

## Latin American Studies in Hungary

*András Inotai*

For geographic, historical, political and economic reasons, Latin America has never been a mainstream research priority in Hungary. However, over time, different factors and motivations have called attention to selected areas of Latin American development. They were partly rooted in the effort to maintain contacts with the waves of Hungarian emigrants to Latin American countries and partly followed economic and political interests. Also, the question of underdevelopment vs. catching-up in development and of one-sided dependence vs. diversification of contacts was considered to be an interesting topic for comparison. Research on Latin America can be characterized by the following features:

- Generally, it has followed Hungarian political, economic and cultural priorities and attempted to analyze the Latin American reality concerning the widening of contacts with selected Latin American countries.
- In some cases, mainly in historical and archaeological research, Hungarian academics have aimed at catching up to international standards and participating in multi-national research networks.
- Especially in economic and political research, Latin America has been dealt with as an interesting comparison to Hungarian (including central and eastern European) development patterns.
- In recent years, where, for obvious reasons, the political and economic interests of Hungary have been concentrated on other areas (mainly NATO, the European Union and regional cooperation), some research activities have taken the lead and have begun to draw attention again to the (almost) 'forgotten continent'. Therefore, demand-led research, which had dominated the previous decades, may have been replaced, or at least accompanied by, supply-led research activities.

One should not forget that research activities have always been influenced by 'technical' conditions, such as the knowledge of the language (Spanish language university education started in the late fifties in Hungary), the availability of fellowships (both within the Hungarian and international framework) and, most importantly, the existence and intensity of diplomatic relations. More recently, and in an ambiguous way, the growing network of multinational companies has also affected the development of Hungarian-Latin American research. Similarly, in recent years a certain discrepancy in the intensity between diplomatic and economic relations can be observed. Although Hungary's official diplomatic representation in Latin America declined in the nineties (some embassies were closed, albeit temporarily) due to budgetary reasons and considerations of priority changes, this country (that is to say, companies located in Hungary) has economic relations with 36 out of a total of 40 Latin American and Caribbean countries.

### **A Short History of Research up to the 1990s**

In the fifties there was a wide gap between political efforts and economic relations and related research on Latin America. Political efforts, mainly counterbalancing the diplomatic isolation after WWII and following the failed negotiations with major Western powers up to 1947, considered Latin America as an – unsuccessful – split-off from this situation (the Cold War). More promising were economic links based on the complementary character of Latin American and Hungarian exports (raw materials and food in exchange for machinery such as transport equipment to Uruguay and Argentina), and backed by the Hungarian emigrants active in the Latin American business community. However, this effort has not been supported or even accompanied by any kind of meaningful research.

By the mid-fifties, external and internal conditions for establishing and developing relations with Latin America had changed substantially. In 1955, Hungary was accepted as a member of the United Nations, an important platform to talk directly to Latin American representatives. The Hungarian revolution of 1956 generated a worldwide reverberation, not least in the Hungarian colonies of Latin America, which, as a result of a new wave of emigration, were growing with the addition of fresh immigrants. From the late fifties on with the disintegration of the colonial world and the emergence of the so-called, though scientifically not fully correct, 'Third World', into which Latin America was also included, political and economic interests were already being complemented by rising research and educational endeavours. Finally, the Hungarian Government recognized the importance of changes in the map of global politics and considered it as a new chance to break out of the political and diplomatic isolation imposed on the country following the events of October-November, 1956.

The 1960s represent the first wave of meaningful research on Latin American issues. Research activities were clearly dominated by economic and political considerations. The Cuban revolution opened up the first possibility to study Latin American developments in the field (fellowships to Cuba were given from 1963 on). Developments in Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and other countries started to attract the attention of researchers. Fortunately, the first wave of university students educated in the Spanish language and in Spanish and Latin American history and culture entered the labour market just at this time. As a result, a group of young academics was fully involved in starting fundamental research on selected topics. Mutual interest was also generated by the desire of some Latin American countries to learn from the experience of central planning in Hungary, particularly concerning the concept and implementation of a flexible macro-economic planning with a higher level of enterprise independence. Since, for historical reasons, the State had been playing a decisive role in economic (and social) development both in Latin America and in Hungary, another point of research was present.

The seventies experienced a real boom in Latin American research, due to previously accumulated knowledge (fieldwork in various Latin American countries in the sixties), expanding diplomatic relations, State-supported trade (specialized in Hungarian exports of hospital and educational equipment accompanied by continuous service activities), widening of fellowship possibilities and the establishment of various research centres at Hungarian universities and academic institutes.

Research in Latin American history, as well as fieldwork in archaeology and ethnography, represent one area of the fresh interest in Latin America. Another strong factor comprised political and economic surveys which were not limited to the analysis of the Latin American situation but which encompassed the search for similarities with Hungarian (and East Central European) development, or rather, structural underdevelopment, which was becoming more evident exactly in this period, after several decades of high, but isolated, inward-looking, and badly structured, growth. Beyond bilateral fellowship agreements, mutual visits of professors and researchers have strengthened cooperation with representatives of Latin American research centres and universities (Cuba, Chile, Peru, and later on Venezuela and Nicaragua). This is the period when Latin America was leaving the relatively narrow field of university teaching and academic research. The appearance of modern Latin American literature in the second half of the seventies established an extremely important communication channel by which the broader Hungarian public attempted to approach and understand the Latin American reality.

In the eighties, research on Latin America was characterized by an ambiguous development rooted in three factors. First, the international climate turned less favourable and official contacts with Latin America stagnated, while space for economic manoeuvring was substantially narrowed by several debt crises and the so-called 'lost decade' of the green continent. At the same time, political and economic priorities in Hungary began to shift from the 'developing world', including Latin America, toward such international actors as the World Bank and the IMF and toward Western Europe. Second, and in the opposite direction, part of the knowledge accumulated in the seventies had now in the eighties been made available to a broader public. Third, the role of 'indirect' research topics was on the increase, as it became clear that both Latin America and Hungary (and East Central Europe) were part of a globalizing world, which was increasingly evident not only by the high level of external debt, but also to badly structured economic and political development, a low level of competitiveness and unsuccessful integration strategies.

### **Research on Latin America during and following the Framework of Systemic Transformation**

Although Hungary had been preparing for its own political, economic and social transformation throughout the eighties (in economic, legal, institutional and cultural terms alike), the dramatic events of 1989 represented the beginning of a completely new era. Repercussions were evident not only in regard to official contacts to Latin American countries but also to research priorities.

At the highest political level, the clearly Euro-Atlantic foreign policy of successive Hungarian governments of whichever political parties that had formed a coalition, regrettably, 'devalued' contacts outside this geographic area. Thus contacts with Latin America also suffered from this change, which was clearly visible in the (temporary) closure of some embassies, mutually infrequent high-level visits, declining university and academic contacts, shifting priorities in policy-oriented research topics and a lack of money and fellowship opportunities for academic ('purely' scientific) research. In addition, leading researchers and professors 'edu-

cated' in Latin American studies, while not fully giving up their interests in their previous work, adjusted their priorities and began to devote most of their time and energy to key development issues regarding the Hungarian transformation and integration into the European Union. For the future, this situation may still have two important and positive consequences.

Firstly, and for the first time, at least in the political, economic and sociology fields, research activities on Latin America may start a supply-driven recovery of interest in the continent. Secondly, and not less importantly, Latin American research in Hungary has been increasingly integrated into an international framework, due to the lack of direct support (either from the Hungarian budget or within the framework of bilateral cooperation offering fellowships and other opportunities to deal with relevant topics). Simultaneously, the internationalization of research activities has also been supported by strong economic factors, such as globalization, the increasing importance of international comparative surveys, the activities of transnational companies, and Hungary's efforts to join the European Union.

### **Key Research Areas and Institutions**

The research activities of Hungarian specialists on Latin America started in the late 1960s and were based both on following international and European trends and on the growing interest in Latin American political, economic and social development. Later, mainly from the seventies onward, broader attention was given to the continent due to the widespread success of Latin American literature.

Research in the field of history, initiated in the late sixties and developed in the next two decades to meet international standards, originally concentrated on the socio-economic patterns of Latin American 'colonial feudalism'. Soon, however, further political developments in that hemisphere, especially the Cuban revolution and other revolutionary attempts, attracted the attention of researchers to explain the historical roots of those emerging trends. A growing amount of evidence revealed that Latin American underdevelopment or mismanaged development and dependency had, to some extent, features similar to the pattern of development in East Central and Eastern Europe and, consequently, this presented a favourable basis for comparative surveys. In the nineties, analysis of historical periods prior to WWII was mainly discontinued, while the burning issues of the continent's more recent history, particularly those following WWII, came into the limelight.

Within this context, political research was substantially strengthened. Although such an approach had its roots in the early seventies, it was only in the eighties that research activities started to spread to different universities and academic institutes as a result of the internationally competitive surveys of the Cuban revolution and the origins and driving forces of Latin American dictatorships. Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Chile became the main topics. As for Chile, the German influence in the development of the Chilean army deserved special attention. In the nineties, for obvious reasons, comparative political research shifted to topics related to democratic change and the sustainability of democratic institutions in Latin America and East Central Europe.

A special combination of historical and political research was represented by two main lines of study. On the one hand, the search for the 'Latin American iden-

tity' was intensified. On the other, particularly in the 1990s, heightened interest was expressed in (re)discovering Hungarian emigration to Latin America, which had begun in the late nineteenth century, culminated in the aftermath of WWII, and ended in the much reduced wave resulting from the revolution of 1956. Identity-related research was rooted in and based on two decades of ethnographic activities focusing on substantive research done in indigenous communities in various Latin American countries, principally in Brazil, but later also in Ecuador, Peru and Mexico.

There was a definite link between research in literature and the booming interest in modern Latin American literature, especially novels. While research activities largely contributed to discovering and communicating the unique value of Latin American novelists, some of them winners of the Nobel Prize, the growing interest of Hungarian readers for the publication of dozens of works written by Latin American artists in turn fostered further research in this field.

One of the most important areas of research was the economy. Such activities date back to the second half of the sixties and were intensively continued for the next fifteen years. Major attention was given to the causes and consequences of economic underdevelopment of the continent, its continuous struggle to gain a higher level of economic independence through enhanced regional cooperation, including regional trading blocs, and its integration into the international division of labour. All of these subjects were clearly related to the outstanding issues of economic development in East Central Europe in general, and in Hungary in particular. After an obvious decline in interest for more than one decade, Latin American economic research started to re-emerge with new priorities. While, in and for itself, the analysis of economic development in Latin America did not attract a high level of interest, a large number of international economic topics started to refer to Latin American examples. Structural change, global competitiveness, regional integration, successful and failed patterns of economic modernization, privatization, and the role of the State in the overall modernization process can be mentioned as some of the areas in which research in Latin American economy provided a useful and valuable contribution to comparative and policy-oriented research. A more recent topic that must be mentioned is the impact that the forthcoming expansion of the European Union to include central and eastern European countries will have on Latin America.

All of the activities described in the previous paragraphs are linked to universities and research institutes. The 'headquarters' of historical research was developed in Szeged (Tibor Wittmann, Ádám Anderle), while ethnography and archaeology were centred in Budapest, as well as literature (Lajos Boglár, Katalin Kulin). Economic research was mainly carried out at the Institute for World Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Béla Kádár, András Inotai) and at the World Economy Department of the Budapest University for Economic Studies (Zoltán Kollár). Political or politically oriented research activities could be found in various 'workshops', including additional academic institutes and the University of Pécs.

In the past years, research on Latin America has shown a mixed picture. While for various reasons some previously important activities have stopped (change of priority, lack of funds, lost contacts, discontinuation for personal motives), other areas show more intensified efforts. As for the future, there are two encouraging

developments. First, Spanish language and Latin American studies have been introduced into various universities outside the traditional centres of Budapest and Szeged, with a rapidly growing number of students. Second, a young generation of researchers has been emerging around the leading academics of the last ten to twenty years, predominantly in history, political science, ethnology-archaeology, and on the level of comparative surveys in economy.

Concerning the dissemination of Latin America-related research results and domestic contacts, regularly organized conferences (for example, the annual Latin American Week at the University of Pécs), the recently published semi-annual journal in Hungarian with a summary in Spanish (*Ibero-Amerika*) and, most importantly, the unstoppable popularity of Latin American literature must be underlined. The last twenty-five years are witness to the publication of more than 100 books of Latin American literature, half of which has been published within the last twelve years (including Isabel Allende, Jorge Amado, Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Pablo Neruda, Mario Vargas Llosa). An even broader, although more disputed, influence has been achieved by the amazing spread and popularity of large series of Latin American *telenovelas* (soap operas).

In the future, growing interest in Latin America-related research can be expected from the activities of the reorganized Hungarian-Latin American Association (chaired by János Dömény) and by the reintegration of Hungarian institutes and universities into the international framework of CEISAL. As a further interesting initiative, the regular informal meetings with Latin American ambassadors to Hungary, organized and hosted by the Institute for World Economics, can be mentioned.

### **International Contacts, Research Networks**

Before the transformation of 1989 began, two main areas of contact had been established. First, within the so-called socialist integration (CMEA or COMECON), academic institutes dedicated to the study of Latin America formed a network and annually held meetings on topical issues of Latin American political, economic and historical development, as well as on bilateral relations. After 1989, this network fell victim to the changes happening in all the central and eastern European countries, either because the previous institutional structure could not be maintained, or as a consequence of the changes in research priorities.

Another international network still existing and recently revitalized is represented by CEISAL. Hungarian institutes and researchers have been involved in the activities of CEISAL from the 1970s onward. However, personal, financial and some other changes in research priorities led to reduced Hungarian participation and activity within this framework during most of the nineties. More recently, however, a re-emerging interest in coordinated Latin American research and education can be observed. It appears that, although in a rather uncoordinated and 'uncommunicative' way, interest in Latin America did not vanish entirely, and there has been a common effort to re-establish the interdisciplinary network of Latin America-oriented Hungarian researchers. In this sense, reactivation of contacts with CEISAL (very much supported and encouraged by the new President of

CEISAL, Professor Andrzej Dembicz) is on the agenda, as proved by the (re)application for membership of the Institute for World Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in March 2002.

Of course, many academics have been able to rely on their personal relationships or on the international networks (in history, ethnography, linguistics, culture, and political and economic research) that they have been active in for the past years. It should be noted that while direct contacts with Latin American research communities did not develop dynamically, widening opportunities to cooperate with Latin America-oriented institutes and universities in Spain, and particularly in the United States, have helped Hungarian academics to be able to participate in several mainstream research activities on Latin America. Finally, the growing importance of research and educational cooperation directed by the European Commission in Brussels must be taken into account as well, since such programmes have been extended to the candidate European Union countries. These multinational educational, teaching and training programmes (such as ERASMUS and TEMPUS) have offered central and eastern European associated countries additional opportunities to establish research contacts with western European universities and institutes dealing with various issues of Latin American development.

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**András Inotai** is currently General Director of the Institute for World Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest and Visiting Professor at the College of Europe, Bruges and Natolin (Poland). His Latin American studies focus on comparative surveys about the impact of the EU's expansion on Latin American trade, structural adjustment, privatization and the role of foreign capital in East Central Europe vs. that in Latin American countries, and similarities and differences in facing global challenges. One of his most recent publications is *A globalizáció kihívásai és Magyarország* (The Challenges of Globalization and Hungary, in Hungarian). Budapest: Editorial Napvilág, 2001. <ainotai@vki.hu>

**Contribuyentes / Contributors**

Barbara Potthast  
 Universität zu Köln  
 Iberische und Lateinamerikanische  
 Abteilung  
 Albertus Magnus-Platz  
 50923 KÖLN  
 ALEMANÍA / GERMANY

Klaus Bodemer  
 Institut für Iberoamerika-Kunde (IIK)  
 Alsterglaciis 8  
 D-20354 HAMBURG  
 ALEMANÍA / GERMANY

Marcus Klein (for AUSTRIA)  
 CEDLA  
 Keizersgracht 395-397  
 1016 EK AMSTERDAM  
 PAÍSES BAJOS / THE NETHERLANDS

Isabel Yépez del Castillo  
 Institut d'études du développement  
 – GRIAL  
 1, Place des Doyens  
 B-1348 LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE  
 BELGICA / BELGIUM

Fiona Wilson  
 Centre for Development Research  
 Gl. Kongevej 5  
 DK-1610 COPENHAGEN V  
 DINAMARCA / DENMARK

A. David Lehmann  
 Centre of Latin American Studies  
 History Faculty Building  
 West Road  
 CAMBRIDGE CB3 9EF  
 EL REINO UNIDO / UNITED KINGDOM

Nikki Craske  
 University of Liverpool  
 ILAS  
 56 Bedford Street South  
 LIVERPOOL L69 7WW  
 EL REINO UNIDO / UNITED KINGDOM

Jana Lenghardtová  
 Ekonomická univerzita v Bratislave  
 Centrum iberských a latinskoamerických  
 štúdií  
 Dolnozemska cesta 2  
 852 35 Bratislava  
 ESLOVAQUIA / SLOVAKIA

Nuria Tabanera García  
 Departamento de Historia Contemporánea  
 Facultad de Geografía e Historia  
 Universidad de Valencia  
 Avda. Blasco Ibáñez, 28  
 46010 VALENCIA  
 ESPAÑA / SPAIN

Martti Passinen  
 Ibero-American Center  
 P.O. Box 59 (Unioninkatu 38 B)  
 FIN-00014 University of Helsinki  
 FINLANDIA / FINLAND

András Inotai  
 Hungarian Academy of Sciences  
 Institute for World Economics  
 H-1531 P.O. Box 36  
 1124 BUDAPEST  
 HUNGRÍA / HUNGARY

Marcello Carmagnani  
 Università di Torino  
 Dipartimento de Studi Politici  
 Via Maria Vittoria 19  
 10123 TORINO  
 ITALIA / ITALY

Josef Opatrný  
 Facultad de Filosofía  
 nám. J. Palacha 2  
 Praha 1  
 LA REPUBLICA CHECA/  
 THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Michiel Baud  
 CEDLA  
 Keizersgracht 395-397  
 1016 EK AMSTERDAM  
 LOS PAÍSES BAJOS / NETHERLANDS