



CEDLA Research Programme (2009-2016)

### **Natural and Cultural Resource Use in Contemporary Latin America**

Since the turn of the century, Latin America has been changing rapidly. In less than a decade Latin American societies have transformed as the result of a complex interaction between initiatives and responses of actors at different levels, both international and domestic. This interaction between market forces, government interventions and individual and collective initiatives in civil society continuously produces processes of transformation that differ in time and across countries in the continent. Nevertheless, we can detect some similarities in longer-term change in the Latin American region.

With respect to processes of social change, urbanization and migration have radically changed the lives of numerous Latin Americans, both of those who moved and those who stayed behind. Remittances have become a major source of income; modern communication technologies have greatly facilitated contact among transnationalised families. Within Latin America, urbanization has continued and smaller cities are emerging as the new poles of economic growth and social and cultural change. The ways in which Latin American citizens are affected by and react to globalization encompass many dimensions: inequality, lifestyles, cultures and identity formation, problems of social cohesion and social conflict, economic opportunity and survival strategies. Everyday struggles to improve livelihoods and to adapt to changing circumstances, have given new meanings to local politics and social life. Politically, the region's experiences with democratization and neoliberalisation in the 1980s and 1990s initially gave way to depolitisation. However, a wave of new mobilization arose with indigenous peoples' organizations and anti-neoliberal protests. Through democratic elections these changing political attitudes in civil society have translated into leftist governments in almost the whole region.

The rule by the (new) Left in Latin America involves a rise of non-elite politicians (indigenous, working class and women), bottom-up democratization, a rearticulation of the role of the state, and sovereign economic policy-making. These governments also effectively stepped away from the powerful grip of the Washington Consensus, thereby contributing to its demise. While the end of this consensus allows for more redistributive policies, the new crisis puts a brake on many plans and intensifies social conflict, thus showing that Latin America may take more lead in its development course but cannot escape from being deeply integrated in the global system.

Economically, regionalization and especially globalization produce profound changes in Latin America. Whereas its northern countries are part of global production chains through maquiladorisation, the countries in the southern part have specialized in the supply of commodities. Yet neither of these strategies of insertion in global markets has solved the overriding shortcomings of the prevailing development pattern of Latin American societies: volatile and low overall economic

growth, a skewed income and wealth distribution, and marginalisation of large sections of society. As weak infrastructure is limiting foreign investment and regional integration, the new regional initiatives in this area can produce significant benefits. It remains to be seen how the current financial crisis will affect the Latin American economies, but even more so the models of economic development chosen by Latin American governments. On the other hand, it is a cause of great concern how new infrastructural works and more economic activities will affect the region's natural areas and their inhabitants, especially in Amazonia.

The relationship between the local and the global remains an important research theme within Latin America studies today. Globalisation should not solely be interpreted as a top down causal model that impacts and disturbs the local scale. Rather, the role of local agents in globalisations processes will be a focal point. This theoretical standpoint becomes especially urgent in the light of the recent developments in Latin America where cultural, economic, social and political dynamics at the local scale have profoundly changed the Latin America reality and redirected processes of globalisation. The CEDLA research programme focuses on transformations within Latin America that have occurred in the context of global developments. The programme intends to bring together a multidisciplinary analytical framework that will allow for the analysis of the relationships between the global and the local. Its purpose is to analyse the specific characteristics of Latin American developments in relation to worldwide, regional and local processes. The programme has two research lines.

The first research line deals with resource use patterns from a multi-scale analytical approach. It focuses on the new political and economic processes driving resource use patterns in Latin America and their consequences. Following neoliberalisation and democratisation, three recent processes have direct influence on the pattern of natural resource use in Latin America. First, the combination of increased demand and fluctuating real prices for natural resource to supply the international market for raw material (hydrocarbons, minerals, wood), food, and, more recently, green energy has been leading to new initiatives for regional integration (e.g., infrastructure and energy) with a direct influence on patterns of natural resource use. Second, there has been an increasingly powerful call for policies aiming at economic justice throughout the region. Questions about control over natural resources, distribution of their revenues, and their role in a new development strategy are back on the political agenda. Third, the international pressure for conservation measures to mitigate the impact of global warming influence decisions on where, what, and how natural resource should be used.

The second research line deals with different forms of cultural resource use patterns and understands the agency and pursuits of individuals, groups and networks as simultaneously incorporating and imposing global reconfigurations. It focuses on the re-knitting of the social fabric, the reshaping of meaning, and the emergence of identities that occur in the context of everyday globalization. Four tendencies can be recognized. First, the neoliberal reforms led to both a restructuring of labour markets and the increase of the costs of basic needs. Where poverty expanded and decreased possibilities to make a living at home, large flows of labour migration to the US and Europe were initiated and were accompanied by the inflow of remittances. Second, migration, poverty and changing livelihood possibilities have made the reconstruction and recomposition of families, households and social networks urgent as well as the way social life is organized. Third, intensive contacts with Latin American and non-Latin American outsiders through

migration, tourism, the Internet and the traditional media, there has been an increasingly clear movement away from traditional locally bound identities, organizations and networks. Fourth, the way individuals deal with these transformations is not gender neutral. Based on gender notions and practices, women and men develop different ways of dealing with their daily challenges. People are urgently reformulating their sense of belonging, thereby mining old and new, local, national and global cultural resources.

## **Main results**

CEDLA's Research Programme on 'Natural and Cultural Resource Use in Contemporary Latin America' (2009-2016) was successful in fomenting research collaboration, attracting external funding and realizing a list of important publications. Besides smaller projects, CEDLA coordinated the EU-financed FP7 project ENGOV on environmental governance in Latin America and the Caribbean (2011-2015) with ten Latin American and European partners, and the NWO-CoCOON project GOMIAM on small-scale gold mining in the Amazon (2011-2016), with research groups in Brazil, Colombia, Surinam, Peru and Bolivia.

In the context of the programme, CEDLA researchers published numerous academic articles and book chapters, and organized several timely book publications on the use of natural and cultural resources, including the books:

- *Environmental Governance in Latin America* (Palgrave, 2016), edited by Fabio De Castro, Barbara Hogenboom and Michiel Baud (Spanish and Portuguese editions published by CLACSO, 2015)
- *Water, Power and Identity. The cultural politics of water in the Andes* (Routledge, 2015), by Rutgerd Boelens
- *Housing and Belonging in Latin America* (Berghahn Books, 2015), edited by Christien Klaufus and Arij Ouweneel
- *Brazil Under the Workers' Party: Continuity and Change from Lula to Dilma* (Palgrave, 2014), edited by Fabio De Castro and Kees Koonings with M. Wiesebron
- *Gender and Conflict: Embodiments, Discourses and Symbolic Practices* (Ashgate, 2014), edited by Annelou Ypeij with G. Frerks and R. König
- *The Impact of the IIRSA Road Infrastructure Programme on Amazonia* (Routledge, 2013), by Pitou van Dijck

Natural and cultural resource use have also been explored in several Cuadernos del CEDLA (especially 25, 26 and 27), and in various special issues prepared for refereed journals, including:

- 'The Extractive Imperative in Latin America' (The Extractive Industries and Society 3:4, 2016), by Barbara Hogenboom with M. Arsel and L. Pellegrini
- 'Tourism, Gender, Ethnicity and Sexuality' (Latin American Perspectives 39:6, 2012), by Annelou Ypeij with T. Wilson.
- 'Mobilities and mobilizations of the urban poor' (International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 36:4, 2012), by Christien Klaufus with R. Jaffe and F. Colombijn
- 'The New Politics of Mineral Extraction in Latin America' (Journal of Developing Societies 28:2, 2012) by Barbara Hogenboom