A Brief History of ERLACS

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The year 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of ERLACS – European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies | Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe. The first issue was published in April 1965. Since then, ERLACS has appeared steadily twice a year (either in April and October, or in June and December), gradually expanding in size and reach. While starting as a bulletin for institutional news, from 1975 its main content has consisted of academic articles subject to blind peer review. Over the years other elements were added: book reviews and review essays as well as ‘Explorations’ and ‘Sources for Latin American Research’, all written by hundreds of scholars based in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and elsewhere in the world.

The history of ERLACS is intimately related to that of its hosting institution: the Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation (CEDLA) based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. CEDLA was created in 1964 as an interuniversity centre to promote Latin American Studies in the Netherlands, Europe and beyond. In addition to research and teaching by its staff members, this was done through its academic publications and CEDLA’s library. While CEDLA has also successfully hosted a book series (the CEDLA Latin America Studies, CLAS, currently published by Berghahn Books) and the ‘Cuadernos del CEDLA’ series, for the purpose of academic networking and increasing knowledge about the societies and cultures of Latin America, the journal is arguably the most prominent publication. It has allowed CEDLA to connect worldwide to numerous universities, research centres and individual researchers and students. In addition, through the exchange of ERLACS with journals of sister institutions throughout the world (see Figure 1), CEDLA has built a unique international
collection of around 500 academic journals on Latin American and Caribbean Studies, including many originating from this region. Especially in the pre-Internet era, this was an exceptional asset that helped CEDLA’s library to become Europe’s second largest collection of material on Latin America.\footnote{1}

**Figure 1.** Postcard used in early days for the exchange of journals (‘canje’)

Over the course of its fifty years, the journal experienced several transformations, with the most visible changes being those of format and name\footnote{2} (for a discussion of the main themes and topics over the past two decades, see the article by Michiel Baud in this issue). The first issue, published in April 1965, carried the name: *Boletín informativo sobre estudios latinoamericanos en Europa* (see Figure 2). The first few issues, of around 16 pages each, very briefly presented ongoing European research on Latin America. Its content consisted of a list of planned and realized publications, subdivided into specific disciplines, to which indexes of the related European researchers, institutions and countries were added. These issues were in Spanish and Portuguese, with Spanish as the main language. In 1970, when the journal’s name was changed to *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos* (1970-1973, issues 10-15), the journal started to publish two articles per issue in either Spanish or English.

From 1974 onwards, the journal expanded its scope to include the Caribbean, and was called *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* (1974-1989, issues 16-46). Furthermore, it became a full scholarly journal with an editorial board. Each issue consisted of four or more research-based articles
Figure 2. The first issue

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INTRODUCCION

Es la conferencia “Europa-América Latina” que tuvo lugar del 4 al 5 de octubre de 1984 en Belgrano. La tarea y nuestro centro la invitación a actuar como “clearing-house” para los centros e institutos de estudio sobre América Latina en el campo de las ciencias sociales en el sentido más amplio de este último, establecidos en Europa, y publicar un Boletín semanal con noticias y noticias de las actividades en el programa de los estudios latinoamericanos en Europa y noticias sobre intercambio de profesores y estudiantes entre América Latina y Europa.

Gracias a la cooperación exporflana de muchas personas e instituciones, el primer número de este Boletín se distribuyó en América Latina, América del Norte y Europa. Aunque hemos incluido algunos artículos de otra índole en la sección de noticias y noticias de la forma, la frecuencia y el contenido de este Boletín, que si que a un enero cooperativo podemos atribuirle por su mayor utilidad.

Introducción

Durante la conferencia “Europa-América Latina” que tuvo lugar en Belgrano (v. nota) el 4 al 5 de octubre de 1984, se creó el Centro de Estudios y Documentación Latinoamericanos (CELDAL) con el fin de hacer una evaluación en el campo de las ciencias sociales en el sentido más amplio de este último, establecidos en Europa, y publicar un Boletín semanal con noticias y noticias de las actividades en el programa de los estudios latinoamericanos en Europa y noticias sobre intercambio de profesores y estudiantes entre América Latina y Europa.

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and several book reviews, with the overview of European publications on the region presented in a few pages at the end. While authors based in the Netherlands dominated in the first issues, soon the authorship of the journal internationalized. Occasionally, a special issue presented articles on a particular theme. This started in 1975 with issue 18 on regional history to honour the Dutch historian Bernard Slicher van Bath, which with 166 pages was also the first issue exceeding a hundred pages (see Figure 3).
Figure 3. Table of contents special issue: Junio de 1975

In December 1989, with issue 47, the journal was renamed and received the title it carries today: *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies | Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*. During the 1990s, ‘Explorations’ and review essays were introduced, allowing for greater variety in the presentation and discussion of academic ideas, work and output.
From this period onwards, the editorial board has explicitly aimed at publishing articles that reflect substantial empirical research and/or are theoretically innovative with respect to major debates within the fields of the social sciences and history. In 2002, when CEDLA hosted the international conference of the European Council for Social Research in Latin America (CEISAL), the journal
presented a special issue on Trends and Topics in Latin American Studies in Europe (see Figure 4). In general, however, the journal continued to further internationalize beyond Europe.

In the first four decades of its publication, its readership depended on the internationally distributed print edition by subscription and journal exchanges, mainly to university libraries. From 1996, members of NALACS – Netherlands Association for Latin American and Caribbean Studies have received a free subscription. In 2001, ERLACS started to publish its articles on the CEDLA website one year following publication, which greatly expanded its accessibility. In 2012 ERLACS was added to many online indexing and database services such as Elsevier’s SCOPUS, Ebsco SocINDEX and JSTOR. Scholars researching specific topics could access ERLACS articles without ever having seen this journal before. However, copyright was still held by CEDLA as the publisher, and a ‘moving wall’ of one year was maintained before new issues were made available to these online services.

With the launch of www.erlacs.org in April, 2013, the journal joined the ranks of open access journals with its website and database supported by Utrecht University Library Open Access Journals – Uopen. ERLACS now provides immediate and unrestricted open access to its content. Authors retain the copyright of their intellectual property and do not have to pay a publication fee. The print edition has been maintained as a service to its readers at a subsidized subscription price. ERLACS is listed with the DOAJ – Directory of Open Access Journals, JournalTOCS, Latindex and others. Since the implementation of open access, the Editorial Board has seen a threefold increase in the number of articles being submitted, with noticeably more scholars from Latin America and articles written in Spanish.

Fifty years of publication has seen an amazing transformation in the way the content of this journal has been made available. ERLACS will continue to develop and adapt to the new technologies and possibilities of providing knowledge on Latin America and the Caribbean to anyone anywhere.

Notes

1. The CEDLA library has a collection of more than 80,000 books and 500 current journals, extensive archive material on microfilm, and many reference works and bibliographies. The collection can be searched through the central catalogue of the University of Amsterdam: http://opc.uva.nl/.
2. The complete archive of all ERLACS issues and its previous titles back to No. 1, April, 1965 is available online at the JSTOR digital archive: