cooperation group independent from the main international trend.”³⁵ This fear, as he later said, was largely shared within the IOIC, rumors of “a separatist movement” being common at that time.

Latin American intellectuals’ concern about a possible turning away from the League’s IIIC and their reluctance vis-à-vis the IAIIC can thus be explained by their mistrust of the United States. Their attachment to the IIIC can also be considered as a result of their Francophilia. France, and therefore the IIIC, remained a reference point of intellectual and cultural prestige. The cultural diplomacies of Argentine, Chile, and Brazil, for example, were partly built on the connections between the intellectuals of these countries and their counterparts in France. These connections were source of legitimacy in international cultural relations, for these nations as for Latin American intellectuals. It was therefore in the best interests of the nations to defend the IIIC. The League of Nations’ International Organization of Intellectual Cooperation can thus be considered as an opportunity for Latin American nations to achieve a necessary balance between Europe and the United States, between universalism and regionalism in order to protect their interests and their autonomy in the international arena during the interwar period.

NOTES

1. The national commissions were meant to be an intermediary between each member state’s organs of intellectual life and the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC). The national delegate was supposed to be the intermediary between the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) and the member state’s government.

2. *Inter-American Congress of Rectors, Deans, and Educators in General (1928), Report of the Chairman of the Delegation of United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1931), 19.
3. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
4. On this topic, see William Spence Robertson, *Hispanic-American Relations with the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1923); and Juan Manuel Espinosa, *Inter-American Beginnings of U.S. Cultural Diplomacy, 1936–1948* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977).
5. *Inter-American Congress of Rectors*, 13–14.
6. The text of the project was joined to a letter sent to Julien Luchaire, director of the IIIC. 18 April 1929, A.XI.11, UNESCO Archives (hereafter UA).
7. *Ibid.*
8. George Ellery Hale in 1922, Robert Andrews Millikan from 1923 to 1932, and James T. Shotwell from 1933 to 1939.
9. 22 January 1929, A.XI.11, UA.
10. *Ibid.* This information would be “a) such statistics as may be available as to numbers, and if these are incomplete, the estimate of any well-informed person; and b) the extent to which such Latin American students receive financial aid from either European governments, universities or international organizations.”
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*: “I think also that it affords an opportunity for the Secretariat to make another effort with Latin American governments for the establishment of National Committees of Intellectual Cooperation.”
14. *Ibid.*
15. *La Coopération Intellectuelle*, September 1929, 601.
16. 14 June 1928, A.XI.11, UA.
17. 21 June 1928, A.XI.11, UA.
18. Jean-Jacques Renoliet, *L’UNESCO oubliée: La Société des Nations et la coopération intellectuelle (1919–1946)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999), 255.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Gonzalo Zaldumbide to Julien Luchaire, 22 July 1928, A.I.121, UA. Zaldumbide (1884–1965) was a writer and a diplomat. From 1923 to 1927, he was appointed at the Ecuadorian Legation in Paris. He was also member of the committee of experts in charge of the Ibero-American collection created by the IIIC. From 1927 to 1929, he was appointed at the Ecuadorian Legation in Washington.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. Correspondance politique et commerciale no. 199, 28 February 1928, Eugène Pépin au Ministre des Affaires étrangères, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris (hereafter AMAEF).
24. Francisco Walker Linares to the director of the IIIC, 28 October 1930, Santiago, A.III.46, UA. For more on Walker Linares, see Yannick Wehrli, “Francisco

- Walker Linares: Un actor del internacionalismo ginebrino en Chile, 1927–1946,” in *América Latina y la Organización Internacional del Trabajo: Redes, cooperación técnica e institucionalidad social, 1919–1950*, ed. Fabián Herrera León and Patricio Herrera González (Morelia: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 2013), 63–97.
25. Maximiliano Grillo (1868–1949), a Colombian writer and diplomat, was known for his Francophilia. He was the author, among other texts, of a paper titled “Augusto Sandino, hero of Hispanic America” (published in the review *Repertorio Americano*, vol. 16, no. 31, 1928), a statement against North American imperialism.
 26. This article was joined to a letter sent by the French plenipotentiary minister in Bogotá to the French minister of foreign affairs. The title of the article is not mentioned. Max Grillo, *El Tiempo*, 29 November 1936, file 1859, Série Société des Nations, AMAEF.
 27. Antonio Aita to Dominique Braga, 16 June 1939, A.III.17, UA.
 28. Grillo, *El Tiempo*, 29 November 1936.
 29. Gonzalo Zaldumbide to Julien Luchaire, 22 July 1928, A.I.121, UA.
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. *Ibid.*
 32. Besides, in the 1930s and 1940s, the US State Department developed its own campaign in cultural diplomacy, which was mainly designed to increase US influence in Latin America. On this topic, see Juan Manuel Espinosa, *Inter-American Beginnings of U.S. Cultural Diplomacy, 1936–1948* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 1976); Darlene J. Sadlier, *Americans All: Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy in World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012); and Frank Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: US Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
 33. Eugène Pépin to the Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, 28 February 1928, “Correspondance politique et commerciale no. 199,” AMAEF.
 34. *Inter-American Congress of Rectors*, 13.
 35. Miguel Ozório de Almeida, “Report on Inter-American intellectual cooperation: Its beginnings, its evolution, its organization,” speech delivered at the General Conference of the National Committees on Intellectual Cooperation, Paris, July 1937, A.III.56, UA.